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**Meeting:** Corporate Parenting Panel  
**Date:** 02 December 2013  
**Subject:** Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service  
July to September 2013

**Report of:** Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations  
**Summary:** The report outlines the activity in the fostering service during Quarter Two, with comparison to activity in previous quarters.

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Contact Officer: Neil Wood, Interim Head of Adoption and Fostering  
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

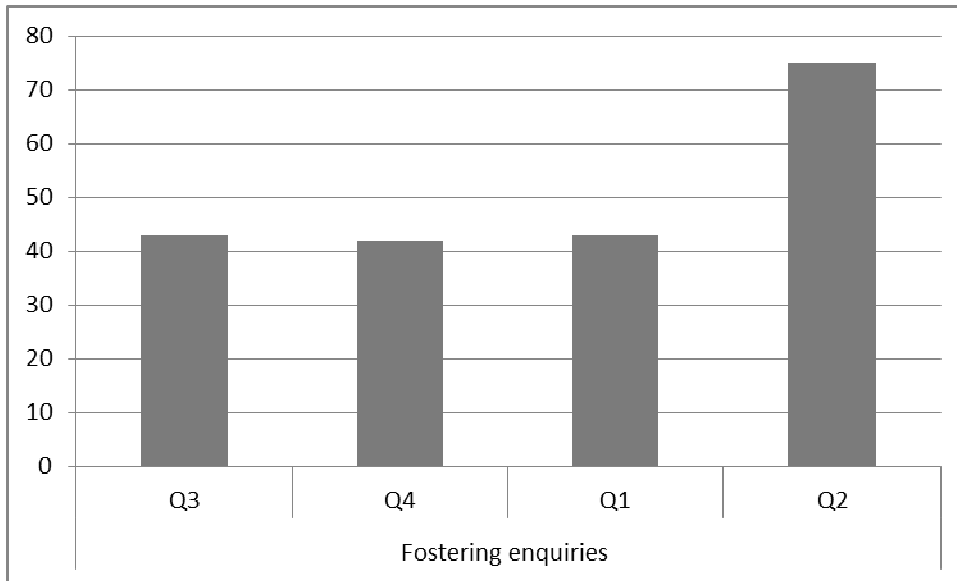
**Background**

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 July to September 2013. Comparative data with previous quarters is summarised in the tables.

**Recruitment of Foster Carers**

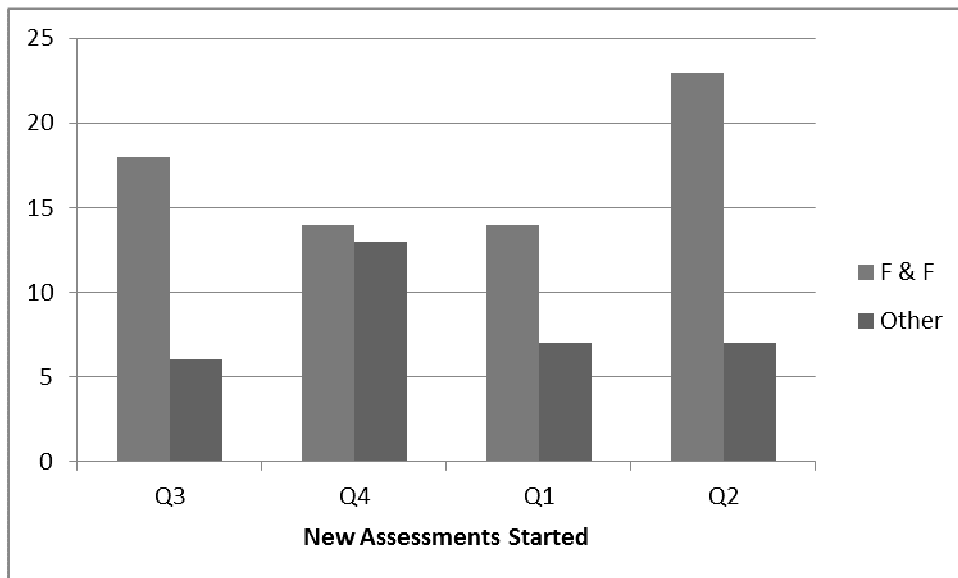
12. During the period 75 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers. This is an encouraging uplift from previous three quarters.

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



13. 30 assessments of new foster carers commenced, of which 23 were assessments of households caring for a child within their own family. This is an increase on previous three quarters.

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



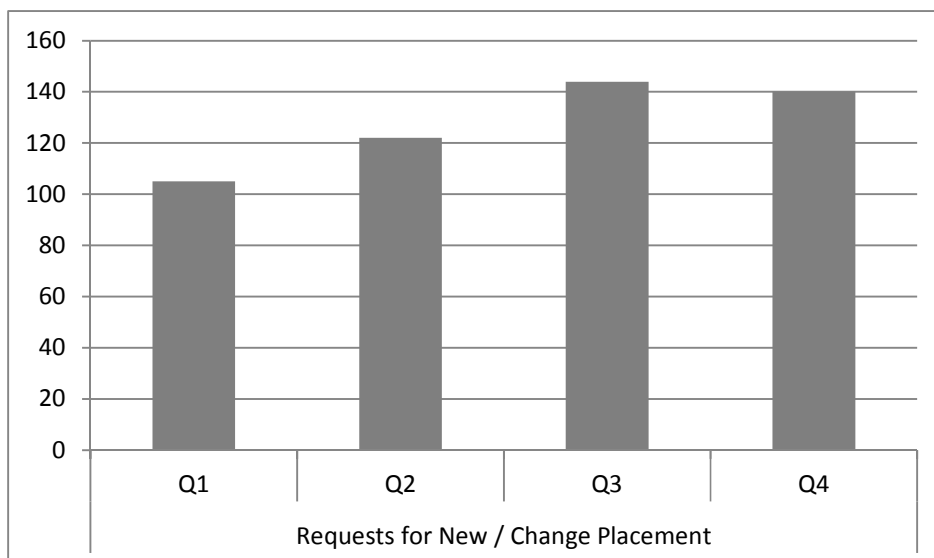
14. 13 new fostering households were approved by the Fostering and Permanence panels in Quarter Two.

15. There were 166 approved fostering households at end of Quarter two (not including 'temporary' approvals under Regulation 24 (a further 8 households). Depending on outcome of full assessment and panel recommendation, some of those may become confirmed fostering households for 'Connected Person' (new term for *Family and Friends* carers).

### Placements for Children

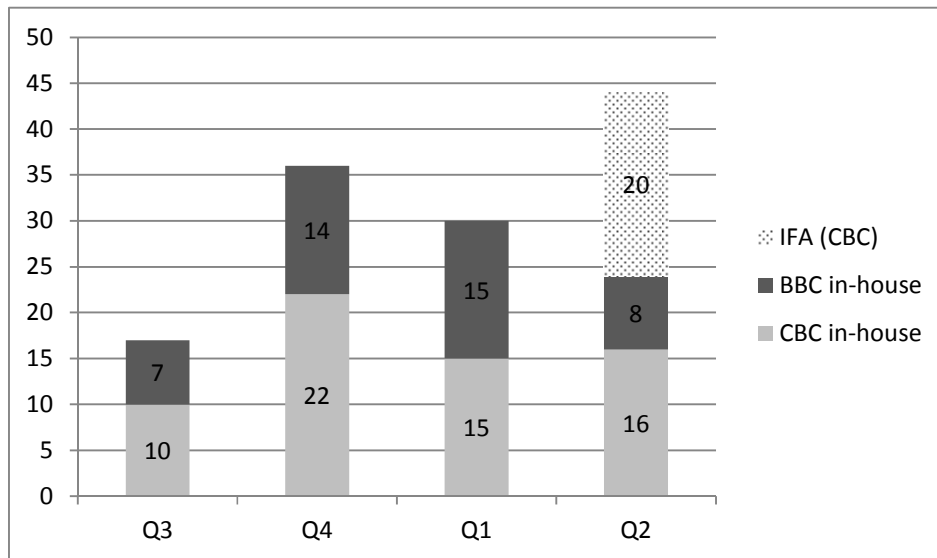
16. In these 3 months there were 140 requests for new or change of fostering placements. This is a minor decrease on previous quarter but still shows an upward trend over the last 12 months, in keeping with the rise in number of LAC.

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



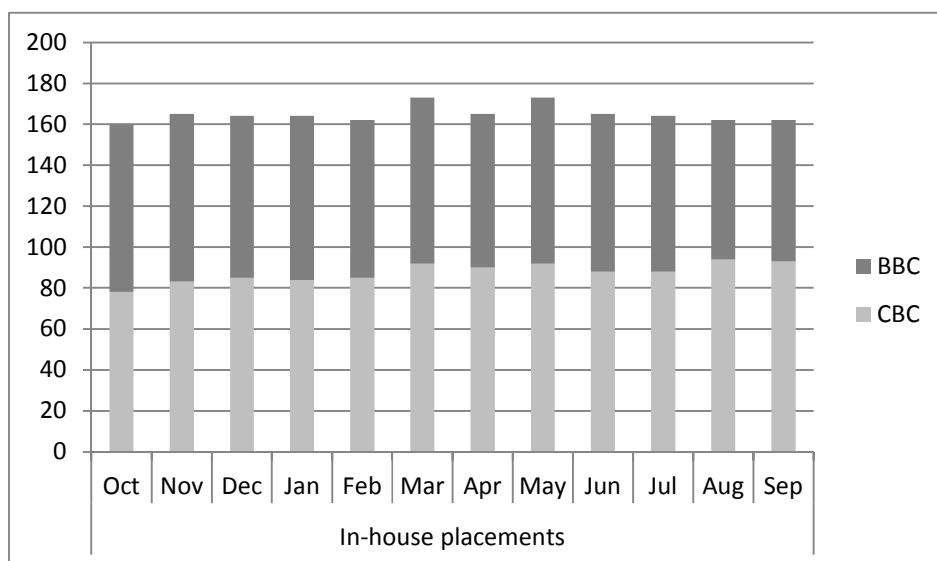
17. 24 newly looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers of whom 16 were Central Bedfordshire children. 20 CBC children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency provision when becoming looked after.

**Chart four shows the proportion of new in-house placements made in CBC and BBC in the last four quarters. New information introduced from Q2, showing number of IFA placements made by CBC.**



18. At 30 September 2013, there were a total of 162 children living with in-house foster carers of which 93 were Central Bedfordshire children and 69 Bedford Borough children. This number has remained relatively consistent for the last three quarters. Taken with the number of fostering households at 166, this represents a placement ratio of 1:1.

**Chart five shows the allocation of in house placements to Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and Bedford Borough Council (BBC) during the last twelve months, ending in Quarter 2.**



19. The absolute number of looked after children from Central Bedfordshire living in Independent Fostering Agency provision was 109 at 30 September 2013, a decrease of 1 since the last quarter.

### **Training for Foster Carers**

20. 9 training courses took place involving 69 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as short courses and workshops for approved foster carers. 85 households have achieved CWDC standard.

### **Key Events and Advertising**

- 21.
- Biggleswade Farmer's Market – tweeted photo of Jamie Oliver
  - Bedford Gourmet Market
  - Beds on Sunday (all editions) – Advert for young families
  - 'Super hero' advert in local press
    - Beds on Sunday
    - Mid-Beds Bulletin
    - Biggleswade Bulletin
  - Salvation Army Dunstable – Leaflets, Newsletter & Bookmarks
  - Posters at Bedford General Hospital
  - Website advert – Bedford Volunteer Centre
  - Dunstable Market
  - Facebook advertising campaign
  - Kings House Church – information evening

### **Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement**

22. The programme for disaggregation of the Adoption and Fostering service has progressed to plan. The prospective fostering team for each Council has worked to prepare the new arrangement. They also continue to meet jointly, to ensure business continuity up until the final disaggregation at the end of December 2013.
23. All foster carers are now aligned to one of the Councils and know who they will deal with after formal ending of the joint service arrangement. This has been established through consultation with the carers and has resulted in a balanced distribution of carers. (This was approximately a 50/50 split). Similarly, staff consultation has been successfully completed and all workers know which agency they will be working for, commencing January 2014.

24. The service is developing the detailed arrangements of preparing for separation, for example ensuring data lists are comprehensive and ready for secure electronic transfer to Bedford Borough. Foster carer payments are organised to be paid without disruption to carers. There have been trial runs of payment information transfer and this has shown systems to be robust, with excellent liaison between the relevant personnel.
25. The disaggregation of the service continues to be overseen by the project board lead officers from both councils. 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