

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Tuesday, 10 January 2012

### PRESENT

Cllr M A G Versallion (Chairman)  
Cllr Mrs A Barker (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs D Bowater  
Mrs S A Goodchild  
Mrs D B Gurney

Cllrs N J Sheppard  
B Wells

Apologies for Absence: Cllr N B Costin

Members in Attendance: Cllr P N Aldis

Officers in Attendance: Ms F Mackirdy – Head of Adoption and Fostering  
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer  
Mrs J Ogley – Director of Social Care, Health and Housing  
Mrs C Parry – Assistant Director (Acting), Children's Services Operations

Others in Attendance: Mrs C Freestone – Co-opted Foster Carer Representative  
Mrs H Phillips – Co-opted Foster Carer Representative

#### CPP/11/22 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 7 November 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### CPP/11/23 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman stated that an invitation to attend one of the forthcoming briefing sessions on corporate parenting had been issued to Members. The sessions were scheduled to be held on 24 January 2012 at Priory House and 28 February 2012 at Watling House. The meeting was aware that all Members of the Council, as well as all officers, were corporate parents.

The Chairman circulated copies of the Council's 'News Central' magazine and drew Members' attention to the articles on the Looked After Children Achievement Awards ceremony on 27 October 2011 and on Sarah Blackford, one of the award winners.

CPP/11/24 **Members' Interests**

a) **Personal Interests:-**

None.

b) **Personal and Prejudicial Interests:-**

None.

CPP/11/25 **Review of Children's Services to Disabled Children, Young People and Their Families**

The Panel considered a report submitted to the Executive that morning which set out the findings and proposals of a review of services for disabled children, young people and their families living in Central Bedfordshire. The meeting noted that the review had been undertaken to ensure increased efficiency and value for money from the existing expenditure. Any monies released from the Early Intervention Grant element of the total budget would be reinvested to provide improved outcomes from children and young people. The meeting further noted that the review had taken into account the Department for Education requirement for all councils to prepare for all young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) to have a single assessment and single plan across health, education and social care by 2013.

The Chairman advised the meeting that the Executive had approved the recommendations on the future delivery of services and the closure of the Poppies building. The redesign of the service would ensure that there was no break in provision for children and families currently accessing them. Implementation would take place between April 2012 and March 2013.

The Panel was asked to discuss the implications of the new service model specifically in relation to Looked After Children and its aspirations for the children and young people arising out of the Executive's decision.

Discussion took place on the Kingfisher residential short break unit which provided a service for young people aged 8-18 years with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and associated challenging behaviours. The Assistant Director (Acting) Children's Services Operations advised the meeting that the unit was currently running at 56% occupancy and the occupancy rate had decreased over the last two years resulting in a high average cost per bed night. There was, therefore, a need to increase efficiency. To this end, children and young people currently accessing short breaks through a Bedford Borough Council provision would be considered for transfer back into Central Bedfordshire Council's residential accommodation. She stressed that officers were fully aware that many of the young people had used Bedford Borough Council's provision for a long period and any transfer would need, therefore, to be undertaken with sensitivity. In reply to a query as to whether the cost per bed night at Kingfisher could be expected to fall should occupancy rates increase the Assistant Director (Acting) stated that hoped such costs would be rebalanced.

In response to a query by the Vice-Chairman the Assistant Director (Acting) explained that it was not usually good practice to take children aged under 8 years old into residential care. Instead Community Home Care/Support, in the form of short breaks, were offered to parents to assist them. With regard to young people over the age of 18 she stated that a transitions plan was put in place when it was clear that an adult services package might be required.

Turning to residential provision in Biggleswade, and in response to a query, the Assistant Director (Acting) explained that the site of the Ivel Valley School had been identified for development as the 'hub' element of the 'hub and spoke' model of service provision in the east of Central Bedfordshire. The one in the west would be in Houghton Regis on the site of the Hillcrest School and nearby Glenwood School. In response to a further query she added that she believed the introduction of the 'hub and spoke' model on two sites, and the provision of respite services at a more local level rather than at the Poppies at Aspley Guise, would encourage more parents to access them.

Reference was made to the closure of, or transfer of children and young people from, various facilities identified in the report and the possibility of emotional upset for the young people as a result. However, comment was also made that all children would experience change in their lives as they became older and there were advantages in allowing them to learn to deal with this and to develop trust in strangers whilst still young. In so doing the children would become more independent.

#### **NOTED**

**the decision of the Executive to implement the following proposals for delivery of services to children, young people and their families living in Central Bedfordshire:**

- a) **that a 'hub and spoke' model be adopted for the delivery of services;**
- b) **that the Poppies be closed by no later than March 2013 and that the support to families arising from individual assessments be delivered within the proposed revised model as part of the 'hub and spoke' delivery.**

#### **RESOLVED**

**that a review of the above proposals be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel in the summer of 2013 following their implementation.**

CPP/11/26

#### **Quarter Two Report on the Adoption Service - April to September 2011**

The Panel considered a report that outlined activity in the Adoption Agency during April – September 2011. The meeting noted that the Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated regulations and national minimum standards required local authority adoption agencies to report to Members at

six monthly intervals. The meeting further noted that this would be achieved by submission of a six monthly Quarter Two update to the Panel and a full annual report to the Panel and to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June each year.

The report covered the following matters:

- The recruitment of adopters
- Adoption panning and placements for children
- Special Guardianship and adoption support
- Adult adoption work
- Key events

In connection with the recruitment of adopters the Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that there had been a good level of public response to information evenings about becoming adopters subsequently leading to the approval of seven new adoptive households by the Adoption Panel. She added that adoption was not approved for all children and alternative options were also considered.

In response to a query the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that she had made no reference to the Narey Report on adoption because the content of the Quarter Two report was dictated by regulation and it was therefore focused on quality monitoring.

Discussion took place on the inclusion of additional information, including comparative information, in future reports in order to emphasis the positive performance of the Adoption Agency. In response the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that the overriding aim had been to present clear information to the Panel on the Adoption Agency's performance and the annual report would contain more information. Nonetheless, the meeting felt that additional information should be included in all future reports as Members could then chose to disregard it if they felt it was unnecessary.

#### **NOTED**

**the Quarter Two report on the Adoption Service for the period April – September 2011.**

CPP/11/27

#### **Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service - July to September 2011**

The Panel considered a report outlining activity within the fostering service for the Quarter Two period July – September 2011 with a comparison with Quarter One.

The report covered the following matters:

- Recruitment of foster carers
- Placements for children
- Training for foster carers

- Key events
- Key issues

The Head of Adoption and Fostering drew Members' attention to the significant increase on the previous Quarter in the total number of children living with in-house foster carers. The meeting noted that this was the result of a number of factors including the Baby P. case, substance misuse by parents, general neglect and the effects of the current world economic situation on family relationships. The meeting noted that a high percentage of the Looked After population were children from families of white UK origin.

In response to comment the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that the number of children living with independent foster carers had remained constant and it was the overall number of children requiring this service which had increased. She undertook to amend the report to ensure clarity. The Assistant Director (Acting) Children's Services Operations added that an in-house foster placement was always sought initially for any child or young person coming into care unless their specific needs could not be met in that environment.

The Head of Adoption and Fostering next referred to the marketing and recruitment key events which had taken place. In response to a query she stated that a cost analysis was always undertaken to establish whether a particular method of marketing or recruitment was cost effective. The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing commented that, whilst the content of the report was positive, it lacked supportive comparative information and failed to convey the importance of the service.

Turning to key issues the Head of Adoption and Fostering referred to changes to state benefits for housing and the unintended negative consequences for non-working foster carers or those living in social housing. As looking after young people post-16 could become more financially challenging the situation would be closely monitored.

In conclusion the Panel recorded its thanks for the action taken by the Assistant Director (Acting) Children's Services Operations and the Head of Adoption and Fostering.

#### **NOTED**

#### **the Quarter Two report on the Fostering Service for the period July - September 2011.**

#### **CPP/11/28 Work Plan 2011-2012**

The Panel considered its Work Plan for the remainder of the 2011/12 municipal year.

The Assistant Director (Acting) Children's Services Operations advised that she would submit a draft Work Plan for 2012/13, which would include statutory reporting requirements, to the next meeting of the Panel for consideration.

**RESOLVED**

**that the proposed agenda items for the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel in March 2012 be approved.**

CPP/11/29 **Awareness Raising Week**

The Chairman, by virtue of the authority vested in him in accordance with Section 100(b)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, agreed to allow this item to be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency. Members were advised that consideration of this item could not be delayed until the next scheduled meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel in March because the event to be discussed would take place in February and any preparation would need to begin shortly.

The Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations informed the meeting that the Council had been contacted by New Family Social, an organisation that supported gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender foster carers and adopters. This body had sought the Council's support for an awareness raising week during 20-26 February 2012 when they would be encouraging fostering and adoption applications.

The Panel considered issues relating to this request in full. Following discussion the meeting was aware that its decision should be guided by the need to ensure that any statutory requirement was met, equal opportunities were applied and any action relating to placement for adoption or fostering was in the best interests of the child. The Panel was aware that any decision should be based on the applicant's ability to provide a caring, stable, home environment.

**RESOLVED**

**that support be given by the Fostering and Adoption Service to the New Family Social awareness raising week during 20-26 February 2012 through the provision of an information evening for prospective adopters or foster carers.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. and concluded at 3.15 p.m.)

(Note: Following the conclusion of the meeting the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing referred to the forthcoming briefing sessions for Members on corporate parenting (minute 11/23 above refers) and reminded the meeting of the need to ensure that the Council's officers, who were also statutorily responsible for corporate parenting, were offered similar training. In response the Assistant Director (Acting) Children's Services Operations undertook to discuss this matter with the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services.)