

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 22 July 2013

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs:

M A G Versallion (Chairman)

A L Dodwell (Vice-Chairman)

Mrs A Barker

D Bowater

N B Costin

Mrs S A Goodchild

N J Sheppard

Officers (voting)

Mrs E Grant – Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children’s Services

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs H Philips

Apologies for Absence: Mrs J Crawford
 Mrs J Ogle

Members in Attendance: Cllr P N Aldis

Officers in Attendance Mrs F Mckirdy – Head of Adoption and Fostering
 Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer

Others in Attendance: Mrs C York – Designated Nurse for Looked After Children (NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group)

CPP/13/16 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 3 June 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

Minute CPP/13/15 – Development of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)

Second paragraph – delete ‘and officers’.

CPP/13/17 Members' Interests

Councillor Costin declared a general interest as the Chairman of Barnfield College.

Councillor Bowater declared an interest with regard to item 6 (Central Bedfordshire Council Looked After Children Annual Report). The reason given for the declaration was that Councillor Bowater served as a Partnership Governor (Local Authority) on the Council of Governors for the South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (SEPT).

CPP/13/18 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman reported that Pete Dudley (Assistant Director Children's Services (Learning & Strategic Commissioning)) would be leaving the Council on 1 October 2013 to join the London Borough of Camden. The Chairman also reported that Fiona Mackirdy (Head of Adoption and Fostering) would be leaving the Council. On behalf of the Panel the Chairman expressed thanks and best wishes to both officers, with especial reference to Ms Mackirdy in view of her outstanding work and her commitment and passion for her job.

Following a Member's comment regarding the way in which Members would receive notice of future personnel changes the Chairman stated that he would raise this issue with the Chairman of the Executive.

CPP/13/19 Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service

The Panel received a report which outlined the statutory framework for the submission of annual reports on the adoption and fostering services and summarised the key points contained in the Annual Adoption and Fostering Service Reports for 2012-13. Copies of the Service Reports were attached as appendices to the report. The meeting was aware that the Adoption and Fostering Service was currently a shared service for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils and that the reports contained information in respect of both Councils.

The Head of Adoption and Fostering introduced the Adoption Agency and Fostering Agency Annual Reports. She highlighted a number of issues for consideration including, in the former, the Council's provision of post adoption support in the form of tracing birth records, associated advice and pre and post reunion support. The Head of Adoption and Fostering suggested that this service could be ended given the growing use of social media and websites such as ancestry.com by individuals to trace their heritage and find birth relatives. Following comment by a Member the Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that despite the provision of training and assistance by the Council on this issue, and the availability of good resources to help individuals prepare for such situations, the impact and use of social media had been powerful. As such she did not think a change to this outcome was likely and the need would be reviewed.

A Member sought clarification on the increase in the number of children being put forward for adoption and fostering. In response the Head of Adoption and Fostering explained that the overwhelming basis for a child being removed from his/her parents was because the Council had concerns that the child would suffer significant harm if he or she remained under parental care. She stressed that the Council attempted to intervene as early as was possible and work with families. She added that there were a small number of cases where it was not possible for the child to return to its immediate family. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services stated that the rate of increase was comparable with that of other local authorities. She added that there was a related budgetary pressure but that the Council was having to cope with this as well as other authorities were.

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services referred to the positive value of early intervention work starting at a pre-natal point in families though she also stressed that whilst good parenting skills were of obvious importance to a child's development it was also necessary to recognise the negative impact on family wellbeing by such factors as unemployment and homelessness.

Further full discussion then took place as Members sought additional information and clarification with regard issues contained in the reports.

NOTED

the content of the Annual Adoption and Fostering Service Reports for 2012/13.

CPP/13/20

Central Bedfordshire Council Looked After Children Annual Report

Members considered the Annual Report from the NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group on meeting the health needs of those Looked After Children registered with Central Bedfordshire Council. The report covered the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 but also outlined the current work being undertaken and the challenges facing the service.

In introducing the report the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children reminded Members of the joint inspection of safeguarding and Looked After Children services by Ofsted and the CQC in February 2012 and the finding of 'inadequate' for 'Being Healthy for Looked After Children'. The Designated Nurse then drew Members' attention to the programme of remedial action which had been adopted in response. The meeting noted from the report that the focus for 2012/13 had therefore been to deliver improved access to the service and improved timeliness of health assessments.

In response to a query the Designated Nurse stated that despite an improvement in the timeliness of referrals and the completion of health assessments difficulties remained and, in the first quarter, a backlog had again arisen. As a result a review had been carried out and she had been assured

that the causes had been rectified and a revised system with more resource focus would be in place by the end of the second quarter.

A query was raised regarding the differences in some of the data contained in the report made available to Members and officers and that referred to by the Designated Nurse from what was an updated version of the report. In response the Designated Nurse undertook to send a copy of the updated report to the PA for the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services for distribution as requested to Members and officers of the Panel.

Further discussion followed during which Members commented on various aspects of the report. Particular reference was made to the need to raise GP's awareness of the health needs of Looked After Children and the need to encourage greater participation by GP's in training sessions on this topic.

NOTED

the Looked After Children Annual Report for 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 by the NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

CPP/13/21 **Development of the Corporate Parenting Panel**

Members considered a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services on the outcome of the review of the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The meeting was reminded that, whilst the joint Ofsted and CQC inspection in February 2012 had not revealed any issues relating to the work of the Panel, Members had wished to ensure that local arrangements met best practice standards. As a result a mixture of desktop reviews and visits to observe the workings of other council's corporate parenting panels had taken place. Arising from this work a number of issues had been identified for further consideration including the frequency and timing of Panel meetings, the style and submission of reports and extending awareness of the Panel's function.

Full discussion took place then took place on the above matters. From the review work undertaken Members were aware that local arrangements came close to best practice but they also acknowledged that changes were required to achieve fuller and more meaningful participation by all parties.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the frequency and timing of the Corporate Parenting Panel remain unchanged;**
- 2 that informal gatherings prior to the meeting be held in either the Panel meeting room or the café one hour prior to the Panel itself in order to allow discussions with foster carers or members of the Children in Care Council accompanied by the Participation Officer;**

- 3 that members of the Children in Care Council continue to attend meetings of the Panel, accompanied by the Participation Officer;**
- 4 that, when members of the Children in Care Council are not due to attend a Panel meeting, the Participation Officer could, from time to time, make a presentation to the Panel in their absence on a relevant topic;**
- 5 that the seating at Panel meetings be arranged so that Members and officers who serve on the Panel are intermixed;**
- 6 that foster carers be advised of the contact details for ward Members and the lead Member for Children's Services;**
- 7 that invitations to the Annual Awards ceremony continue to be extended to all members of the Panel.**

RECOMMENDED

- 1 that, in recognition of the role of all officers as corporate parents, membership of the Panel be extended to include the Head of Leisure Services or their representative;**
- 2 that the Head of Housing Services or their representative be invited to attend a Panel meeting when the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing is unable to attend that meeting;**
- 3 that efforts be made to co-opt additional foster carer representatives;**
- 4 that the number of co-opted foster carer representatives expected to attend meetings of the Panel be increased to four.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.15 p.m.)