

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 5 March 2012
Subject: Quarter Three Report on the Fostering Service – October to December 2011
Report of: Catherine Parry, Assistant Director Children’s Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the fostering service during Quarter Three, with comparison to Quarters One and Two.

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 October to December 2011. Comparative data with the previous quarters is summarised in the tables in Appendix A.

Recruitment of Foster carers

12. During the period 39 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers. This number is lower than previous quarters due to fewer face to face recruitment events taking place in this quarter. We have identified the correlation between numbers of enquiries and the number of face to face recruitment events, and will ensure that regular events are held to ensure that we optimise the numbers of enquiries we receive.

13. 25 assessments of new foster carers commenced, including 12 assessments of households caring for a child within their own family. These family placements are assessed under 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. 12 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 11 fostering placements in Quarter 3. This brings the net increase in the year to 20.

Placements for Children

15. In these 3 months there were 98 requests for new or change of fostering placements. 25 of these requests did not materialise into placements as children did not become looked after or did not move placement.
16. 44 newly looked after children were placed with foster carers recruited by the Council (in-house foster carers) of whom 24 were Central Bedfordshire children. 4 CBC children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency provision when becoming looked after and a further 2 children moved from in-house to Independent Fostering Agency provision in order to meet their needs.
17. At 30 December 2011, there were a total of 146 children living with in-house foster carers of which 76 were Central Bedfordshire children. This is, once again, a significant increase on the previous quarter.
18. The absolute number of looked after children living in Independent Fostering Agency provision was 57 in December 2011, a fall from 62 in April 2011. The proportion of children fostered with in-house carers rose from 50% in April 2011 to 58 % at the end of quarter 3. The reduction in overall numbers of these placements means that future costs to this budget will be reduced by approximately £220 000 per annum.

Training for Foster Carers

19. 24 training courses took place involving 164 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as short courses and workshops for approved foster carers.

Key Events

20. A recruitment event took place at the Samuel Whitbread Upper School New Intake evening during this period. Evaluation identified that the New Intake evening was not highly productive in generating enquiries because parents were focussed on the needs of their own children, rather than consideration of fostering. However, positive links were made with this school and other local Upper Schools who would be willing to host future recruitment events.
21. During this period a radio interview took place with the Executive Member on Three Counties Radio to talk about the positive rewards of being a foster carer and to promote the need for more foster carers for children.
22. Advertising and press releases were placed in the local newspapers and publications, specifically seeking families who could offer long- term fostering, and to celebrate the contribution made by birth children of fostering families.

Key Issues

23. Changes in regulations since April 2011 and case law has meant a significant rise in the numbers of children living with family or friends who are considered legally to be looked after. This has implications for the fostering service in as much as the family members have to be assessed as foster carers. Significant resources have been deployed since April 2011 on assessing these often complex arrangements and contributing to the associated court proceedings.
24. Both Councils have experienced an overall rise in the number of children becoming looked after during 2011. In this quarter, the number of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council has risen from 192 on 30 September 2011 to 197 on 31 December 2011. The number of looked after children in Bedford Borough Council rose from 182 on 30 September 2011 to 196 on 31 December 2011.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Comparative Data

Background Papers: None