



Central Bedfordshire Council  
and Bedford Borough Council  
working together

# Fostering Agency

Annual Report

For the period  
2010/2011

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## SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

- 1.0 As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 Bedfordshire County Council ceased to exist, being replaced by 2 new unitary authorities, Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils. From the year 2009/2010, Central Bedfordshire has hosted the Fostering Service as a shared service on behalf of both new unitary authorities. This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council's Fostering Agency during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2010 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2011, noting its achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of its work and identifying recommendations for the development of the service.
- 1.0.1 This report is provided as part of the monitoring of the Fostering Agency required under the Fostering Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards 2011. This report will be presented to the Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2011 and three monthly update reports will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

### 1.1 STAFFING/SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The Fostering Service is currently made up of the following staff as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011:

1 x full time Team Manager  
1 x full time Deputy Team Manager  
8 x Senior Practitioners  
10 x Social Workers  
2 x Social Work Assistants  
1 x Duty Worker

- 1.1.2 The service is supported by 1 full time and 2 part time administrators.
- 1.1.3 The workforce is diverse and as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 includes three staff members from black and minority ethnic groups. This level of diversity is valued when considering case allocation.
- 1.1.4 All staff have access to the Council's extensive learning and development programme, and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. The service also provides diversity training for staff in order to improve its understanding of the needs of children from black and minority ethnic communities and enable them to meet their needs more appropriately.

## SECTION 2 – THE PANELS

### 2.1 THE FOSTERING PANEL

- 2.1.1 The Fostering Panel meets every month of the year, with an occasional extraordinary panels as and when required.
- 2.1.2 The Fostering Panel considers applications from prospective foster carers and makes recommendations as to their approval. The panel also considers the first annual review of foster carers, as well as any change or termination of approval. The Panel is advised of

any exemptions to a carer's existing range of approval. Reviews following complaints or allegations are also presented to the Panel.

## 2.2 FOSTERING PANEL MEMBERSHIP

2.2.1 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2011 the Fostering Panel Membership was as follows:

Panel Chair	Independent
Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist, Central Bedfordshire Council
Social Worker (Vice Chair)	Senior Practitioner, Adoption Team, Central Bedfordshire Council
Social Worker	Team Manager, Children with Disabilities, Central Bedfordshire Council
Elected Member BBC (vacancy)	
Independent	Foster Carer – IFA
Independent	Health Visitor
Independent	Independent Social Worker
Elected Member	Central Bedfordshire Council
Independent	Foster Carer – IFA

2.2.2 In attendance but non voting members were:

Professional Adviser	Central Bedfordshire Council
Panel Secretary	Central Bedfordshire Council

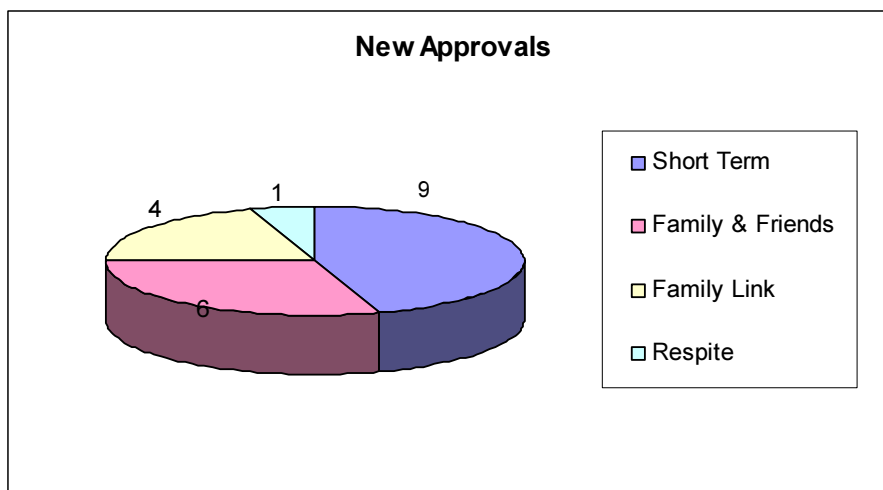
2.2.3 A Medical Adviser to the Panel was appointed from April 2008 and gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings, but may attend in person if requested.

2.2.4 A Legal Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings and attends in person as requested.

## 2.3 FOSTERING PANEL ACTIVITY

2.3.1 In 2010/2011 the Fostering Panel met 12 times and recommended that 20 households should be approved as foster carers. This compares to 29 during 2009/10.

2.3.2 Of the 20 carers newly approved by the Fostering Panel, 4 were approved for the Family Link Scheme, 9 as short-term carers, 6 as Family and Friends carers and 1 as Respite only.



- 2.3.3 The Panel also agreed changes of approval for 9 fostering households and heard 15 fostering reviews.
- 2.3.4 There were 31 fostering households deregistered during 2010/11, offering 41 placements. The reasons for deregistration varied, but included personal circumstances, ill health, retirement, relocation, moving to another local authority and children in placement becoming permanent family members.
- 2.3.5 There were 5 reviews presented following complaints or allegations.
- 2.3.6 In total 45 fostering households attended the panel.

## 2.4 FOSTERING PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 2.4.1 There is a good level of training, appraisal and induction offered to Panel Members. More informal 'bite-size' training is also provided on a regular basis on panel days and all Panel Members have an annual appraisal where their personal training needs are discussed and considered.
- 2.4.2 Over the past year, the following training has been provided to the Panel Members:

May 2010	CWDC
May 2010	Siblings – Assessment and Planning
August 2010	Attachment Style Interviews
September 2010	Children's Participation Officer
January 2011	Leaving Care Regulations 2010
February 2011	Gypsy and Roma Cultures

- 2.4.3 The Panel Adviser has devised a comprehensive training programme for the coming year which will include a full day training on Safeguarding and Allegations in Fostering and Pre-Adoptive Placements in June 2011, and sessions on Care Proceedings and the Children in Care Council.

## 2.5 FOSTERING AND JOINT PERMANENCE PANEL

- 2.5.1 The Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel's primary activity is to deal with permanent fostering work. It considers the plan for any child under the age of 13 for whom permanent

fostering is proposed. When the child is over 13 and part of a sibling group containing younger children whose plan is that they remain outside the birth family, the 13+ child's plan will be considered at whichever Panel (Adoption or Permanence) is considering the plan for the other children. The Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel also considers applications by foster carers to be long-term carers for a particular child. All matches for permanent fostering for children under 13 go to the Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel. The Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel also considers the first annual review of permanent foster carers, as well as any changes to their approval. The Panel is advised of any exemptions to a carer's existing range of approval. In all but a few exceptional cases, matching decisions on children over 13 years are made by the Head of Service for Quality Assurance for Central Bedfordshire or the Head of Service for LAC & LAAC for Bedford Borough.

2.5.2 However, due to the volume of cases concerning short term fostering, the Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel also considers the approval and reviews of short term foster carers.

## 2.6 FOSTERING AND JOINT PERMANENCE PANEL MEMBERSHIP

2.6.1 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2011 the Permanence Panel Membership was as follows:

Panel Chair	Independent
Health	Paediatric Nurse
Social Worker	Deputy Team Manager, Adoption & Fostering Service, Central Bedfordshire Council (Vice Chair)
Social Worker	Deputy Team Manager, LAC/LAAC, Central Bedfordshire Council
Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist
Independent	Adoptive Parent
Independent	Independent Social Worker
Elected Member	Central Bedfordshire Council
Independent	Foster Carer – IFA
Elected Member Vacancy Bedford Borough Council	

2.6.2 In attendance but non voting members were:

Professional Adviser	Central Bedfordshire Council
Panel Secretary	Central Bedfordshire Council

2.6.3 A Medical Adviser to the Panel was appointed from April 2008 and gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings, but may attend in person if requested.

2.6.4 A Legal Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings and attends in person as requested.

## 2.7 FOSTERING AND JOINT PERMANENCE PANEL ACTIVITY

2.7.1 The Fostering and Joint Permanence Panel met 12 times during the year 2010/11. During this time, 7 households were approved as permanent foster carers (this compares with 1 the previous year). Plans for 3 children to be permanently placed were recommended and 3 children were recommended for a match. Panel considered first

annual reviews for 10 households, 2 reviews following concerns, 1 change of approval, 1 disruption and 1 termination of approval. 7 households were approved as short term foster carers and 8 as family & friends carers. Overall 26 households attended Panel. Advice was sought from panel regarding particular cases on occasion.

## 2.8 FOSTERING AND JOINT PERMANENCE PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

2.8.1 As with the Fostering Panel, training, appraisal and induction is offered to Panel Members. More informal 'bite-size' training is also provided on a regular basis on panel days and all Panel Members have an annual appraisal where their personal training needs are discussed and considered.

2.8.2 Over the past year, the following training has been provided to the Panel Members:

May 2010	Siblings – Assessment and Planning
June 2010	Education for Looked After Children
November 2010	Care Proceedings
January 2011	Gypsy and Roma Cultures
February 2011	Leaving Care Regulations
March 2011	Contact

2.8.3 The Panel Adviser has devised a comprehensive training programme for the coming year which will include a full day training on Safeguarding and Allegations in Fostering and Pre-Adoptive Placements in June 2011 and a session with the Children in Care Council.

## 2.9 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT FOSTERING AND JOINT PERMANENCE PANEL

2.9.1 Children and Young People are welcomed at panels considering their matches for permanence and are also encouraged to attend the disruption meeting if a planned permanent placement has failed to last. One young person attended the Permanence Panel in 2010/2011 to discuss the disruption of their permanent placement.

## 2.10 PANEL DIVERSITY

2.10.1 The agency has ensured that both panels are diverse and include not only black members but also a member of Bedford's Italian community, a significant group in Bedfordshire. There is also a panel member with personal experience of being looked after and of disruption. Both Panels have male and female panel members, with a majority being female. There is also a diversity of age on both panels. We are hoping to welcome a panel member who is a recent care leaver in the very near future.

## SECTION 3 – SPECIALISED FOSTERING

### 3.1 THE FAMILY LINK SCHEME

- 3.1.1 The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability. Family Link carers are foster carers who are recruited, approved and trained in the same way as other foster carers. They receive regular support and guidance from a supervising social worker.
- 3.1.2 Family Link Workers can care for a child in their own home, the child's home or by taking the child to an activity. Periods of short breaks will be carefully planned and could be for a few hours occasionally or whole weekends on a regular basis.
- 3.1.3 The child's social worker will make an assessment of the child's needs and specifically what services could be provided to best support the child and their family.
- 3.1.4 The social worker will then make a referral to the CDAP (Children with Disabilities Allocation Panel), which is a panel of experienced children's services managers and other professionals who meet weekly to discuss and authorise levels of support and the allocation of resources.
- 3.1.5 A careful process of matching takes place, taking into account the individual needs of the child and their family and the carer's abilities
- 3.1.6 Families can use the time to do ordinary things such as shopping or going for a meal. It may give an opportunity to spend some quality time with other members of the family, or just provide a break from the normal routine involved with caring for a child with disabilities.
- 3.1.7 On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, there were 9 Family Link carers approved, offering respite care to a total of 13 children. A further 6 Family Link carers are currently being assessed.
- 3.1.8 During 2010/11 the scheme expanded to include 3 fee-based Family Link carers who have increased availability and can be linked to up to 7 young people receiving short breaks.

### 3.2 THE YOUTH CARE SCHEME

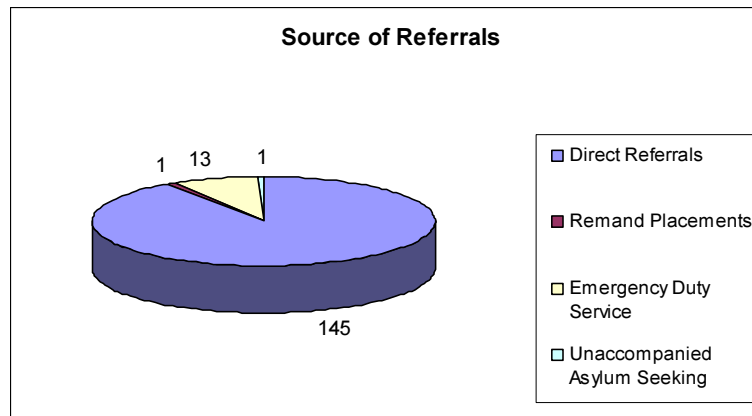
- 3.2.1 The Youth Care Scheme is a comprehensive, fee paid fostering scheme which provides specialist care to young people over the age of 10 years who exhibit behaviour which is particularly challenging or complex.
- 3.2.2 As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, there were 10 approved Youth Care households. There were 10 young people in placement. There has been a specific recruitment campaign for Youth Care and Youth Care Respite carers. There have been 2 Youth Care specific Information Evenings and 10 initial visits for Youth Care have been undertaken over the last year. 4 new assessments are underway on potential new Youth Carers.



## SECTION 4 – CHILDREN AND FOSTERING

### 4.1 CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

- 4.1.1 During 2010/2011, the Fostering Service received a total of 159 new referrals for foster placements. Of these 78 were Central Bedfordshire children and 81 were Bedford Borough children. 74 of the new referrals were placed with in-house carers. Some children did not ultimately enter foster care, but remained with family. 8 were placed in residential units. For the remaining 35 children, 17 Central Bedfordshire and 18 Bedford Borough, placements in an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) were sought.
- 4.1.2 The referral for the child includes the matching criteria that are essential and preferable when looking for a placement for a child, and a risk assessment is also considered. This is crucial to identifying which carers may be able to support a child. Where a placement does not meet the essential criteria or where any identified risks cannot be managed an alternative placement is sought.
- 4.1.3 Respite took place 130 times, with 16 children having regular respite.
- 4.1.4 Of the new referrals for foster placements, 13 came through the Emergency Duty Service, 1 was a remand placement and 1 was an unaccompanied asylum seeking young person. 145 of the referrals were made directly by the children's social worker.
- 4.1.5 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 a total of 121 children were placed with in house foster carers in the geographical county of Bedfordshire, with 59 children coming from Central Bedfordshire and 62 children from Bedford Borough.

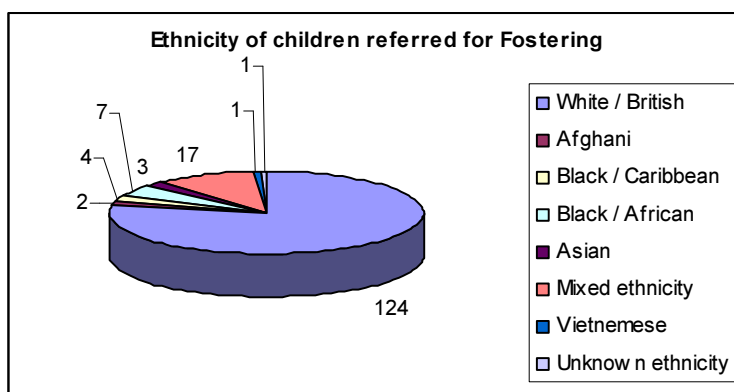
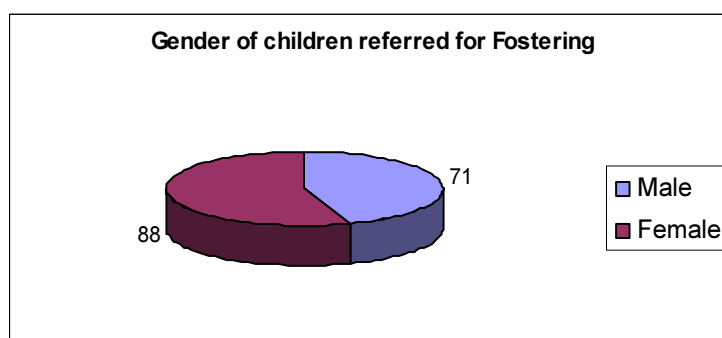
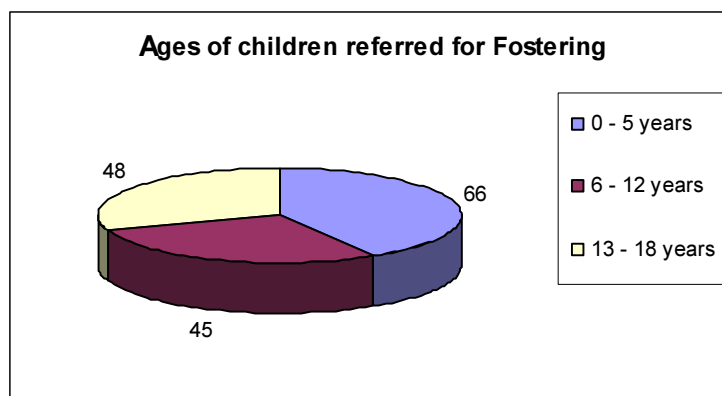


### 4.2 AGE, GENDER AND ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING 2010/2011

- 4.2.1 With regard to age, from Central Bedfordshire 33 children were aged 0-5 years, 23 were 6-12 years and 22 were aged 13-18 years and Bedford Borough 33 children were aged 0-5 years, 22 were 6-12 years and 26 were aged 13-18 years
- 4.2.2 Of the 78 children referred from Central Bedfordshire, 41 were female and 37 male. Of the 81 children referred from Bedford Borough 47 were female and 34 were male.
- 4.2.3 In Central Bedfordshire 69 children referred were White / British, 2 were from Afghanistan, 2 were Black / Caribbean, 3 were of mixed ethnicity, 1 was Vietnamese and 1 was of unknown ethnicity. In Bedford Borough 55 children referred were White / British, 7 were

Black / African, 2 Black / Caribbean, 2 were Asian and the remainder were of mixed ethnicity.

4.2.4 The agency has clear management information and monitors closely the ethnicity of Bedfordshire's looked after children.



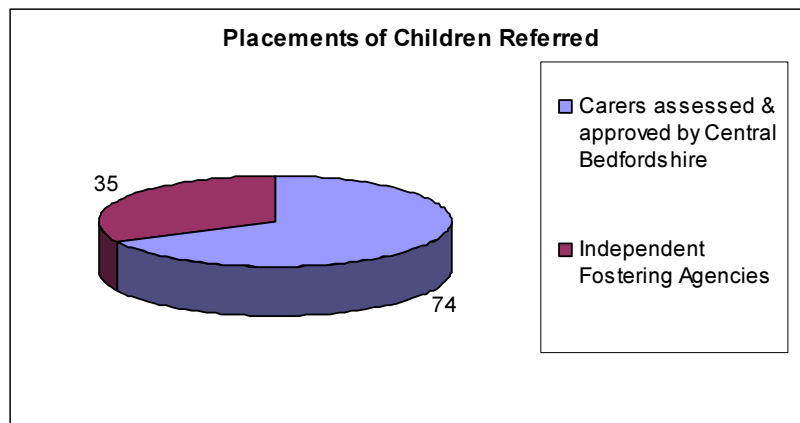
**4.3 SIBLING GROUPS OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING**

4.3.1 There were 21 sibling groups within the 159 children referred for fostering 2010/2011. This included 12 sibling groups from Central Bedfordshire and 9 from Bedford Borough.

**4.4 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF CHILDREN PLACED IN FOSTER PLACEMENTS (INTER-AGENCY VERSUS BEDFORDSHIRE)**

4.4.1 Of the 109 children placed for fostering in 2010/11, 74 were placed with carers assessed and approved by Central Bedfordshire Council. The advantages of this are that the staff of the service have prior knowledge of the children and positive working relationships with the carers, thus enhancing fostering support for these placements.

4.4.2 35 of the children referred were placed externally with Independent Fostering Agencies (17 from Central Bedfordshire and 18 from Bedford Borough).

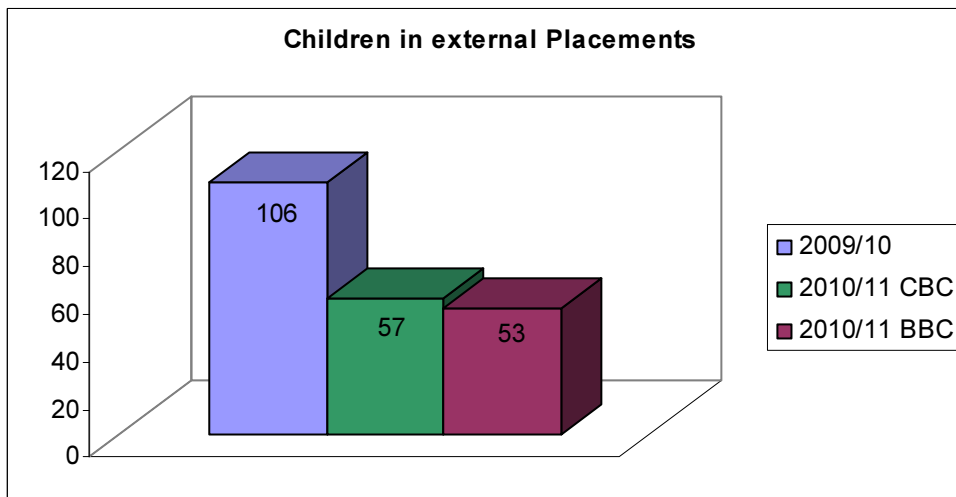


**4.5 CHILDREN IN CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE OR BEDFORD BOROUGH PLACEMENTS 2010/2011**

4.5.1 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, there were 121 fostering households approved by the agency, with a total of 121 children in these placements. Of these 121 children, 59 are from Central Bedfordshire, 62 from Bedford Borough, including 2 Family & Friends placements for Central Bedfordshire children outside the boundary and 4 for Bedford Borough children outside the geographical boundaries of Bedfordshire.

**4.6 CHILDREN IN EXTERNAL PLACEMENTS 31/03/11**

4.6.1 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, there were a total of 110 children in external foster placements provided by independent fostering agencies, as compared to 106 the previous year. Of these 57 children were from Central Bedfordshire Council (including 22 unaccompanied asylum seekers) and 53 from Bedford Borough Council.

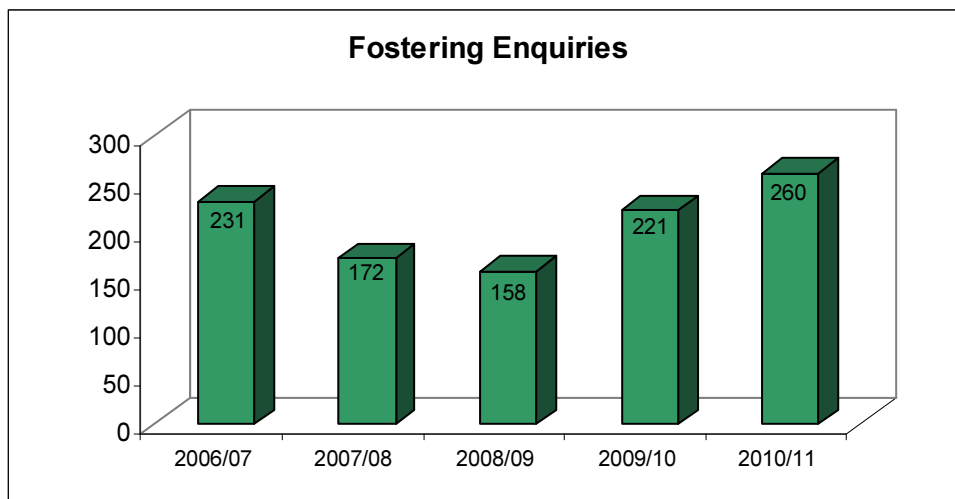


4.6.2 There has been a slight increase in the number of children in external placements as at 31 March 2011, which reflects the overall increase in numbers of looked after children.

## SECTION 5 – FOSTER CARERS

### 5.1 FOSTERING ENQUIRIES

- 5.1.1 All enquirers are sent an Information Pack within 24 hours of their enquiry. A social worker from the Fostering Service will then make a follow-up telephone call to the enquirer within 2 working days and carry out an initial visit within 7 working days if requested.
- 5.1.2 After the initial visit, and a formal application from the enquirer the decision will be made whether or not to complete the assessment or to defer the assessment process until the enquirer is in a better position to proceed.
- 5.1.3 There were 260 initial fostering enquiries during 2010/1 compared with 221 the previous year. Application forms were received from 45 households all of whom were allocated an assessing social worker. 27 new assessments were completed over the course of the year and 45 new assessments were allocated. There were 26 new carers approved.



### 5.2 THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS OF FOSTER CARERS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS

- 5.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and their Statutory and Practice Guidance. All prospective foster carers are required to undertake a training programme as part of the preparation and assessment process.

### 5.3 ETHNICITY OF CARERS

- 5.3.1 During the year 2010/2011, the agency calculated that 10 out of 150 carers were from black or ethnic minority groups. Whilst this ratio of black carers does not yet reflect the demographics of the two authorities, the increase has improved appropriate matching for children.
- 5.3.2 Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010, the agency has approved 3 fostering households from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and a further one from a mixed heritage couple being assessed as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

## **SECTION 6 – TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FOSTER CARERS**

- 6.0 All foster carers are expected to attend relevant training recommended by their supervising social worker. The service has a full and comprehensive training programme for carers, from preparation training, through induction and core training through to more complex post-approval training.

### **6.1 SKILLS TO FOSTER**

- 6.1.1 New fostering applicants have many questions prior to and during the assessment process. As an essential part of the fostering assessment, the 'Skills to Foster' course examines issues that are relevant, such as what it will be like to have children placed with them, or working in tandem with the local authority in order to reach positive outcomes for children.
- 6.1.2 Spread over several dates, this course provides an opportunity for prospective carers to reflect on their values and attitudes to caring and learn more about the skills and attributes needed to become a foster carer.
- 6.1.3 During 2010/2011, the Fostering Service ran 5 of these courses (compared with 7 the previous year) and they were attended by 47 delegates in total.

### **6.2 CHILD CARE EMERGENCY FIRST AID**

- 6.2.1 As part of the application and assessment process, all applicants must complete an Emergency First Aid course. 6 courses were held during 2010/2011 and these were attended by a total of 86 delegates.

### **6.3 SONS AND DAUGHTERS**

- 6.3.1 'Sons and Daughters' is a one day programme that started last year and mirrors the 'Skills to Foster' course. It is aimed at helping the children of prospective foster carers to consider their role in the process. It also helps increase their awareness of the needs of a child who has come into care.
- 6.3.2 During 2010/11, the Fostering Service ran 2 courses which were attended by 17 children and young people aged between 8 – 16 years.

### **6.4 INDUCTION**

- 6.4.1 Following approval, foster carers enter their 12 month induction phase into the service and are required to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. The implementation of the new standards has been supported by ongoing workshops for carers alongside group supervision for supporting social workers. Aside from having the opportunity to meet members of the service who work with looked after children, there are also opportunities to ask questions and receive essential information about the agency's policies and procedures. In addition, carers are made familiar with the comprehensive training opportunities available throughout their fostering career.

## 6.5 THE FOSTERING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

6.5.1 Each year, the service devises a comprehensive programme covering a wide variety of the skills and knowledge needed in order for carers to develop their careers in fostering. There were a total of 118 different courses on 46 subjects held over the year. This is split into core training recommended in a foster carers first 2 years of approval. This includes:

- Understanding the Mental Health issues for Looked After Children
- Safeguarding Children
- Understanding schools and supporting learning
- Introduction to Lifestory work
- Makaton
- Play Deprivation
- Talking to Teenagers about sex and relationships
- Working with Self Harm
- Safer Caring
- Safeguarding Children Online
- Contact
- Managing Behaviour
- Personal Safety
- Talking to and Listening to Children
- Surviving as a Foster Carer
- Attachment
- Allegations Awareness
- Understanding Diversity
- Exploring the challenges of parenting
- A Guide to Care Proceedings
- The Gypsy Roma and Travelling Communities
- The Muslim Faith
- Record Keeping
- Protective Behaviours
- It's feeling not good

6.5.2 Each carer is required to have a record of their training and development needs, although other alternatives to formal training courses are encouraged in order to meet the minimum standards. This can include home study, training, reading and also on-line training (provided by AKAMAS) at both level 2 (induction) and level 3. This can be especially helpful for carers who find it hard to attend training dates. There is also the opportunity for carers to complete an NVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People or BTEC in Advanced Foster Care Skills.

6.5.3 In total, 570 delegates attended training courses held over the year. This demonstrates the commitment that the agency has towards training foster carers and illustrates the willingness of carers to develop their own knowledge and skill base.

6.5.4 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, 55 foster carers have completed their CWDC workbooks. Workshops, surgeries and one to one appointments are facilitated for those who have still to complete their workbooks.

## SECTION 7 – SUPPORT FOR CARERS

7.0.1 Every foster carer from our agency receives regular supervision and support from a Fostering Social Worker. In addition, the agency provides foster carers with an Independent Advisor from the Fostering Network, a national organisation for foster carers. There are also local

support groups of foster carers that meet regularly to discuss fostering issues and to enjoy occasional social events such as the annual awards presentation or a cheese and wine evening. Foster carers also have access to telephone support out of hours, and can access the Bedfordshire Foster Care Association, which is run by foster carers, for foster carers.

- 7.0.2 All new carers are also matched to a foster carer mentor who provides formal and practical guidance and support through the carer's first placement and beyond.

## 7.1 FOSTER CARERS' SUPPORT GROUPS

- 7.1.1 Foster Carers' Support Groups meet regularly in the north and south of the county. During the year, the Support Group North met 10 times and was attended by 99 delegates and 18 children. During the same period, the Support Group South met 10 times and was attended by 58 delegates and 6 children.
- 7.1.2 Some of the topics discussed included:- Contact, Fire Safety, Domestic Violence, Youth Participation, Black Hair & Skin Care and the Muslim Faith and Preparing children for adoption. There were also fun activities such as craft.
- 7.1.3 A men's support group meets approximately every 3 months and was attended by 20 delegates throughout the year. Guest speakers covered topics on Leaving & After Care, Youth Offending and Fire Safety.
- 7.1.4 A Family Link Support Group was also set up in July 2009. It meets 4 times a year in the evenings. An average of 7 carers attended per meeting. Guest speakers are invited to attend and topics covered included: Autism, Strategies to manage challenging behaviour on the autistic spectrum.
- 7.1.5 A Social Event and Pudding night with a quiz was held in September 2010 and 15 carers and 7 children attended.
- 7.1.6 A Social Event with an Awards Ceremony for foster carers was held in May 2010 which was attended by 85 carers and 85 children. Staff and elected members also attended, including the Directors of Children's Services in both authorities. Media Officers from the two local authorities compered the event. 9 long service awards were given out, and there were 2 awards for carers who had completed their BTEC Level 3 and 4 in Advanced Skills in Foster Care.

## 7.2 THE MENTORING SCHEME

- 7.2.1 The Fostering Service offers peer mentoring to all new and existing carers. This service for carers, staffed by carers, offers encouragement, support, and opportunities for collaborative working. It also allows experienced foster carers the chance to develop professionally.
- 7.2.2 Carers who join the scheme are linked with a mentor who is an experienced foster carer themselves. Mentors are trained to support foster carers in their role. As well as offering support to new carers, sometimes mentoring can be offered to experienced carers when they are undergoing a particularly challenging time. The service currently employs 9 mentors – who have 117 years of fostering experience between them. The mentors have varying experiences of fostering, including age ranges and types of approval. We are due to advertise for more mentors in the near future.

- 7.2.3 Foster carers can be referred to the mentoring scheme via their supervising social worker and additional detailed information is available from the training team.
- 7.2.4 Mentors attend preparation training on a rota basis to allow them to keep up to date with developments and changes in practice. Mentors have regular group supervision as well as 6 – 8 weekly individual supervision.

### **7.3 THE OUT OF HOURS SERVICE**

- 7.3.1 Fostering Social Workers offer an 'out of hours' service for carers. A mobile telephone number has been dedicated to this service and all carers have access to the number. The service is available from 5.20pm – 11pm weekdays and from 9am-11pm during weekends and bank holidays. This service ensures that foster carers can readily access telephone support from an experienced fostering worker. Research carried out in Bedfordshire indicates that this service is highly valued by foster carers.

### **7.4 THE FOSTER CARERS ASSOCIATION**

- 7.4.1 Both local authorities support the Bedfordshire Foster Carers' Association in meeting new carers and promoting the role and the function of the Association. The agency actively encourages and supports the Association and provides financial support to fund outings for fostering households and to support them in producing and circulating a quality newsletter.

### **7.5 BAAF AND THE FOSTERING NETWORK**

- 7.5.1 Both local authorities are full members of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) which is a leading national voluntary organisation working to promote best practice for children separated from their birth families. It is the leading organisation representing local authority and independent fostering agencies and provides training courses, practice guidance, research material, and a consultation and advice service to all its members.
- 7.5.2 The Fostering Service is a member of the BAAF Eastern Region, a group which meets quarterly to discuss and exchange best practice in the East Anglia region.
- 7.5.3 The Fostering Service is a member of The Fostering Network that works to promote fostering in the UK. All approved foster carers are also able to have individual membership funded by the service, as well as access to The Fostering Network Advice and Mediation Service.

## **SECTION 8 - CONCLUSION** **1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2010 – 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2011**

- 8.0.1 We have had another successful year, continuing to deliver a high quality service within a shared arrangement. The second year of this shared service has been positive and we continue to work in close partnership with both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire to respond to the individual needs of each local authority.
- 8.0.2 Our recruitment strategy has had a positive effect on our enquiry rate, which has increased once again. Throughout the whole of 2010 – 2011 we have had over 30 assessments



ongoing at any one time (a significant increase from the previous year, which averaged 20 at any one time).

- 8.0.3 In the coming year we are driving our recruitment forward by gathering information using various tools and research of our existing customers. This will enable us to formulate successful targeted recruitment campaigns to reach potential customers.
- 8.0.4 By profiling our current foster carers we are able to ascertain receptivity to certain marketing methods and advertising channels. We are able to find out more about what their preferred communication methods are and use this when implementing the Recruitment Plan. We continue to re-evaluate all enquirers to fostering ascertaining their motivation to contact us and by which advertising model they were captivated. We continue to assess which campaigns have worked and why.
- 8.0.5 By using these marketing techniques we will strive to fill gaps in the service with advertising campaigns for Youth Care, Family Link, foster carers for sibling groups and babies.
- 8.0.6 By reaching members of the community we hope to bridge the gap, achieve a heightened awareness and recruit more Adopters and Foster Carers in local towns and rural communities in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire areas.
- 8.0.7 We have continued to develop our support for foster carers and now offer specific workers to support placements. Two social work assistants are available to provide bespoke support to children and carers, with one worker experienced in supporting over 10 year olds and one worker specialising in under 10 year olds. The outcome of a recent survey of carers evidenced that the overall support offered to foster carers is considered to be of a good standard.
- 8.0.8 The Family Link and the Youth Care Schemes continue to expand and we aim to ensure that they run to capacity, thereby minimising the use of Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 8.0.9 We aim to increase the number of approved foster carers, in order to enable children from Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough to be appropriately placed with in house carers. Furthermore we aim to more than replenish our number of approved carers, taking into account the significant number lost to fostering this year due to retirement, moving area, illness and long term placements coming to an end as the children reach 18 years of age. We aim to recruit 40 new fostering households in 2011-12.
- 8.0.10 As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 new Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards came into force. This has involved updating and refreshing policies and procedures and particular emphasis was placed on "Connected Persons" (Family and Friends carers). We now offer a specific training course for Family and Friends carers and a specific mentor. We recognise that there will be an increasing demand for placements with "Connected Persons" and our service will continue to reflect and meet this need.

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**Produced by Central Bedfordshire Council**

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