

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 3 February 2014

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs:

M A G Versallion (Chairman)

A L Dodwell (Vice-Chairman)

Mrs A Barker

N B Costin

Mrs S A Goodchild

N J Sheppard

B Wells

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Ogle - Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs C Andrews

Apologies for Absence: Cllr D Bowater
Mrs H Phillips

Officers in Attendance: Mr A Ahmed – Team Manager 13+ Transition and Leaving Care
Mrs J Dickinson – Head of Leisure Services
Mr G Jones – Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Mr T Keaveney – Assistant Director Housing Services
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Mrs C Seamarks – Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker
Mr E Wong – Head of Corporate Parenting
Mr N Wood – Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering

Others in Attendance: Mrs C York - Designated Nurse for Looked After Children (Bedfordshire and Luton Clinical Commissioning Groups)

Representatives - Children in Care Council

CPP/13/34 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 2 December 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/13/35 **Members' Interests**

Councillor Mrs A Barker declared an interest as a member of the Council's Adoption Panel.

Councillor A L Dodwell declared an interest as a member of the Council's Fostering Panel.

CPP/13/36 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Edward Wong, the newly appointed Head of Corporate Parenting, to his first meeting of the Panel and reminded the meeting of the work that this officer had previously undertaken in relation to health assessments for Looked After Children. The Panel noted that the current Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering would continue to remain in post for a temporary period.

The Chairman advised the meeting that Mrs H Phillips, a co-opted foster carer representative on the Panel, had received an MBE in the New Year's Honours List for her work as a carer. The Panel expressed its congratulations on receiving this news.

CPP/13/37 **All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers - Roles and Responsibilities**

The Panel received a presentation from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) representatives which set out the results of the work carried out in relation to the inquiry on entitlements being undertaken by the All Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

A copy of the slide pack is attached at Appendix A to these minutes.

In addition an action plan was circulated at the meeting setting out, in table format, the key findings and recommendations arising from the national inquiry. The table also contained local actions which had been devised by the Senior Management Team (SMT) in response to the recommendations.

A copy of the action plan is attached at Appendix B to these minutes.

The CiCC representatives then introduced their presentation. When asked what local entitlement issue required improvement they indicated that they thought some social workers lacked an understanding of what entitlements Looked After Children and young people could receive. The Assistant Director

Children's Services Operations explained that this matter had been considered by the SMT and action was scheduled within the action plan. The Assistant Director added that the recommendations in the action plan would be audited and an update report submitted to the Panel in six months. The Head of Corporate Parenting stated that the audit would cover compliance, meeting expectations and increasing social worker knowledge. At the suggestion of the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing the Assistant Director undertook to amend the action plan by including relevant dates and times.

In response to a query on the CiCC a representative of that body explained that it met once a month at various venues. A new chairman was elected at each meeting and minutes taken, typed up and submitted to the following meeting to ensure that decisions had been implemented.

A Member raised a number of queries regarding the composition of the CiCC, including the length of time in which individual CiCC members had been in care and participation by disabled young people, and how the viewpoints of the different age ranges were represented. In response, and with regard to the participation of disabled children in the CiCC, the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that both he and the CiCC acknowledged that improvement was required in this area. The CiCC intended to recruit disabled young people and the Head of Services for Disabled People had been tasked with taking this forward. On the matter of representation of the views of different age ranges a CiCC representative stated that the older Looked After Children did seek the views of the younger children so they could be reported to the Panel.

In response to a query by the Vice-Chairman regarding the assistance offered to young people when claiming entitlements, the Head of Corporate Parenting advised that officers assisted young people to complete forms. The Team Manager – 13+ Transition and Leaving Care added that personal advisers would sit with young people and establish what entitlements they could receive and then assist them with their applications.

The Panel considered the benefits arising from placing a greater emphasis on holding informal discussions with the CiCC representatives and the use of alternative venues for this purpose. Members and CiCC representatives indicated their support for this approach.

A Member commented on the sense of reality introduced by CiCC representation at the Panel's meetings and asked if it would be possible for at least one CiCC representative to attend each meeting of the Panel in future and report back on developments. Discussion followed on this suggestion which was welcomed by the Chairman and CiCC representatives. It was felt that meeting agendas should contain items of direct relevance to the CiCC in order to ensure their attendance was worthwhile. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that, if possible, future Panel agendas would contain at least one item which would enable CiCC representative participation and another on which the representative's views would be sought.

The Assistant Director Housing Services informed the CiCC representatives that he would value discussions with the CiCC on accommodation provision for

Looked After Children and being challenged by them on related policy and procedure. The CiCC representatives welcomed this opportunity and the Assistant Director undertook to invite the CiCC to meet him.

NOTED

the presentation on the Entitlements Inquiry for Looked After Children and Care Leavers and the accompanying Action Plan from the Senior Management Team.

RESOLVED

- 1a that an update report on the progress made under the Senior Management Team action plan, which had arisen in response to the outcome of the national Entitlements Enquiry, be submitted to the Panel in six months;**
- 1b that the action plan be amended to include relevant dates and times;**
- 2 that the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations ensure that, if possible, future Panel agendas include at least one item which would enable CiCC representative participation and another on which the representative's views would be sought;**
- 3 that the possibility of the Panel undertaking informal discussions with CiCC representatives at alternative venues be investigated.**

CPP/13/38 The Experience for Looked After Children with Housing

The Panel received a presentation from the Assistant Director Housing Services and the Team Manager – 13+ Transition & Leaving Care entitled 'Suitable Accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers'.

A copy of the slide pack is attached at Appendix C to these minutes.

The Assistant Director Housing Services and Team Manager introduced their presentation and expanded on the issues contained within it as they went. During the introduction the Assistant Director explained that, under the legacy authorities, supported housing provision had largely been centred in the towns of Luton and Bedford. The local authority reorganisation had therefore lead to gaps in service provision within Central Bedfordshire and the resources that were available tended to be used in an uncoordinated way. In addition the matching of suitable support with the accommodation provided was an on-going challenge. The Assistant Director added that the lack of sufficient supported housing provision gave rise to a risk of social disconnection and exclusion amongst some young people. He also stressed the need to ensure that accommodation was not just be affordable but met the needs of client groups.

A Member suggested the provision of accommodation within walking distance of a young person's job or college as this would reduce or remove travel costs. She suggested discussions take place with businesses in towns regarding this point.

Another Member commented that the Council's design guide did not support the future provision of one bedroom accommodation and this could generate shortages. The Assistant Director Housing Services acknowledged this point but explained that this type of accommodation was largely used by older people for whom it was regarded as unsuitable. As a result it was proposed that older people should be encouraged to relocate to more suitable housing stock and the existing one bedroom properties be offered to young people. However, he also indicated that he was aware of the possibility of social isolation arising and that, as a possible alternative, the use of three bedroomed properties by suitable young people was under consideration. He acknowledged that various management issues relating to the use of three bedroomed properties for this purpose remained outstanding.

A CiCC representative informed the meeting of the problems which could arise for young persons who, having succeeded in gaining a tenancy at 16, lost their personal support on reaching 18 and then found they were unable to cope independently due to a lack of life skills training. In response the Assistant Director Housing Services acknowledged the need to work with individuals to ensure that they were taught the right skills to be able to live independently. Discussion took place on the robustness of the Council's procedures in both recognising that a problem existed and then remedying it. The CiCC representative also referred to other matters, such as mental health issues, which prevented a successful move to independent living by some young people and stated that these sometimes remained unrecognised. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting referred to the role of the new Support for Success Panel in ensuring that a gap in personal support did not arise. The Team Manager reminded the meeting of the development of the Independent Life Skills Programme to provide core skills and assured Members that officers were fully focused on the needs of individual young people and their suitability to move to independent living.

A Member felt that the possibility of individual living at 16 was too young and she expressed concerns over safeguarding. She suggested that, instead, a transition period between 16 – 24 years of age should be introduced for young people in order to prepare them for such a major change. The Member then referred to the suggested use of three bedroomed properties and queried the impact of the occupants being able to afford the cost of full Council Tax payments.

The Assistant Director Housing Services explained that the most common cause of homelessness was parental eviction due to either a breakdown in relationships or as a means by which to secure accommodation. He added that the Council's new Allocations Policy would prevent the use of parental eviction as a means to obtain housing. Following further discussion the Assistant Director stated that the new Allocations Policy would clearly articulate what its requirements were and these would be embedded in the Council's Annual Lettings Plan.

In response to a query from the Chairman regarding CiCC input into the new allocation policy the Assistant Director stated that he did not believe there had been specific consultation with Looked After Children. However, he undertook to what consultation had taken place and report back to Members.

Discussion took place on the teaching of life skills, education choices and apprenticeships for Looked After Children.

NOTED

the presentation on suitable accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Assistant Director Housing Services submit a report to the Panel setting out the new Allocations Policy for consideration;**
- 2 that the Assistant Director Housing Services submit a report to the Panel setting out the new Housing Pathways for Care Leavers following its development by 30 June 2014;**
- 3 that the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations submit a report to the next meeting of the Panel updating Members on the progress made in encouraging the Council's business partners to offer apprenticeships to Looked After Children.**

CPP/13/39 The Health of Looked After Children - Six Monthly Update

The Panel received a slide pack from the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children (Bedfordshire and Luton Clinical Commissioning Groups) which provided Members with the six monthly health update for Looked After Children.

A copy of the slide pack is attached at Appendix D to these minutes.

The Designated Nurse then introduced the slide pack which covered the following matters:

- Numbers of Looked After Children
- Performance Data
- Achievements
- Leaving Care Health Service
- Out of Area LAC and Young People (including the difficulties experienced and the actions taken to mitigate risks).

Arising from the increasing numbers of Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire, the Designated Nurse advised the meeting that her workload was to be divided between two posts, one of which would be responsible for Luton

and the other for the remainder of Bedfordshire, from 1 April 2014. She advised the meeting that she had been appointed to the post covering Bedfordshire.

The meeting then considered the comparative performance data for the periods April – September 2013 and April – December 2013 and the improvements that had been achieved. Reference was made in particular to the data which had been forthcoming from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The Designated Nurse stressed the positive contribution played by the performance data in the health assessments of Looked After Children and in informing their requirements. In response to query from the Chairman regarding the inclusion of data on the immunisation of Looked After Children the Designated Nurse explained the historical reasons for its absence from her report and the measures she was taking to draw the data together in a spread sheet format. She added that she was unable to express full confidence regarding the accuracy of the data because of the manner in which it was stored and extracted.

Further discussion followed as Members sought clarification on various issues including the possible duplication of the initial health assessment work undertaken for Looked After Children. In response the Designated Nurse stated that the Bedfordshire and Luton Clinical Commissioning Groups were aware of the need to review the health assessment procedure and the Commissioning Manager was currently examining what improvements were required.

Following a request by the Panel the Designated Nurse undertook to ensure that future reports contained a full explanation of the acronyms used.

NOTED

the content of the six monthly update on the health of Looked After Children.

CPP/13/40

Quarter Three Report on the Fostering Service - October to December 2013

The Panel received a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter Three (October to December 2013) with a comparison to previous quarters.

The report contained updates on the following areas:

- Background
- Recruitment of Foster Carers
- Training for Foster Carers
- Key Events and Advertising
- Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations informed the meeting that, following the end of the joint service arrangement on 31 December, the report covered the final period during which the Fostering Service was a shared service with Bedford Borough Council. Members noted that the disaggregation process itself had been successful with the related staff moves and reallocation of foster carers being carried out without loss of service provision.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that, as a result of the disaggregation and in view of the volume of fostering cases to be heard, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils had introduced their own, separate, Fostering Panels. However, because of the lower overall number of adoption cases the Councils had retained a single, 'shared', Adoption Panel.

In response to Member's query on what, if any seasonal impact took place on foster carer recruitment the Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering stated that family orientated times of year, such as Christmas and the summer holidays, generated a larger number of initial inquiries. However, the level of follow through from enquiries at Christmas was low. He added that the general level of response for the remainder of the year was unpredictable.

Further discussion then took place on the recruitment of foster carers. The foster carer representative present stressed the need to target the recruitment of younger people to become carers and referred to the perceived association of foster caring with older people. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged the need to increase the number of younger foster carers and stated that he had taken note of the comments made.

NOTED

the content of the Quarter Three report on the Fostering Service for the period October to December 2013.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.26 p.m.)