

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 10 January 2012
Subject: Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service – July to September 2011
Report of: Catherine Parry, Assistant Director Children’s Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the fostering service during Quarter Two, with comparison to quarter one

Contact Officer: Fiona Mackirdy, Head of Adoption and Fostering
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Central Bedfordshire Council’s Strategic Plan 2009-11 Priority 2 – Educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people.

The Children and Young People’s Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.

Fostering is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

Financial:

1. Adoption and Fostering within Children’s Services has an annual budget of £5.015 million, including income from Bedford Borough Council under the Shared Service arrangement. There are no new financial considerations arising from the Annual Reports.

Legal:

2. Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outlines the requirement to report to Members on the management and outcomes of the services, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the services are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Risk Management:

3. Regulatory Risks: Failure to report to Members would be a breach of National Minimum Standard.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. Not Applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Fostering and services provided to Looked after Children affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

6. Not Applicable.

Sustainability:

7. Not Applicable.

Procurement:

8. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Corporate Parenting Panel note and comment on the content of the report.

Background

9. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Fostering Services to report to Members at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of quarterly updates to the Corporate Parenting Panel and a full year Annual Report to this Panel and the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June each year.
10. The Adoption and Fostering service is a shared service hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council. Annual reports contain information activity in respect of both Councils. This report will be provided to Bedford Borough.
11. This report covers activity in the period July to September 2011. Comparative data with the previous quarter is summarised in the tables in Appendix A.

Recruitment of Foster carers

12. During the period 84 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers.
13. 18 assessments of new foster carers commenced, including 10 assessments of households caring for a child within their own family. These family placements are assessed under the regulation 24 of the Care Planning regulations and guidance of April 2011. These placements demonstrate the Council's commitment to retaining children and young people within their family environments where possible.

14. 8 new fostering households were approved by the Fostering and Permanence Panels. Taken with changes to carers' approval and resignations there was a net increase of 2 fostering placements in Quarter 2. This brings the net increase in the year to 9.

Placements for Children

15. In these 3 months there were 96 requests for new or change of fostering placements. 22 of these requests did not materialise into placements as children did not become looked after or did not move placement.
16. 38 children were placed with in-house foster carers of whom 16 were Central Bedfordshire children. 10 CBC children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency provision.
17. At 30 September 2011, there were a total of 130 children living with in-house foster carers of which 67 were Central Bedfordshire children. This was a significant increase on the previous quarter.

Training for Foster Carers

18. 15 training courses took place involving 157 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as short courses and workshops for approved foster carers.

Key Events

19. Marketing and recruitment events took place at Bedford Market (every Wednesday in August), Linslade Canal Festival and Sandy Upper School New Intake Evening.
20. Advertising and press releases were placed in the local newspapers and publications. A mail shot advertising the youth care scheme open evening was distributed to 250 establishments including council buildings, sports facilities, Upper Schools, Job Centres, Community and Church premises.
21. An information evening for the Youth Care Scheme was held in September, and staff attended the Job Fair in Flitwick.

Key Issues

22. The national changes to state benefits relating to housing could have unintended negative consequences on some of our non working foster carers, or those carers that live in social housing. It could also discourage members of the public from applying to be assessed as potential foster carers if they are in social housing or claiming benefits. The fostering service will be monitoring this closely alongside foster carers and taking mitigating action where necessary.
23. Looking after young people post 16 may become more financially challenging for carers as a result. This will be monitored closely and mitigating action taken where necessary to secure options for looked after children.

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Appendices:

Appendix A – Comparative Data

Background Papers: None