

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 7 October 2013
Subject: Quarter One Report on the Fostering Service – April to June 2013
Report of: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the activity in the fostering service during Quarter One, with comparison to activity in previous quarters.

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 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 £6.6 million, including costs of Independent Fostering Agency placements and provision on behalf of 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 comment on the content of the report

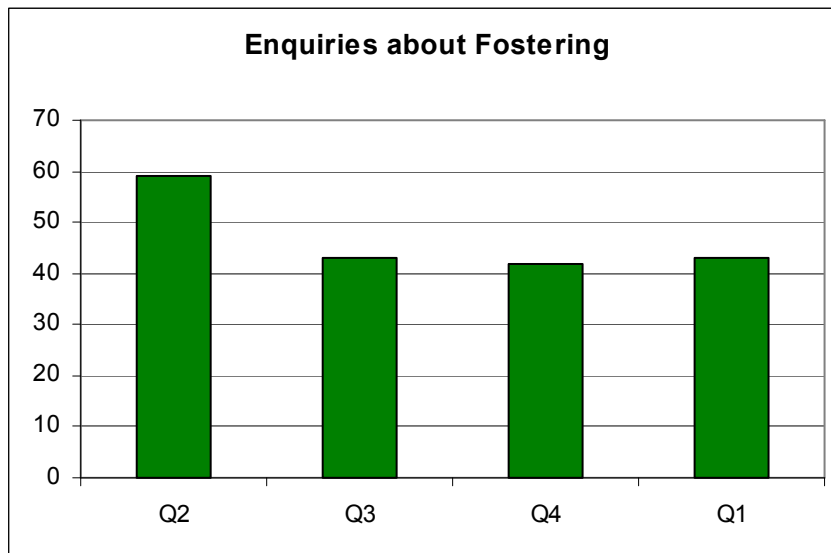
Background

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 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 June 2013. Comparative data with previous quarters is summarised in the tables in Appendix One

Recruitment of Foster carers

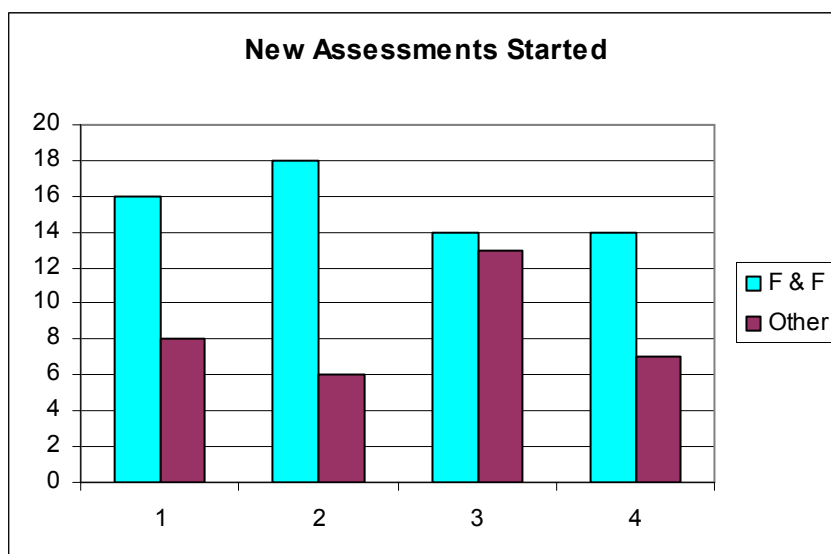
12. During the period 43 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers. This is below the comparable quarter for last year but similar to figures for the last two quarters.

Chart one shows the total number of enquiries made about fostering in the last four quarters.



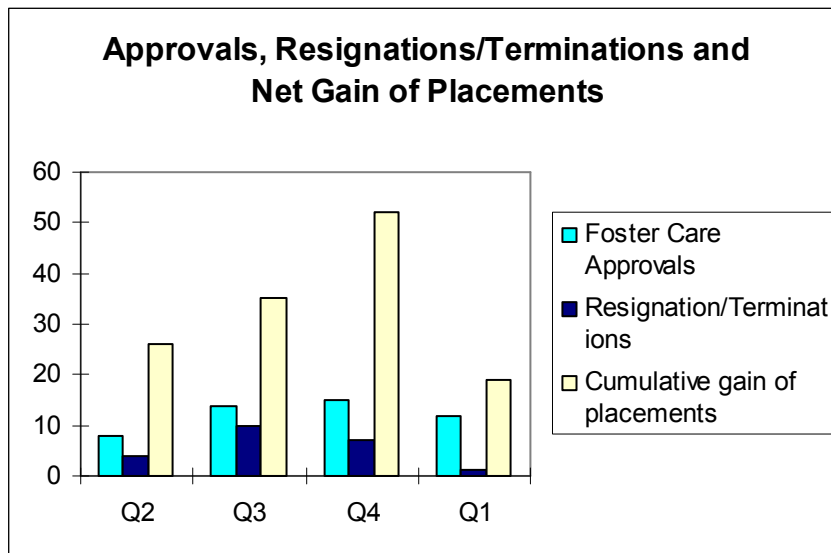
13. 21 assessments of new foster carers commenced, of which 14 were assessments of households caring for a child within their own family. This is a similar average level of activity as the last three quarters.

Chart two shows the number of foster carer assessments started in the last four quarters.



14. 12 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 19 fostering placements in Quarter One.

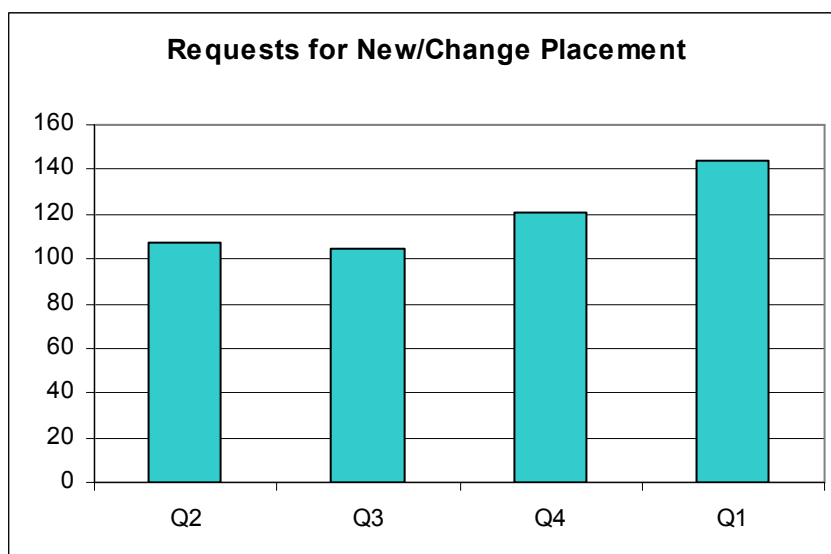
Chart three shows the total numbers of approvals, resignations/terminations and net gain of placements in the last four quarters.



Placements for Children

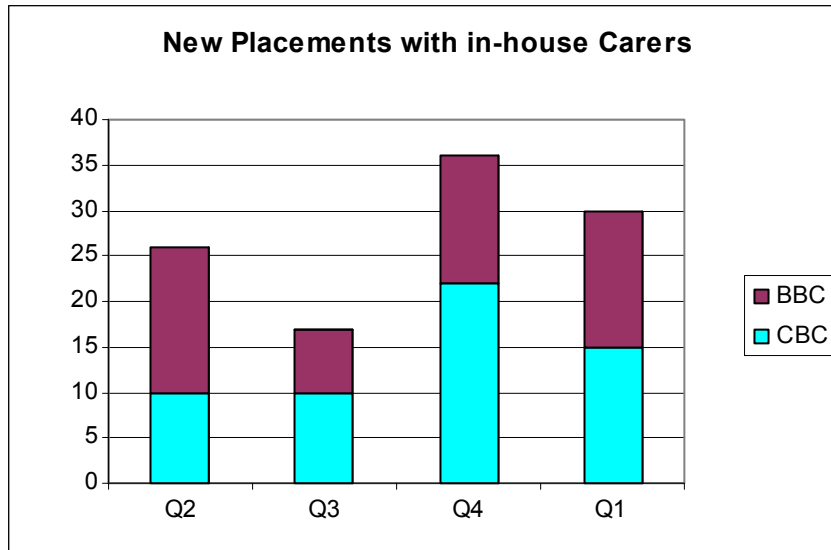
15. In these 3 months there were 144 requests for new or change of fostering placements. This is an increase and shows an upward trajectory over the last 12 months.

Chart four shows the total number of requests of both councils for new placements and a change of placement in the last four quarters.



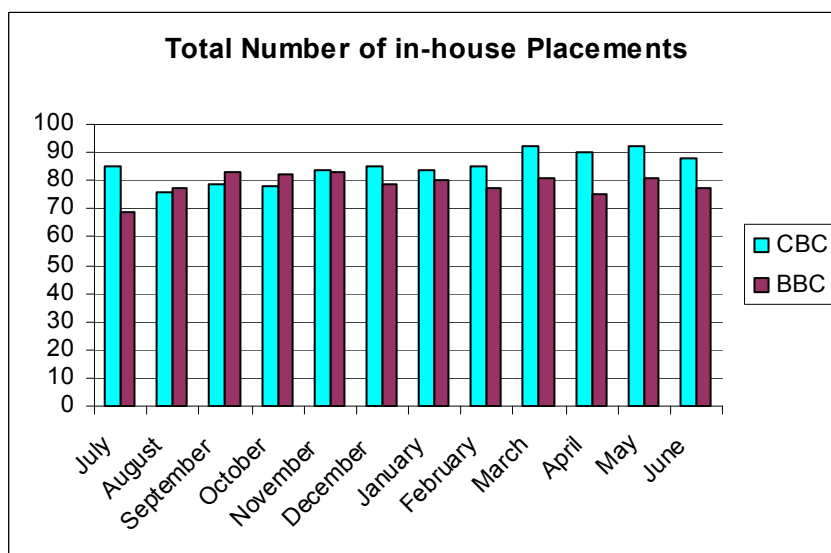
16. 30 newly looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers of whom were 15 Central Bedfordshire children. 25 CBC children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency provision when becoming looked after.

Chart five shows the proportion of new placements made in CBC and BBC in the last four quarters.



17. At 30 June 2013, there were a total of 165 children living with in-house foster carers of which 88 were Central Bedfordshire children. This number has remained relatively consistent for the last three quarters.

Chart six shows the allocation of in house placements to Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and Bedford Borough Council (BBC) during the last four quarters.



18. The absolute number of looked after children from Central Bedfordshire living in Independent Fostering Agency provision was 110 at 30 June 2013, an increase of 23 since the last quarter and reflective of the significant increase in the number of looked after children over the period.

Training for Foster Carers

19. 11 training courses took place involving 111 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as short courses and workshops for approved foster carers.

Key Events

20. Fostering recruitment campaigns took place in this period to tie in with the Fostering Network's national Foster Care Fortnight. Adverts and editorials were placed in local newspapers, articles were published in both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils' public magazines and via social networking forums on Twitter and Facebook. Two recruitment drop-in events were held, one in each council area. A major leaflet distribution exercise took place with leaflets placed in children's centres, village halls, libraries, church halls and sports centres.
21. The annual foster care social event and awards ceremony took place on 24 June 2013 in the Council Chamber at Priory House, Chicksands. Eleven fostering households were eligible for long service awards, with two of these awards for 20 and 25 years service.

Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement

22. Work has progressed this quarter towards the ending of the shared service arrangement with Bedford Borough Council. The disaggregation of the service is being overseen by a project board comprising lead officers from both councils with 8 work streams. Tasks and key milestones in the project have all been met within target and no significant risks in respect of meeting future milestones have been identified.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None