
Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 5 November 2012
Subject: Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service – July to September 2012
Report of: Yolanda Corden, Interim Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the fostering service during Quarter Two, 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 July to September 2012. Comparative data with previous quarters is summarised in the tables in Appendix A.

Recruitment of Foster carers

12. During the period 59 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers. This is slightly lower than the comparable quarter last year, but overall for the year so far numbers of enquiries are on par with last year.
13. 24 assessments of new foster carers commenced, including 16 assessments of households caring for a child within their own family. This is a similar level of activity as the last two quarters with the number of new assessments started for mainstream carers being 8 on average per quarter.

14. 8 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 6 fostering placements in Quarter 2, taking the total for the year so far to 26.

Placements for Children

15. In these 3 months there were 107 requests for new or change of fostering placements. This was considerably lower than the previous quarter but more in line with average performance. 29 of these requests did not materialise into placements as children did not become looked after or did not move placement.
16. 26 newly looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers of whom 10 were Central Bedfordshire children. 9 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 84 at 30 September 2012, an increase from 74 in June 2012 and reflective of the increase in the number of looked after children over the period.

Training for Foster Carers

19. 14 training courses took place involving 79 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as short courses and workshops for approved foster carers.

Key Events

20. Recruitment events included a presence at Leighton Buzzard Canal Festival and at Bedford Market throughout August. Specific information events for Youth Care Fostering were held during this period. All events were advertised in local newspapers, and adverts have been placed in some parish magazines in both council areas.
21. The local Foster Care Association held a cheese and wine event for foster carers and elected members from both councils as part of the Fostering Network 'Stronger Voice' campaign to raise the profile of fostering with elected members.

Key Issues

22. The Department for Education have published a consultation document on a range of measures affecting adoption and fostering, with a closing date of 7 December 2012. Proposals include the introduction of 'Fostering for Adoption' whereby approved adopters initially have a child placed on a fostering arrangement whilst plans for the child's future care are finalised. The consultation is also seeking views on whether further guidance is needed to strengthen foster carers delegated responsibility for looked after children in their care.

Appendices

Appendix A – Comparative Data

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None