
Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 2 July 2012
Subject: Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service
Report of: Yolanda Corden, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines the Statutory framework regarding Annual Reports and summarises key points contained within the reports.

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 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable

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

Adoption and Fostering are key statutory services 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 outline 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 would be a breach of National Minimum Standard.

Child Protection Risks: Failure to assess risk may lead to unfavourable outcomes.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. There are no staffing issues.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Adoption and Fostering affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

6. There are no community safety issues.

Sustainability:

7. There are no sustainability issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

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

Background

8. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Adoption Services and Fostering Services to report regularly on the operation of the services. The service specific regulations outline the frequency of reporting and to whom the reports must be submitted.
9. 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 Council.

Adoption Services

10. The Adoption Service is required to report at six-monthly intervals. In Central Bedfordshire Council, this will be to the Scrutiny Committee. An Annual Report will be produced by the end of May each year covering the preceding April to March period. In addition a six-monthly briefing update will be produced by the end of October each year and presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
11. In 2011/12 there was an increase for the second year running in the number of children whose cases were presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation as to whether adoption should be the plan for the child. This was for 31 children, an increase from 27 in the previous 12 months. 14 households were approved as adopters, an increase from 11 in 2010/11 and matches of 15 children to adopters were made.
12. 4 Adoption Orders were granted in respect of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council, with a further 11 being granted Special Guardianship. Whilst the number of adoptions was down from 5 the previous year, the overall number of children where a permanent legal option was secured via adoption or Special Guardianship increased from 7 in 2010/11 to 15 in 2011/12.

13. As of the 31 March 2012, 25 adopted children and their families were in receipt of support. In addition contact plans were being made on behalf of 190 children. Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family, which usually involves supporting the periodic exchange of letters or information between adoptive and birth families.
14. There were 88 referrals from adult adoptees and their birth relatives, a slight increase on the previous 12 month period. Post Adoption support in the form of tracing birth records, counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support was provided.
15. As part of the Government reform of adoption services, a range of measures is planned for implementation 2012 to 2015 to increase the number and speed of adoptions. Measures include addressing delay in Court Proceedings, the publishing of an adoption 'scorecard' for each council, and the setting of challenging targets to reduce delay. We are currently analysing Central Bedfordshire Council's scorecard profile and consider that the Council is in a strong position to respond to the requirements of the action plan, having robust performance monitoring and good practices in place in regard to planning for adoption.

Fostering Services

16. A report to Members is required at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by production of an Annual Report to this Committee by the end of June each year covering the April to March period. In addition, three-monthly updates will be presented at the end of July, October and January each year to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
17. 41 new fostering households were approved during 2011-12, an increase on the previous year.
18. 162 children were placed in full-time foster placements at the end of March 2012, of whom 85 were looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council. This is a significant increase from the 118 who were in placement in April 2011. Across both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council, there have been 375 referrals for new or a change of placement. 146 children were placed with carers approved by Central Bedfordshire Council, 116 placed in Independent Fostering Agencies, 9 placed in residential units and the remainder did not become looked after by either Council.
19. The number of enquiries from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers fell slightly from 260 in 2010/11 to 218 in 2011/12. All enquiries received prompt information and a visit from a social worker. 84 households made formal application to become a foster carers either from a follow up enquiry as a member of the public or because they wished to care for a looked after child known to them as a family member or friend. This was an increase from the 45 applications received in 2010/11.

20. Over the course of the year 77 training activities were provided for foster carers on 36 topics. 567 delegates attended. A range of support is provided to foster carers, including regular supervision from a social worker, support groups, peer mentoring and out-of-hours telephone support.

Shared Service Arrangement

21. In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement as of 31st January 2013. Key staff in both councils will therefore be meeting regularly during 2012 to plan the arrangements for February 2013 and beyond. This planning process will involve consultation with key stakeholders and staff to ensure that effective adoption and fostering services that meets the needs of children can be maintained and developed

Appendices:

Appendix A – Adoption Annual Report.

Appendix B – Fostering Annual Report.

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands