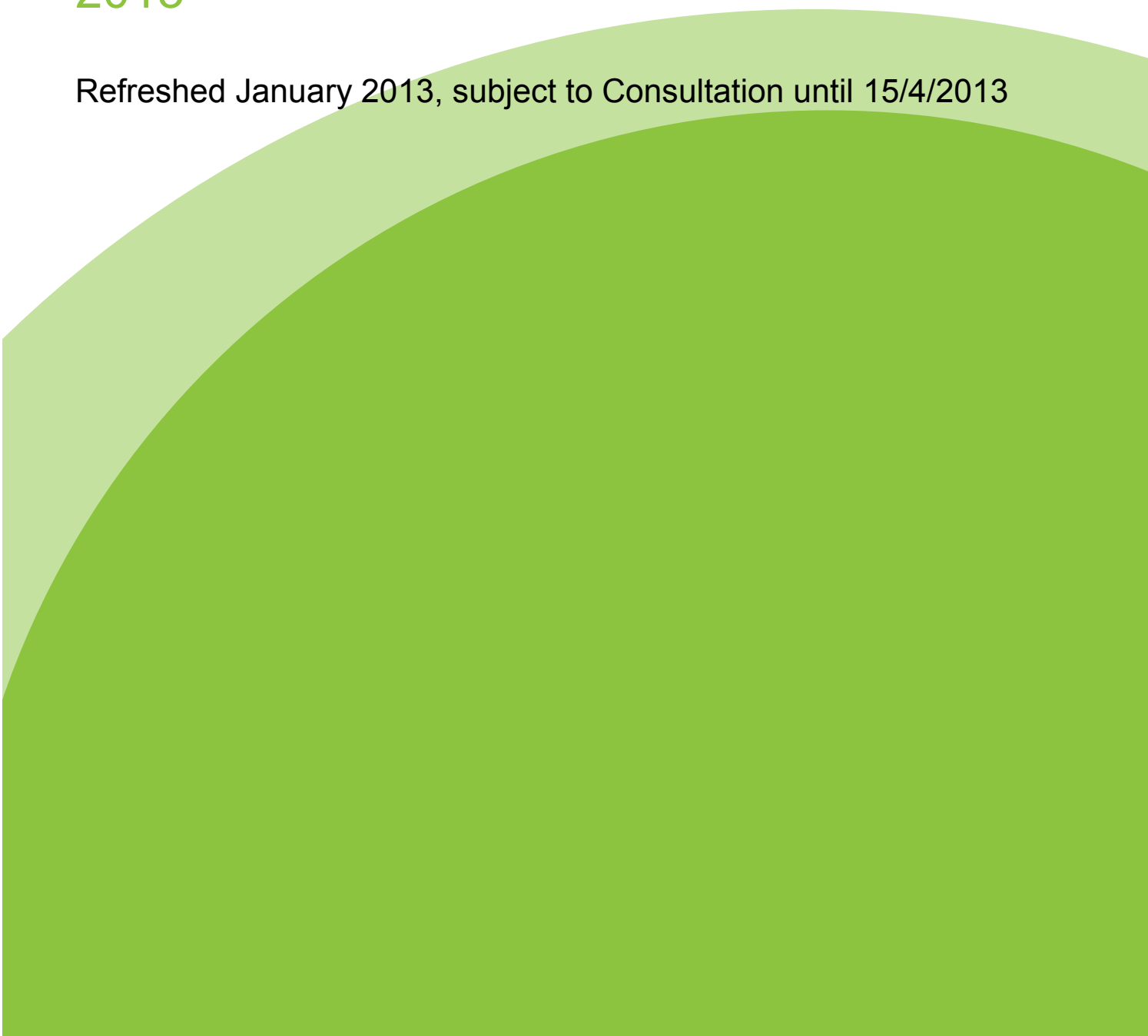


Appendix A

Looked after children Placement Strategy

2013

Refreshed January 2013, subject to Consultation until 15/4/2013



1. Introduction

Section 22G of The Children Act 1989 requires a council to take steps, as far as reasonably practicable, that secures accommodation for looked after children within the authority's area and which meets the needs of those children. Councils should consider the number of accommodation providers in their area that is sufficient in the council's opinion, and take account of the range of accommodation in their area capable of meeting different needs.

In 2010, Statutory Guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children was published by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families. (Now Department for Education) This outlined how councils should carry out their duty under The Children Act which came into force in April 2011.

This strategy sets out the position in relation to placements for looked after children in Central Bedfordshire, including actions needed to ensure sufficient placements to meet future need.

2. Looked After Population Data and Trends

Overall numbers

On 1 April 2009, when Central Bedfordshire Council became a unitary authority the Looked After Children (LAC) population stood at 132. This represented a rate of 24 per 10 000 population. Our statistical neighbour rate, per 10 000 population, was 38.

The numbers of looked after children have risen significantly over the past 3 years and the population at 31 March 2012 stood at 208. This represented a rate per 10 000 population of 37 and a percentage increase of 58%. Over the same period the statistical neighbour rate, per 10 000 population, has risen to 46. Our position in relation to our statistical neighbours however remains in the fourth quartile. Most of the Councils in our statistical comparison group take more children into care than Central Bedfordshire does.

The increase can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, there has been a national increase in referrals to children's social care services, open cases and statutory intervention in relation to children as a result of the national awareness and response to the Baby Peter case. Secondly, Central Bedfordshire Council has applied more rigour than the legacy authority in applying thresholds and intervening to ensure children are protected from harm.

Age and gender

The age profile of the looked after population as at 31 March 2012 was as follows:

Age	CBC LAC population (%)			England LAC population (%)
	Male	Female	Total	Total
0-4	15	14	29	24
5- 9	7	8	15	18
10-14	22	13	35	18
15-17	14	7	21	37
Total	58	42	100	100

In comparison with the England looked after population (2011) children aged 5 – 14 are under-represented and young people aged 10- 14 are over-represented.

Length of time in care

Data indicates no significant trends in relation to the length of time children remain looked after. In April 2010, 59% of children had been looked after for one year or over. This increased to 63% in March 2011 and fell to 57% by 31 March 2012.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity data shows that children from all non-white black and minority ethnic groups are over-represented in the looked after population when compared to both census data and information from Central Bedfordshire Council local school population. 15% of looked after children are non-white compared to 9% in the council school population. When unaccompanied asylum seeking children are taken out of the looked after population numbers, the percentage of non-white children falls to 11.5% which is still slightly higher than the local school population of 9%.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

At 31 March 2012, 8 of the 192 looked after children were unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. This number has fallen from a peak of 34 in May 2010 and there has been only one new young person claiming asylum and becoming looked after since February 2011. However, it is difficult to predict trends in young people arriving in the council area and claiming asylum.

Placement Stability

In relation to the two measures of placement stability, performance in Central Bedfordshire has been consistently good although in the year to March 2012 there had been some reported decline in performance. We measure both the number of moves children have in any one year, and whether those children who have been looked after for 2.5 years have experienced a recent move. We measure this because we know that a stable placement is

a positive influence on children's emotional wellbeing, achievement and long term prospects. .

At the end of March 2012 12% of looked after children had had 3 or more placements in the previous 12 months, slightly above the England average of 11%. This decline in reported performance was largely as the result of improvements in quality of data, ensuring that all placement moves were properly recorded. Those children and young people experiencing multiple moves tended to be those over 11 years. We monitor more closely those children who have had one or two moves, and, where the reasons may be due to placement breakdown, put additional support into the placement to minimise the risk of a further move. For some children, moves may be at the direction of the Court as part of care proceedings.

In respect of long term placement stability, at 31 March 2012, 23 of 41 children who had been looked after for 2.5 years or more had been in the same placement for 2 years or more. For a further 8 children their latest move had been to a permanent placement or onto independence.

Distance from Home

At March 2012, 12% of children were placed more than 20 miles away from their home address, a fall from the previous year's figure of 14.8%. The number of children placed outside the area is in line with the national average. Some of this improvement can be attributed to an increase in numbers of in-house fostering placements and the new framework agreement in place with the Independent Fostering Agencies, which places emphasis on local placements.

3. Current Placement Provision

Fostering Provision

Central Bedfordshire Council operates the 'in-house' fostering service providing placements for its own looked after population and to Bedford Borough Council under a service level agreement. At 31 March 2012 the service had 127 approved fostering households, including those caring for friends and family members under a fostering arrangement. 85 Central Bedfordshire looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers. This was an increase in absolute numbers from the 55 children that were placed in-house on 31 March 2010 and 59 that were in placement in March 2011. The proportion of looked after children placed with in-house foster carers also increase over this period from 33% in March 2011 to 41 % by March 2012.

In addition to mainstream foster placements, the Council as part of its in-house service runs a Youth Care scheme providing specialist placements for young people aged 10-18 who have additional or complex needs. In addition to the fostering allowance for the child, these carers receive a weekly fee and are self-employed, and the Councils' fostering and adoption service provides additional supervision and support to them. 14 Youth Care placements are available when the full complement of carers is approved. During 2011, a recruitment campaign successfully recruited 4 new carers to ensure that the scheme was able to continue at full capacity.

The number of children in Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements remained reasonably constant during 2009 -12. In April 2009, 63 children were placed in IFA

placements; in March 2012 the number was 65. Given the rise in overall numbers of looked after children this meant that the proportion of children in externally commissioned foster placements fell during this period. However since April 2012 to the end of November 2012 42 new IFA placements have been made, as the in-house fostering service has not been able to keep full pace with the increase in numbers of looked after children during that period. Of the 42 new IFA placements made, 26 of these were in order to keep sibling groups together, 7 were for children over 10 and 4 were for children with particular needs.

The proportion of looked after children who were in foster placements (in-house or IFA) at 31 March 2012 was 73%. This is a similar proportion to 31 March 2011 although there was a temporary fall in this proportion in late 2011. This compares with England data of 75% of looked after children placed in a fostering placement.

Places in IFAs are sought through a Framework Contract which has been in place since 1 November 2011. More detail about this is given in the 'Planning for Change' section below.

Residential Provision

The legacy authority, Bedfordshire County Council entered into an agreement in 2007 for St Christopher's Fellowship to manage its three mainstream children's homes. This arrangement was continued by both new unitary authorities under a Service Level Agreement which runs until 2014.

The arrangement provides for 14 places across 3 homes – one in the Bedford Borough Area and two in the Central Bedfordshire area. One home also has one emergency 72-hour bed. All except one single occupancy provision is shared with Bedford Borough Council. The available number of beds reduced during 2011 with the closure of a four-bed home in the Central Bedfordshire area following an adverse Ofsted inspection. All other provision is rated by Ofsted as outstanding or good with outstanding features. Proposals to extend the provision offered in one of the homes by an additional two beds will be realised during the Autumn of 2012. Overall occupancy in the homes remains high (ranging from 90% to 100% from April 2011 to 31st March 2012). Central Bedfordshire occupancy of places increased during that period from 54% to 65%. The young people placed at the homes by Central Bedfordshire Council were of both genders.

Central Bedfordshire Council runs two children's homes for children with disabilities. One of these homes, Maythorn provides long stay provision for children who are looked after alongside some provision for short breaks. Kingfisher provides short-break provision. At 31 March, 2012, 5 children were living at Maythorn on a full time or shared care basis

At 31 March 2012, 27 young people were placed in residential provision, including Maythorn and the St Christopher's homes. This is a 29% increase since 31 March 2011. The overall proportion of looked after young people in residential provision in the same period has risen slightly from 12% to 14%.

The profile of young people living in residential care is 61% male and 74% of young people are aged over 14 years. As is usual in this cohort, the majority of the young people have experienced multiple foster placements or present with behaviour that cannot be managed within a family setting.

Provision in private children's homes is sought on a spot purchase basis. There are no formal arrangements with providers for preferred rates or cost/volume contracts. This position was reviewed during 2012 by the Children's Services Commissioning Team and the outcome was that the current arrangement provides the best flexibility and value for money given the relatively low numbers of children placed outside of the St Christopher's

Fellowship provision. There is no evidence that significant expansion of provision in the residential sector is required.

All young people placed in residential provision other than the St Christopher's Fellowship provision are placed outside the boundary of Central Bedfordshire Council. 6 young people are in placements in neighbouring authorities, and 5 in other authorities further away. The number of young people placed outside of Central Bedfordshire or neighbouring authorities had reduced from 8 in 2011.

4 young people are looked after in 52-week residential school placements. 3 are out of the Central Bedfordshire Council area and all are high cost specialist provision.

Secure Accommodation

In the period from 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012, Central Bedfordshire Council has sought secure residential accommodation for two young people for part of the year. There is no secure provision locally to Central Bedfordshire with the nearest provision in Peterborough or Essex.

Independent and semi-independent accommodation

52 of the looked after population at 31 March 2012 were aged 16 or 17. Young people are supported to remain in foster care or in residential homes where this is consistent with their needs and wishes. A 'staying –put' policy is in place for young people who need to remain in a fostering household beyond 18. However for those young people who wish to move towards independence or for those who become looked after at age 16 or 17 a range of semi-independent and independent living provision is required.

Central Bedfordshire Council operates a Supported Lodgings scheme offering 8 places spread geographically across the council area. The supported lodgings scheme also operates 3 crash pad beds for young people who are homeless and need 'emergency short term accommodation' while assessments are undertaken. This service also offers a mediation service for young people aged 14+ to help prevent relationship issues that may lead to homelessness

The council has also worked with two main providers of semi-independent provision, who offer young people housing tenancies and a package of staff support. There are no formal contracted arrangements with the two providers and placements are commissioned on a spot purchased basis. A review of provision was undertaken in Autumn 2012 and plans are underway to provide a similar service via in-house staff from Children's Services (for the support element) and Housing (for the accommodation element.) This is due to come on line in Spring/Summer 2013.

There is limited provision for homeless young people in the area. Under the Southwark Judgement (recently reviewed by the House of Lords), homeless young people are entitled to an assessment by Children's services to establish if they have additional needs. If the council provides any accommodation for these young people they are deemed to be 'accommodated' (looked after under Section 20 of the Children Act). As looked after young people they could be placed in a range of placements. There is little hostel provision within the Central Bedfordshire boundary. There is one small hostel offering approximately 12 beds located in the south of the council area, but no priority is given to looked after children and applications for places are considered on a needs basis, alongside applications from people from the general population. There is also some provision for homeless people of all ages located in the east of the council area but this is not appropriate for many of the 16 and 17 year old homeless young people who may have additional vulnerabilities

Regular meetings are taking place between Children's Services and Housing to identify the need and make provision for good quality housing for 16- 18 year olds.

Emergency placements

Where a child is accommodated or needs a change of placement out of office hours the Emergency Duty Team have responsibility for making arrangements. They have access to the list of in-house carers who have vacancies and who are able to take emergency placements. They also have a list of independent fostering providers who can be approached if no suitable in-house placement is available. One of the St Christopher's Fellowship homes located in Central Bedfordshire has a 72-hour emergency bed that can be used if available.

Provision for Children with Disabilities

The in-house fostering service has some foster carers with the appropriate skills to care for children with disabilities. Similarly some children are looked after in independent fostering agency placements. The council also has a residential provision for children with disabilities who require shared care or full-time care. 4 long stay places are available for looked after children aged 8 to 18 years, with 3 further beds for short breaks.

Whilst the number of looked after children with disabilities is low at 7% of the total LAC population they are more likely to live in residential care or independent provision. Whilst this may be attributed to the more complex needs that some children present with, in some cases it is due to lack of availability of foster placements.

A review of Children with Disabilities services took place during the Autumn of 2011 which considered placement provision as part of the remit of the review. Long stay provision remains at Maythorn which is part of the new 'Hub and Spoke' model of services to disabled children and their families.

Costs

The approximate unit cost of a mainstream in-house foster placement was calculated in March 2012 as £400 per week.

A youth care in-house placement was estimated at £785 per week.

A joint consortium agreement with 19 contractually committed Independent Fostering Agencies commenced in November 2011. If young people are placed with one of these preferred agencies as a single placement (ie. not placed with siblings or in a solo placement) then the average cost for an IFA placement is £759 per week. In all of these agencies, there is a reduction in the weekly charge for siblings. Again, there is variation on costs for solo placements or young people placed in enhanced placements where their needs are specific.

The average cost of a non-consortium IFA placement is £885 per week – this masks the variation in individual placement costs depending on the age and needs of the young person. Placements can cost as much as £1533 per week.

The average cost of an independent residential placement is £3614 per week – this also masks a wide variation in placement cost.

The current cost of a placement in one of the St Christopher's Fellowship homes, including the specialist solo-placement home is less than independent provision. This assumes full occupancy of 7 beds.

4. Provision for children on the edge of care

Central Bedfordshire Council's aim is to support families to care for their own children wherever possible and where this is consistent with their welfare. This is what the majority of families want and will achieve the best for most children.

Where children are determined to be in need or in need of protection a range of support may be identified as needed during assessment to assist with meeting the child's needs or to prevent them from becoming looked after. In Central Bedfordshire requests for support or resources are presented to the professionals making up the Allocation Panel (CBAP), Children with Disabilities Allocation Panel (CDAP) or Joint Agency Panel (JAP) as appropriate. Support or resources may include:

- Services or payments to family members under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to enable them to care for child who otherwise does not need to be looked after by the council
- Childminding or nursery provision
- Services from the Family Intervention Support Service (FISS)
- Crisis or intensive support to assist parents – also known as High Level Family Support Services
- Short breaks or respite breaks for children and their families
- Signposting to community provided services or targeted early intervention services

The Family Group Meeting service provides assistance in facilitating family meetings where support for the family and arrangements to prevent a child becoming looked after can be agreed from within the family network. Similarly Family Group Meetings can be instrumental in supporting a plan for a looked after child to return to their family – either through identifying family support for the parents or by identifying family members who may be able to care for the child.

5. Adoption and Permanence

The Central Bedfordshire Council adoption service has a recruitment strategy which identifies the number of adopters needed in the next 12 months to enable sufficient placements for children with a plan for adoption. It is anticipated that 30 new adoptive households will be needed in 2012-13 to meet the needs of children in Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council.

The in-house fostering service seeks to recruit foster carers who can offer permanent or long-term placements, and in respect of some children has advertised for carers for specific children. The recruitment target for 2012-13 is 50 new households to enable a net increase of carers and range of placements available.

6. Principles of good placements

Where children become looked after a placement within their family or friends network will be sought as a priority where this is consistent with their welfare. As a looked after arrangement, the carer will be assessed and supported as a foster carer.

Where a placement within the child's family or friends network is not available an in-house fostering placement will be sought. Unless it is not safe to do so it is expected that such a placement will be close enough to the child's community to enable them to remain at their school and involved in their networks. It is usual that a child will be placed with siblings wherever possible unless it has been assessed that this is not appropriate.

Where an in-house placement is not available a foster placement from an independent fostering agency will be sought. A placement closest to the child's community will be sought unless this is not consistent with their safety or welfare.

Where the needs of a young person cannot be met within a family environment a residential placement will be considered, with placement within the St Christopher's homes being considered first. Children aged under 12 will not usually be placed in residential homes unless it is clearly demonstrated that this is consistent with their welfare and the only way of meeting their needs.

Any placements will only be made in provision which has been assessed as good or outstanding by Ofsted or the appropriate regulatory body. If a home loses this rating alternative placements will be considered .

Where a highly specialist therapeutic placement or placement in secure provision is assessed as required, this will only be agreed after agreement from the appropriate Joint Agency Panel or Secure Accommodation Panel (and subsequent Court agreement.)

Where children and young people are not able to return to those with parental responsibility planning will take place in a timely way to enable them to move on to permanent families who can offer them legal and emotional security. For younger children the placement of choice will be adoption. For older children who retain significant ties to their birth family, long-term or permanent fostering may be more appropriate if Special Guardianship is not suitable.

7. Assessing Demand

It is not anticipated that increases in national population or local population based on estimates of new local housing provision will make any significant statistical changes to the looked after population in Central Bedfordshire.

Despite recent significant rises, the LAC population rate per 10 000 in Central Bedfordshire Council is lower than the statistical neighbour and national rates. During 2011-12 there was an increase in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans from 166 in April 2011 to 225 at 31 March 2012. Whilst these children are not looked after, this data can give some indication of looked after numbers in the future, particularly if child protection plans do not effect significant change in families, and legal action has to be taken to remove children from home. On that basis it is estimated that the numbers of looked after children will continue to rise by 20% over the two years to March 2014.

It should be noted that other factors can have influence on LAC population, such as high media profile cases, judgements in case law and national policy change

Some expansion of the overall placement provision is needed alongside remodelling in types of placements will be required to meet need?

Our current LAC population data and placement provision tells us that:

- Children under 4 and those aged 10-14 years are over represented in the LAC population.
- Non-white children are slightly over represented compared to the local population
- We have improved at placing children closer to home but a slightly higher number of children than the England average are placed more than 20 miles away
- In-house fostering provision has not been able to keep pace with the increase in numbers of looked after children, and there has been an increase in the number and proportion of IFA placements
- We need to actively monitor long and short-term placement stability to ensure that children benefit from having stable placements, or from moving quickly to permanent placements.
- The proportion of children placed in foster care and residential care is similar to England averages, but needs to be monitored to ensure as many children as possible benefit from family placements where this meets their needs

Gaps in current provision are:

- The overall number and choice of in-house fostering placements
- Specialist in-house foster placements for teenagers who have complex needs
- Sufficient in-house foster placements for sibling groups and children with disabilities of all ages
- Provision in the local area for young people with complex needs – those needing therapeutic residential placements or who have experienced multiple placements
- A full range of local provision for 16 and 17 year olds, particularly hostel accommodation and emergency/homeless accommodation.

8. Planning for Change

Key areas for development in 2011- 13 are outlined below with a detailed action plan outlined at Appendix One.

Independent Fostering Agency Framework Agreement

During 2010-11 Central Bedfordshire Council joined in partnership with Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council to develop a Framework Agreement for the provision of independent fostering agency placements. It was recognised by the partners that a more systematic and holistic approach was required to provide a consistent quality assurance framework, reduce negotiation times, better understand and review pricing structures of placements.

The partnership has tendered a framework agreement with 19 independent fostering agencies. The contract commenced on 1 November 2011 and improvements in value for money have already been seen. Quality of provision is being assessed during Autumn 2012 and overall evaluation of the findings of quality audits will be considered in Spring 2013.

Residential Provision

The Service Level Agreement **hosted by BBC** with St Christopher's Fellowship will continue until 2014. Plans to expand the provision offered by one home by two beds have been implemented and should be completed by Autumn 2012. The additional beds will be allocated one each to Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council and as well as increasing available beds will serve to reduce the unit costs of this provision.

In house fostering provision

The recruitment strategy for fostering identifies how in-house capacity will be maximised. This includes a revised recruitment target for 2012-13 with particular emphasis on attracting carers who can provide for sibling groups, older children and permanent placements.

Recruitment will continue to ensure the Youth Care scheme can offer the full 14 placements. A costed proposal to expand the scheme was put on hold during 2012 while ongoing discussions about the shared service were held. This will be revisited when a decision about the continuation of the shared fostering and adoption service is made.

Semi independent and independent services

Work has been started with Housing, Commissioning colleagues and local providers in order to widen the housing and support options in the Central Bedfordshire area for 16 and 17 year olds.

Children with disabilities services

No major changes are planned in respect of placements for disabled looked after children. However, continued expansion of in-house fostering provision is ongoing in order to attract new carers who can meet the needs of disabled children.

Children from Black and Minority Ethnic groups

Central Bedfordshire Children's Services staff will continue to explore the reasons why the non-white LAC population is slightly higher than that of the general population to ensure that the specific needs of BME communities are met and that children do not become looked after as the result of unconscious stereotyping, or lack of culturally appropriate support to families or communities. They will seek to ensure that all placement provision can meet the heritage, identity and cultural needs of children and will seek to increase the diversity of foster carers and providers.

Appendix One

Placement Strategy Action Plan						
	Identified Need	Action	Target Date	Lead Officer	Desired Outcomes	Progress at 31 March 2012
1.	Improve cost framework and quality of Independent Fostering Agency Provision	Implement and monitor Framework Agreement for new IFA placements	1/11/11- implementation 1/11/12 – review begins	Head of Children's Services Commissioning Head of Adoption and Fostering	Reduce costs on IFA budget Implement quality framework for IFA provision Ensure IFA provision can meet needs of CBC children	Framework agreement implemented Cost savings for existing placements realised Ongoing work with IFA providers to expand placement availability
2.	Review current provision of residential care, particularly placements outside of the St Christopher's Fellowship contract	Undertake further analysis of the need for local provision for children with complex needs and a commissioning model that could support identified need	31/12/11	Head of Children's Services Commissioning Head of Safeguarding and Children in Care	Identify whether commissioning activity is required to secure local provision at best value	Decision taken that current spot purchase practice provides best flexibility and value for money
		Work with St Christopher's to realise the additional two beds	31/3/12	Head of Children's Services Commissioning Head of Safeguarding and Children in Care	Increase local residential provision	Complete

		Review St Christopher's contract to ensure it remains fit for purpose and to inform planning for when the contract ends	30/9/12	Head of Children's Services Commissioning	Ensure future provision meets the need of CBC children	Ongoing
3.	Increase number and availability of in-house fostering placements	Recruit 40 new fostering households in 2011-12 and achieve net increase in fostering placements available	31/3/12	Head of Adoption and Fostering	Increase availability and choice of foster placements Ensure foster placements can meet need	41 new household approved 2011-12. Target set for 2012-13 of 50 new households
		Review existing foster carers' approval to ensure maximum flexibility and capacity	31/3/12	Head of Adoption and Fostering	Increase foster care placements and minimise placement moves	Completed with net increase in available placements
		Recruit to Youth Care Scheme to maximise placements	31/12/11	Head of Adoption and Fostering	Increase available placement to reduce number of placements in IFA or residential provision	Recruitment complete, scheme running at full capacity
		Complete costed proposal to expand the Youth Care Scheme	31/12/11	Head of Adoption and Fostering	Invest to save – increase youth care placement to reduce IFA or residential placement demand.	Ongoing – will be addressed as part of the decision about the Shared Service arrangement

4.	Develop wider mix of provision for 16 and 17 years olds	Undertake liaison and work with housing on establishing homeless and hostel provision	31/3/12	Head of Looked After Children, Leaving Care and Asylum	Increase choice of placement for 16 and 17 years olds	Ongoing – task group established
		Undertake analysis of the benefits of a different commissioning model for semi-independent provision	30/9/12	Head of Children’s Services Commissioning Head of Looked After Children, Leaving Care and Asylum	Consider Identify whether commissioning activity is required to secure local provision at best value	Ongoing – task group established and plans for in-house provision underway
		Continue the expansion of the supported lodgings scheme	31/3/12	Head of Looked After Children, Leaving Care and Asylum	Increase choice of placement for 16 and 17 years olds	3 crash-pad beds added
5.	Consider outcomes of Children with Disabilities review	Implement the action plan arising from the review	31/1/12	Head of Children with Disabilities and Child Health	Ensure appropriate mix and choice of placement to meet need and reduce costs where possible. Increase numbers of foster placements available in-house for disabled children	Purpose of Maythorn reconfigured to include long-stay and short break provision Increase in family link placement achieved, further recruitment for full time placements ongoing