
Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 3 September 2012
Subject: Quarter One Report on the Fostering Service – April to June 2012
Report of: Yolanda Corden, Assistant Director Children’s Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the fostering service during Quarter One, with comparison to previous quarters.

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 Medium Term Plan Priority C Promote Health and Well-being.

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 April to June 2012. Comparative data with previous quarters is summarised in the tables in Appendix A.

Recruitment of Foster carers

12. During the period 69 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers. This is a 30% increase on the number received in the same quarter last year and reflects the high national and local profile that fostering is given in the media during Foster Care fortnight in May.
13. 28 assessments of new foster carers commenced, including 18 assessments of households caring for a child within their own family. This is a further increase in the number of assessments both from members of the public and family members. 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 20 fostering placements in Quarter 1.

Placements for Children

15. In these 3 months there were 143 requests for new or change of fostering placements. This was an increase from 118 in the previous quarter and 78 in the same quarter in 2011-12. 60 of these requests did not materialise into placements as children did not become looked after or did not move placement.
16. 34 newly looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers of whom 24 were Central Bedfordshire children. 11 CBC children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency provision when becoming looked after.
17. At 30 June 2012, there were a total of 162 children living with in-house foster carers of which 91 were Central Bedfordshire children. This is a similar figure to the year end in March 2012.
18. The absolute number of looked after children from Central Bedfordshire living in Independent Fostering Agency provision was 74 at 30 June 2012, an increase from 69 in March 2012 and reflective of the increase in the number of looked after children over the period.

Training for Foster Carers

19. 17 training courses took place involving 120 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as short courses and workshops for approved foster carers.

Key Events

20. Annual advertising commitments were renewed this quarter, including continuation of permanent adverts on 3 roundabouts (Leighton Buzzard, Chicksands and Bedford) and 14 A5 posters in Bedford Hospital. Recruitment events included two drop-in events, a fostering information evening and a recruitment stall at Picnic in the Park in Leighton Buzzard.
21. To coincide with Foster Care Fortnight from 12 to 15 May 2012 we embarked on an additional style of recruitment using adverts on social networking sites which linked to a video we produced on You Tube where foster carers and former looked after children talked about the difference fostering made to their lives. Over 16 days of our campaign 1128 people looked at the video. There were 1537 views of the fostering page on the Central Bedfordshire Council website. (Prior to this campaign the website was viewed 232 times in a similar 16 day period.) In May and June we had 20 enquiries from people who stated they had enquired specifically as a result of seeing the internet campaigns.
22. The annual Foster Carers Celebration and Awards event was held on 25 May in the Council Chamber. 14 fostering households were eligible for long-service awards, with 8 attending on the evening to receive their awards. Positive feedback about the evening was received from carers, children and invited guests.

Key Issues

23. Both councils continue to see a rise in the number of children becoming looked after. In this quarter, the number of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council has risen from 208 on 1 April 2012 to 229 on 30 June 2012. This has a significant impact on the fostering service in terms of placement demand and choice, the increased use of external agency placements and in the numbers of assessments required for family members and new mainstream carers.
24. Ofsted have published a consultation document on proposals to streamline the inspection processes for Looked After Children from April 2013. If adopted the proposals would see the inspection of the fostering service incorporated into the Council's wider inspection of services for Looked After Children. Inspection of the fostering service under the current inspection framework is expected by March 2013.
25. Work continues with colleagues in Bedford Borough Council on planning the ending of the shared service arrangement. Key milestones in the coming quarter are the consultation with staff on the proposed structures, and consultation with foster carers and adopters about which council they will work with in the future.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Comparative Data

Background Papers: (open to public inspection) – None

Appendix A

Chart one shows the allocation of in house placements to Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and Bedford Borough Council (BBC) during the last four quarters.

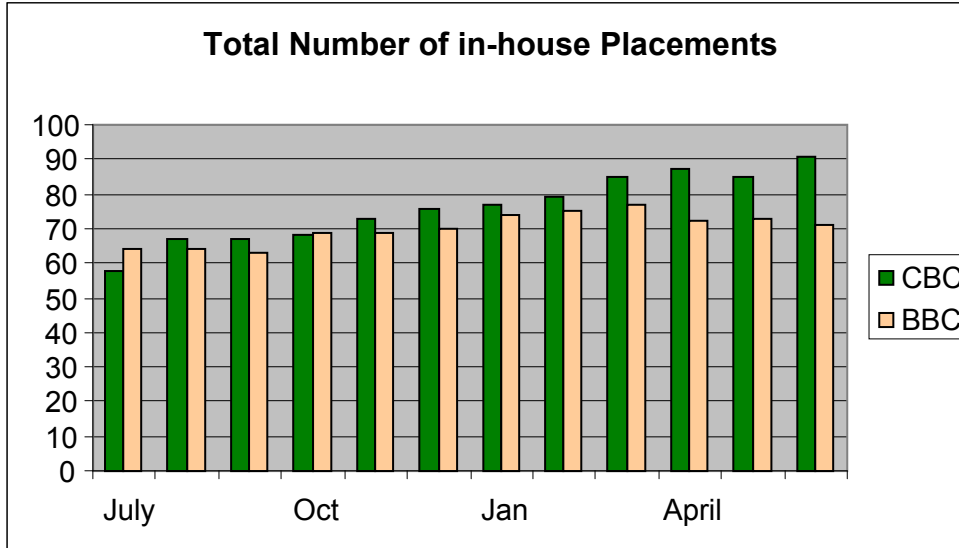


Chart two shows the proportion of new placements made in CBC and BBC in the last four quarters.

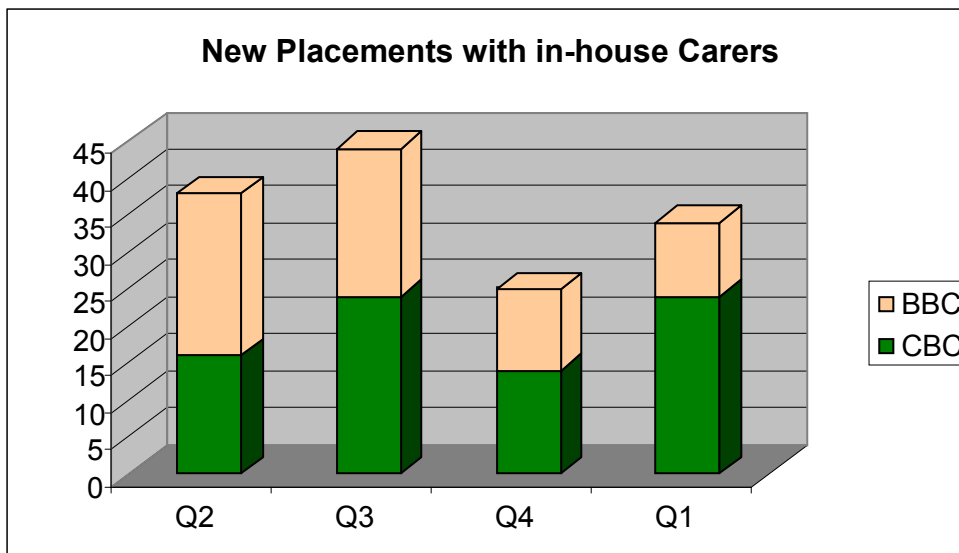


Chart three shows the number of foster carer assessments started in the last four quarters.

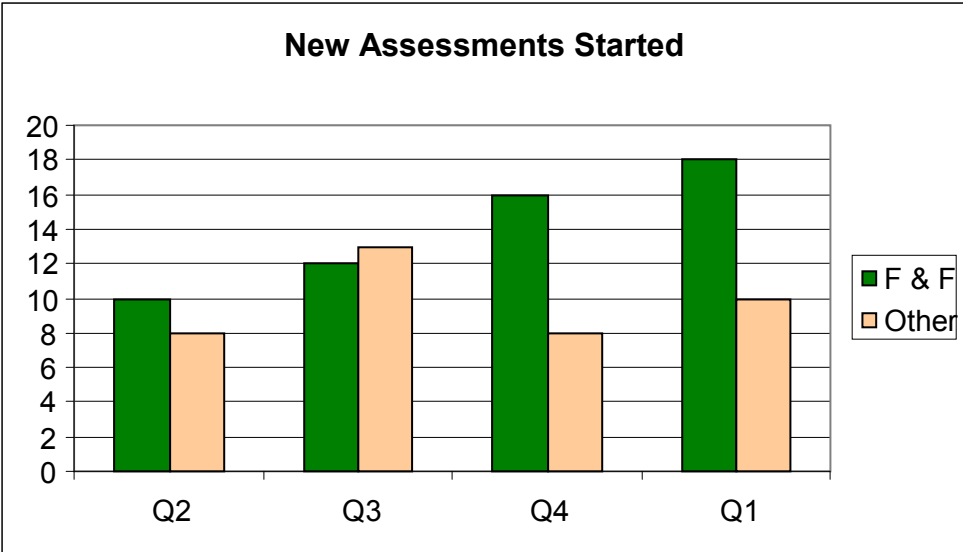


Chart four shows the total number of requests of both councils for new placements and a change of placement in the last four quarters.

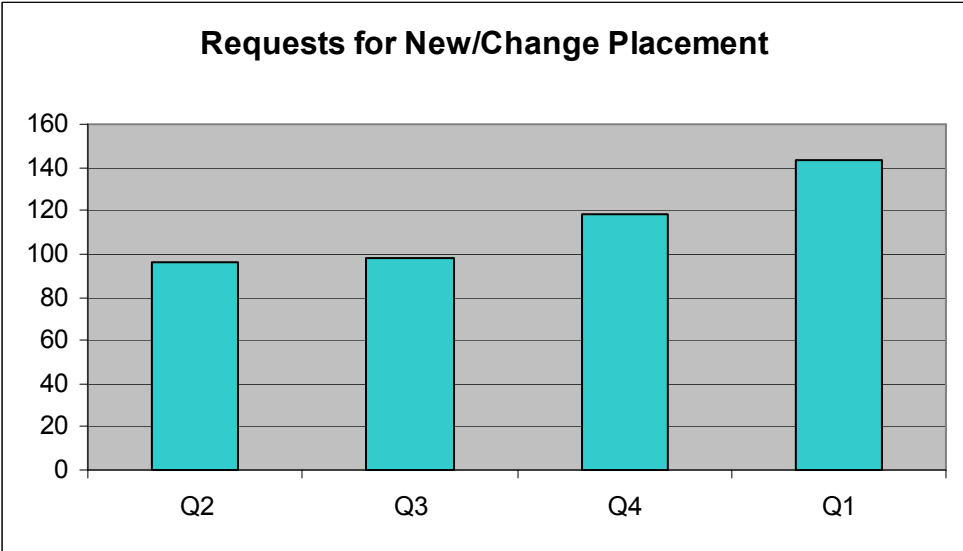


Chart five shows the total number of enquiries made about fostering in the last four quarters.

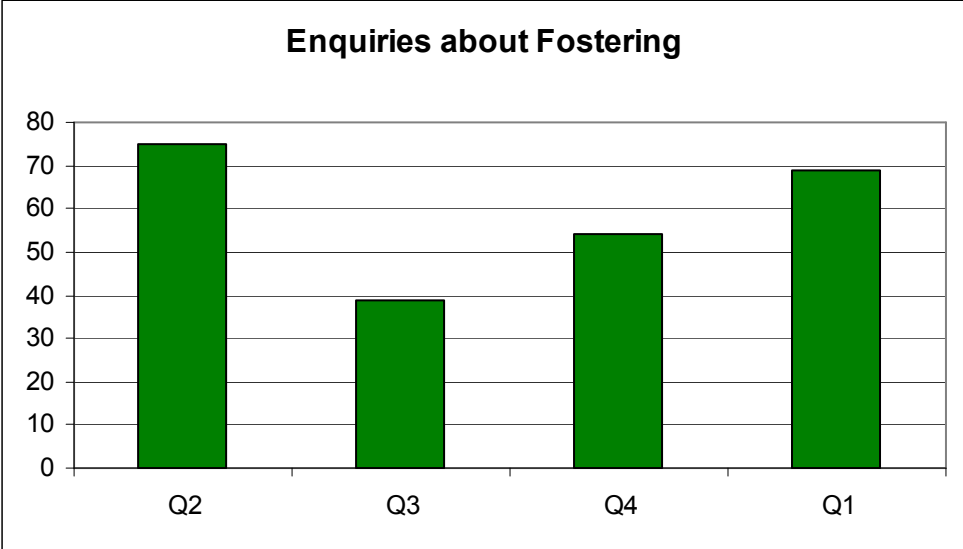


Chart six shows the total numbers of approvals, resignations/terminations and net gain of placements in the last four quarters.

