Meeting:	**Corporate Parenting Panel**
Date:	**03 February 2014**
Subject:	**Quarter Three Report on the Fostering Service October to December 2013**
Report of:	**Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/Director Children's Services**
Summary:	The report outlines the activity in the fostering service during Quarter three, with comparison to activity in previous quarters.

Contact Officer:	Gerard Jones, Assistant Director 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 outline 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 Adoption services provided to Looked after Children affect 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.**
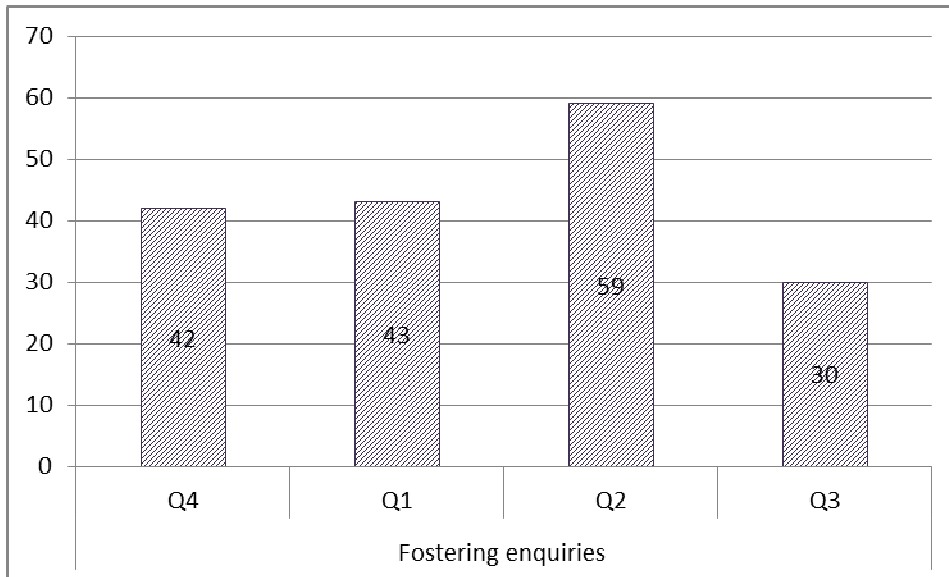

Background

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.   This is the final period for which the Adoption and Fostering service is a shared service hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). Annual reports contain information activity in respect of both Councils. This report will be provided to Bedford Borough Council. From January 2014, Central Bedfordshire Fostering Service will be a single agency, as will Bedford Borough Council (BBC).

11.   This report covers activity in the period October to December 2013. Comparative data with previous quarters is summarised in the tables.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

12.   During the period 30 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers. This is a fluctuating trend, with some apparent seasonal influence. This is a low number of enquiries and previous Q3 for December 2012 showed 43 enquiries, by direct comparison. The service will need to further develop marketing and recruitment activity so that this can be built upon to increase the number and range of foster carers.
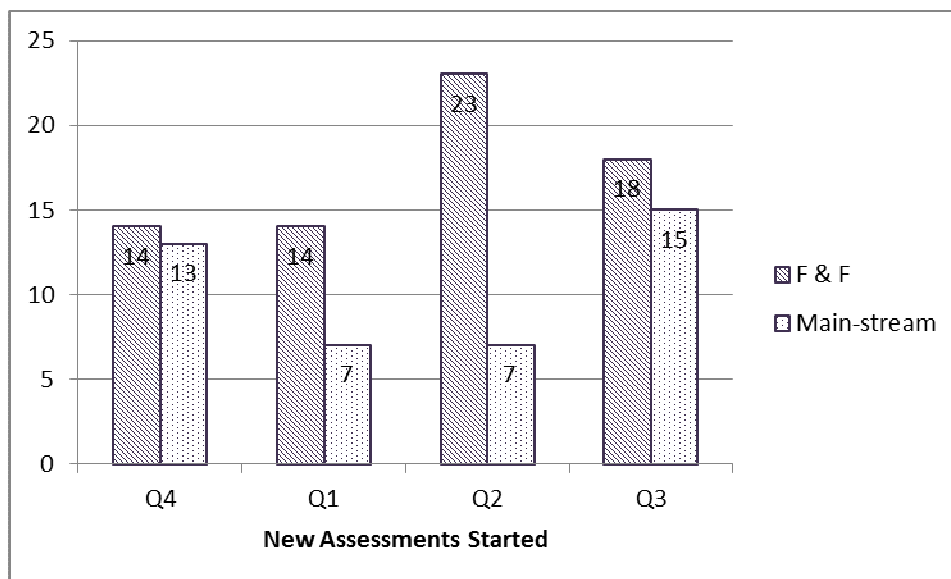
In the year to date (Q1-3) there were 132 enquiries and 13 newly approved foster carers (excluding Family & Friends carers). This represents a conversion rate of 10%. The national average is 11%.

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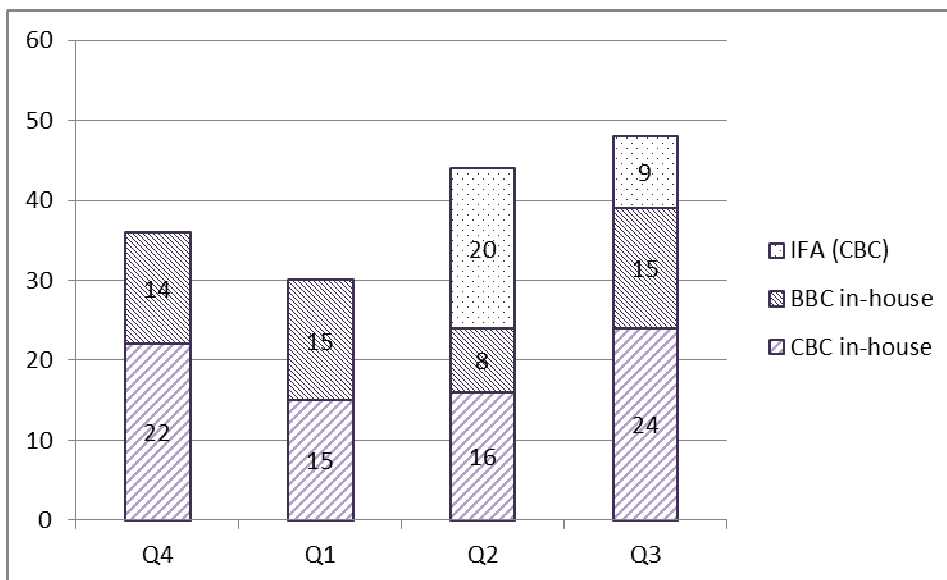

13. In Quarter three, 33 assessments of new foster carers commenced of which 18 were assessments of households caring for a child within their own family. This is an increase on previous three quarters.

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

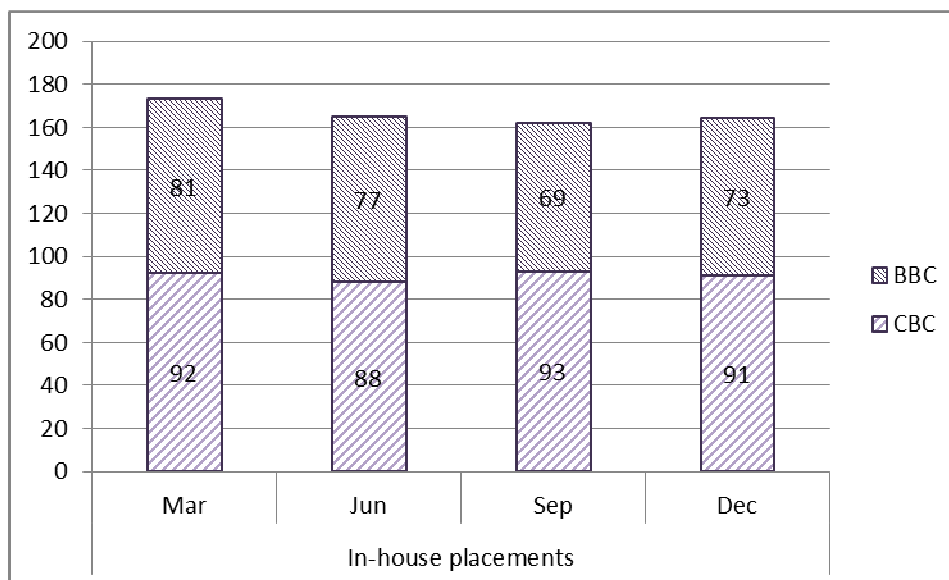Report title Quarter three fostering report v1

14. 6 new fostering households were approved by the Fostering and Permanence panel in Quarter three. 2 households were Family & Friends carers, each for a specific child. The other 4 newly approved households were mainstream carers, offering a potential 7 additional placements.

15. There were 169 approved in-house fostering households at end of Quarter three. This is an increase of 3 households since last quarter.

16. 39 newly looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers of whom 24 were Central Bedfordshire children and 15 were Bedford Borough children. 9 Central Bedfordshire Council children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) provision when becoming looked after. Bedford Borough Council placements with IFA's were not processed through Central Bedfordshire.

17. IFA placements (figures shown below for Central Bedfordshire only) have reduced significantly in comparison to the previous quarter. This is a quick changing feature and cannot be assumed to reflect an overall trend at this point in time. It is clearly desirable to continue to reduce the proportion of foster placements made through IFA's, given their higher cost; at the same time to increase the proportion of in-house foster placements. At end of December 2013, Central Bedfordshire foster placements were 54% with IFA's and 46% with in-house carers.

Chart three shows the proportion of new in-house placements made in CBC and BBC in the last four quarters

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18.   At 31 December 2013, there were a total of 164 children living with in-house foster carers of which 91 were Central Bedfordshire children and 73 Bedford Borough children. This number has remained relatively consistent for the last three quarters. Taken with the number of fostering households at 169, this represents a placement ratio of 1:1.

Chart four shows the allocation of in house placements to Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and Bedford Borough Council (BBC) during the last twelve months, ending in Q3.

19.   The absolute number of looked after children from Central Bedfordshire living in Independent Fostering Agency provision was 108 at 31 December 2013, a decrease of 1 since the last quarter. This represents 54% CBC children placed with IFA carers and 46% placed with in-house carers (including Family & Friends carers).

Training for Foster Carers

20.   22 training courses took place involving 218 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as short courses and workshops for approved foster carers.

21.   90 households have achieved *Training, Support and Development* (formerly known as *Children's Workforce Development Council*) standard. This is an increase of 5 households since last quarter.

Key Events and Advertising

22. • Siblings advert – Local press
    • Polish community article in Beds on Sunday
    • Leaflet drop
    • Drop-in afternoon - Queens Park neighbourhood centre
    • Babies and toddlers advert - Local press
    • Nation adoption week advert - Local press
    • Website advert - Bedford volunteer centre
    • A5 posters x 14 - Bedford general hospital

Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement

23. The Fostering service joint arrangement with Central Bedfordshire providing service for Bedford Borough Council, ended on 31 December 2013. Those staff aligned to Bedford Borough moved to their new office ahead of time, to avoid the complications of an office move in the middle of seasonal public holidays. This move went smoothly and all staff met for a lunch to mark the beginning of the new arrangements.

24. Foster carers have been re-allocated their supervisory social worker, where necessary. During the final weeks of a joint service, there were handover meetings. There have been no gaps in service provision.

25. The disaggregation project board met in early January to consider and resolve any remainder details. The lead officers from both councils reported that the process was successful and on target. 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