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**Meeting:** Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 3 September 2013  
**Subject:** Annual Report for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service.  
**Report of:** Cllr Mark Versallion, Executive Member for Children's Services  
**Summary:** The report outlines the Statutory framework regarding Annual Reports and summarises key points contained within the reports.

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**Advising Officer:** Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services  
**Contact Officer:** Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** All  
**Function of:** Council

#### **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

**Council Priorities:**

Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.

Adoption and Fostering are key statutory services to Looked After Children.

**Financial:**

1. Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services has an annual budget of £6.602 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 would be a breach of National Minimum Standard.

Child Protection Risks: Failure to assess risk may lead to unfavourable outcomes.

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

4. There are no staffing issues.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

5. Adoption and Fostering affects all sectors of communities.

**Community Safety:**

6. There are no community safety issues.

**Sustainability:**

7. There are no sustainability issues.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Committee comments on the statutory reports.**

**Background**

8. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Adoption and Fostering Services to report regularly on the operation of the services. The service specific regulations outline the frequency of reporting and to whom the reports must be submitted.
9. 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 Council

## **Adoption Services**

10. The Adoption Service is required to report at six-monthly intervals. In Central Bedfordshire Council, this will be to the Scrutiny Committee. An Annual Report will be produced by the end of June each year covering the preceding April to March period. At the appendices is that report. In addition, a six-monthly briefing update will be produced by the end of October each year and presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
11. In 2012–13, there was again an increase in the number of children whose cases were presented for a recommendation as to whether adoption should be the plan for the child. This was for 41 children, an increase from 31 in the previous 12 months. 22 households were approved as adopters, an increase from 14 in 2011/12 and matches of 21 children to adopters were made.
12. 6 Adoption Orders were granted in respect of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council, with a further 12 being granted Special Guardianship. The number of adoptions was an increase from 4 the previous year, and the overall number of children where a permanent legal option was secured via adoption or Special Guardianship increased from 15 in 2011/12 to 18 in 2012/13.
13. As of the 31 March 2013, 32 adopted children and their families were in receipt of support. In addition contact plans were being made on behalf of 190 children. Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family, which usually involves supporting the periodic exchange of letters or information between adoptive and birth families.
14. There were 37 referrals from adult adoptees and their birth relatives, a 58% drop from the previous 12 month period. Post Adoption support in the form of tracing birth records, counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre- and post-reunion support was provided.
15. As part of the continued Government reform of adoption services, a range of measures is planned for implementation 2012 to 2015 to increase the number and speed of adoptions. Measures include addressing delay in Court Proceedings, the publishing of an adoption 'scorecard' on performance for each Council, changes to adopter recruitment processes and the setting of challenging targets to reduce delay. The Adoption Service is in a strong position to meet the requirements of the action plan, having robust performance monitoring and good practices in place in regard to planning for adoption.

## **Fostering Services**

16. A report to Members is required at three monthly intervals. This is achieved by production of an Annual Report to this Committee in September each year covering the April to March period. In addition, three-monthly updates will be presented at the end of July, October and January each year to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
17. 49 new fostering households were approved during 2012-13, an increase on 41 the previous year.

18. 173 children were placed in full-time in-house foster placements at the end of March 2013, of whom 92 were looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council. This is an increase from the 162 who were in placement in April 2012. Across both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council, there have been 476 referrals for new or a change of placement, a substantial increase from 376 in 2011/12. 127 children were placed with carers approved by Central Bedfordshire Council, 126 placed in Independent Fostering Agencies, 13 placed in residential units and the remainder did not become looked after by either Council and alternative arrangements were made to support those children and their families.
19. The number of enquiries from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers remained at similar levels to 2011/12. All enquiries received prompt information and a visit from a social worker. 103 households made formal application to become a foster carers either from a follow up enquiry as a member of the public or because they wished to care for a looked after child known to them as a family member or friend. This was an increase from the 84 applications received in 2011/12.
20. Over the course of the year 70 training activities were provided for foster carers on 38 topics. 550 delegates attended. A range of support is provided to foster carers, including regular supervision from a social worker, support groups, peer mentoring and out-of-hours telephone support.

### **Shared Service Arrangement**

21. In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement. This decision was subsequently reviewed in detail in Autumn 2012 with the decision being made for the disaggregation of the service to be effective from 1 January 2014. A project board comprising staff in both councils has been established to plan the arrangements for January 2014 and beyond. This planning process will involve consultation with key stakeholders and staff to ensure that an effective fostering service that meets the needs of children can be maintained and developed. It has been agreed by both Councils that discussions will take place during the period of disaggregation about any plans each Council may have to change the structure of fees and allowances. Early work is on going to consider if the current fees and allowances structure is fit for purpose.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Adoption Agency Annual Report  
Appendix B – Fostering Agency Annual Report  
Appendix C – Private Fostering Annual Report

**Location of papers:** Priory House, Chicksands