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**Meeting:** Corporate Parenting Panel  
**Date:** 5 November 2012  
**Subject:** Half-year Report on the Adoption Service – April to September 2012  
**Report of:** Yolanda Corden, Interim Assistant Director Children's Services Operations  
**Summary:** The report outlines the activity in the Adoption Agency during the first six months of 2012-13.

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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.

Adoption 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 this report.

### **Legal:**

2. Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outlines the requirement to report to Members on the management and outcomes of the Adoption Agency, 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. Adoption 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 Adoption Agencies to report to Members at six monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of a six monthly update 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 September 2012. Comparative data with the previous year is included where relevant.

**Recruitment of Adopters**

12. During the period 45 households attended information evenings about becoming adopters and 19 households attended for a subsequent in-depth interview.
13. 11 assessments of new adopters commenced in the period. 17 new adoptive households completed their assessment and were approved by the Adoption panel. Taken with the number of assessments started, the service is on track to exceed the number of adopters approved last year, and to meet the recruitment target set.

## **Adoption planning and placements for Children**

14. In this 6 month period there were 80 referrals for permanence planning including those where the plan was adoption. 39 were from CBC and 41 from BBC. The number of referrals was nearly double that in the previous six-month period and reflected the proactive planning taking place in both councils to ensure children are placed in a timely way in a permanent placement
15. 16 cases were presented to the adoption panel or to the Agency Decision Maker for a recommendation as to whether adoption should be the plan for the child. This is twice the number in the comparable period last year.
16. 7 children were placed with adopters during the period (5 from Bedford Borough and 2 Central Bedfordshire Council children.) This takes the total number of children placed with adopters and awaiting the adoption order to 12. 5 further children had been matched with adopters and introductions for early October were planned. 4 adoption orders have been granted since April 2012, 2 for Bedford Borough children and 2 for Central Bedfordshire children.

## **Special Guardianship and Adoption Support**

17. The adoption and permanence team within Children's Services play a key role in supporting children placed under a Special Guardianship Order or for adoption after the legal order is made. At the end of September the team were providing support to 44 families (23 CBC and 21 BBC. This is a lower number of cases than previously, reflecting a change in the types of support provided towards earlier intervention and group/peer support services, enabling targeted support to those families in most need.
18. The staff have also facilitated support to 203 letterbox contact cases (113 BBC and 90 CBC).

## **Adult Adoption work**

19. Over the period there were 28 referrals from adopted adults or their birth relatives seeking support to trace records or for intermediary services to facilitate contact, a small increase on the number over the same period last year.

## **Key Events**

20. There was ongoing publicity to recruit adopters throughout the period, with adverts placed in newspapers and parish magazines in both council areas. Information and drop-in sessions specifically about adoption were held in July at Priory House and Borough Hall. The adoption and fostering service held stalls at Leighton Buzzard Canal Festival and at Bedford Market during the summer holidays.

## **Key Issues**

21. This period has seen a significant national spotlight from Government on adoption. The government published 'An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay' in March which set out key proposals to increase the number of children being adopted and to ensure those children were adopted without due delay. A subsequent change in Regulations was enacted to change the way in which decisions about adoption for a child are made by the Council. The Government has announced some grant funding for Councils to assist with implementation of the reforms.
22. Alongside this, an Adoption Scorecard was published in May 2012 outlining council performance against key targets. In both authorities, whilst low numbers of children were adopted as a percentage of all looked after children leaving care, timeliness of adoption for those children was good, with performance being within the target timescale.
23. The Department for Education has also launched three consultations over this period in relation to adoption practice. The first in relation to contact for children where adoption is the plan, and second in relation to sibling placements, have now closed and guidance is awaited. The current consultation, which closes on 7 December is seeking views on a radical change to the way adopters are recruited, and in relation to the implementation of 'Fostering for Adoption', a practice whereby children are placed with adopters firstly under a fostering arrangement whilst the court decides finally on whether adoption should be the plan.
24. Both Councils have responded to the DfE request for voluntary submission of quarterly adoption performance data as this provides benefit to the service by way of regular tracking of overall performance.

## **Appendices:**

None

## **Background Papers:** (open to public inspection)

None