

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 22 April 2013

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs M A G Versallion (Chairman), A L Dodwell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A Barker, D Bowater, Mrs S A Goodchild, N J Sheppard and B Wells

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Ogley – Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Apologies for Absence: Cllr N B Costin

Officers in Attendance:	Mr P Harpin	– School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Head
	Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
	Ms F Mackirdy	– Head of Adoption and Fostering
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Miss H Redding	– Head of Learning and School Support
	Ms M Short	– Participation Officer

CPP/13/1 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 4 February 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/13/2 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

There were no announcements or matters of communication from the Chairman.

CPP/13/3 **Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

CPP/13/4 **Foster Carers' Charter & Care Leavers' Charter**

The Panel considered a report by the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations which sought comments on the proposed Foster Carers' Charter and Care Leavers' Charter. Both Charters had been jointly produced

by Government, fostering organisations, charities and children and young people. However, it was noted that, whilst it had been possible to amend the Foster Carers' Charter by adding local commitments, a request to similarly tailor the Care Leavers' Charter was still under consideration by the Department for Education.

Copies of both draft Charters were attached to the report at Appendices A and B respectively.

In response to a query raised by the Chairman regarding the publicising of the Foster Carers' Charter the Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that consideration was being given to launching the document at the Foster Carer Awards ceremony.

References were made by Members to typographical errors in the document and a number of amendments to the text were suggested. In response the Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that she would correct the typographical errors and would raise the proposed amendments with the Chairman of the Foster Carers' Association at their forthcoming meeting.

A Member commented that measures should be taken to ensure that the terms of the Charter were being adhered to and she advocated some form of monitoring and feedback.

Turning to the Charter for Care Leavers a Member queried the use of the term 'punish' in the section on the support offered to care leavers. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations explained that the document was produced by the Department for Education and it was currently uncertain whether the Council was able to amend it. He suggested that, to reflect a more local approach, consideration could be given to attaching an addendum. The Chairman welcomed the suggestion as an addendum would ensure that care leavers in Central Bedfordshire were fully aware of the Council's position of support for them. The Participation Officer added that the Charter had been considered by the Children in Care Council and it had indicated that it would want the document to be easy to read for care leavers.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Foster Carer's Charter be approved and adopted subject to the following:**
 - a) that the date of the Foster Carers' Charter be amended to reflect the revision date and include the month and year of the launch on the front of the document;**
 - b) that the typographical errors identified by Members be corrected;**
 - c) that the suggested amendments to the document first be considered at the forthcoming meeting with the Chairman of the Foster Carers' Association before incorporation in the document to ensure there was no objection;**

- d) **that comments on the implementation of the Charter be gathered by the use of surveys, one-to-one interviews and annual foster carer reviews and then collated and submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel in 12 months time;**
- 2 **that the Care Leavers' Charter be approved and adopted subject to resolution 3 below;**
- 3 **that should the Department for Education refuse to allow the amendment of the Charter for Care Leavers in order to clarify issues on a local basis Director Children's Services Operations investigate the possibility of attaching an addendum to the document setting out this information instead.**

CPP/13/5 **Looked After Children Placement Strategy**

The Panel considered a report by the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations on the Council's refreshed Placement Strategy for Looked After Children. The Strategy related to both current provision and the future need for placements. A copy of the refreshed Placement Strategy was attached at Appendix A to the report.

Members noted that, arising from the Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and Looked After Children in February 2012, it had been part of the subsequent action plan to refresh the Placement Strategy to ensure that there were robust plans to address the Ofsted requirement regarding accommodation for 16-18 year olds. Members further noted that, following a request by the Panel at its meeting on 5 March 2012, the alignment of dates and data within the Strategy had been addressed as part of the refreshment process.

The Panel then gave full consideration to the refreshed Placement Strategy during which a number of queries, comments and suggested amendments were raised.

RESOLVED

that the refreshed Looked After Children Placement Strategy be approved and adopted subject to the following amendments:

- a) **that the date given for the refreshment of the document on the cover of the document (page 1) be changed to reflect the fact that consultation of the proposed changes had not finished until 15 April 2013;**
- b) **that in the sentence immediately following the chart in the section headed "Age and Gender" (page 3) the reference to children aged 5-14 should be changed to children aged 5-9;**
- c) **that at the end of the first paragraph of the section headed "Residential Provision" (page 5) the month in 2014 that the Service**

Level Agreement with St Christopher's Fellowship expires should be inserted;

- d) **that at the end of the first sentence in the paragraph headed "Residential Provision" (page 12) the month in 2014 that the Service Level Agreement with St Christopher's Fellowship expires should be inserted.**

CPP/13/6 **Adoption Scorecard April-December 2012**

The Panel considered a report by the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations which provided the internally produced Adoption Scorecard for the period April-December 2012 for Members' comment. The meeting noted that the Scorecard data, which was collected and sent to the Department for Education on a quarterly basis, was also used within the Council to track progress throughout the year and undertake comparisons with statistical neighbours. The Government used the data to produce annual Scorecards for each local authority.

The Head of Adoption and Fostering highlighted various points of interest for Members' attention. She referred to the number of children placed with adoptive families and stated that the figure was below that of the Council's statistical neighbours and England as a whole. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations also commented on this issue and the need to ensure that the number of adoptions increased. Nonetheless, a Member referred to the very positive results overall contained within the Scorecard in relation to the comparison with statistical neighbours and the Panel expressed its thanks to the officers for their achievement.

In response to a reference to the delay experienced in receiving court authority to place a child the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that, just as local authorities faced government pressure to speed up care proceedings, pressure existed on family courts to do likewise by ensuring that all unnecessary delays were removed or resolved as quickly as possible. As an example she referred to courts experiencing delays in the past as a result of requests for expert assessments to be carried out. However, the Government now only expected such assessments to be commissioned under special, specific circumstances. The courts were expected to complete care proceedings within 26 weeks unless they could justify why this figure could not be achieved. The Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that, to help meet the target, representatives of the Council regularly met with the local Judiciary and court staff to discuss issues including the timetabling of court proceedings.

NOTED

the Central Bedfordshire Adoption Scorecard for April-December 2012.

CPP/13/7 **Allowances for Foster Carers**

The Panel considered a report by the Acting Assistant Director Children's Services Operations which sought Members' comments on a proposed cost of living increase of 2% to the allowances paid to foster carers.

Members indicated their support for the proposed increase though it was suggested that it be made clear when the increase would be effective from.

RESOLVED

that, with effect from 1 April 2013, a cost of living increase of 2% be made to the allowances paid to foster carers.

CPP/13/8 **Annual Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children**

The Panel considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which provided information on the role of the Virtual School for Looked After Children and the outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2011/12. The report also identified steps taken since September 2012 to develop the role of the Virtual School to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people.

The School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Lead provided a full introduction to the report following which Members' comments were sought.

Discussion took place on the use of 'Welfare Call', an organisation used by many virtual schools to gather attendance and progress (pupil achievement) data for Looked After Children. The School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Lead explained the advantages in adopting the system including its confidentiality and absence of slippage and stated that the availability and analysis of data from this source would enable an interim report to be submitted to the Panel in the Autumn in addition to the Annual Report in early Spring. The Head of Learning and School Support stated that whilst attendance data had been available before it had been subject to delay. However, because the data was now collected on a daily basis it gave rise to immediate action where necessary.

In connection with the Pupil Premium, which was paid to schools for all Looked After Children who had been in care for six months or more, a Member referred to carers' interest in how the Premium was spent and stressed that school governors needed to seek further information on this issue with their schools. She commented that governors needed to ask the right questions and queried whether training was required. In response the School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Lead stated that suitable training had been given to governors and they should be confident to ask questions relating to Pupil Premium use. The Head of Learning and School Support added that the question of Pupil Premium use by a school would be raised during an Ofsted inspection.

The Vice-Chairman sought clarification on the support given to carers whose children were excluded. In response the School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Lead stated that the emphasis would be on reintegration and support would be offered to carers in this position. In response to a further query from the Member regarding the assistance provided to maintain the learning process the School Intervention Manager and Virtual School Lead explained that if the child was excluded for a lengthy period then a designated teacher would allocated to provide academic work.

RESOLVED

that an interim report on standards achieved at the Virtual School be submitted to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel in October/November each year and the Panel continue to receive the annual report to a meeting in April/March each year.

NOTED

the Annual Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children for the academic year 2011/12.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.39 p.m.)

Chairman.....

Dated.....