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**Meeting:** Corporate Parenting Panel  
**Date:** 02 June 2014  
**Subject:** Quarter Four Report on the Fostering Service  
**Report of:** Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director Children's Services  
**Summary:** The report outlines the activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter four. Usually this is with comparison to activity in previous quarters, however, the shared service arrangement ended at the end of December 2013 and therefore it is difficult to compare activity like for like.

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**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. For the first three quarters of the year the Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services had an annual budget of £6.6 million, including costs of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and provision on behalf of Bedford Borough Council under Shared Service arrangement. For this final quarter Central Bedfordshire Council have provided Fostering Services as a single agency and budgets have been adjusted to reflect this.

##### **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:**

4. As part of the disaggregation, staff moved into their respective authority's service. The Fostering Service is now incorporated in the Corporate Parenting Service.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

5. Fostering and Adoption 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. This is the first period for Central Bedfordshire Council's Adoption and Fostering Service to report on following the disaggregation.
11. This report covers activity in the period January to March 2014. It is difficult to provide comparative data with previous quarters due to the service now being a single agency as previous reports reported data as a shared service.

**Recruitment of Foster Carers**

12. During the last quarter, a total of 29 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in becoming a Foster Carer. Of these enquiries, 9 were in January (16 in January 2013), 7 in February (11 in February 2013) and 13 in March (15 in March 2013). Numbers are down from last year but reflect the fact that since January 2014 Central Bedfordshire Fostering Service has been operating as a single agency. From the rebranding exercise and recruitment activity already commenced the figures are gradually increasing. In March 2014 there were only 2 fewer enquiries than in March 2013 when the service was joint with Bedford Borough Council. This should therefore be recognised as an

achievement and these figures should increase further as the revised recruitment strategy is implemented during the year.

## **January**

Marketing activities included an article on the two Foster Carers who received their MBE nomination. This appeared in the local press. A newspaper advert ran in all editions of *Beds on Sunday*. In addition, the existing core publicity items were given a temporary re-brand and reprinted to remove reference to Bedford Borough. The same adjustment was made to the fostering and adoption pages of the Central Bedfordshire Council website and all external websites holding dual branded information were also contacted to remove Bedford Borough references.

The Central Bedfordshire Council website was the most cited source of advertising during this month and the newspaper advert generated one enquiry.

## **February**

Contact was made with all Central Bedfordshire Council public buildings to replace the existing poster with temporarily rebranded items. The Service promoted a Private Fostering Awareness week and an advert ran in *News Central* in the last week of February to tie in with this. The website was amended to include a case study of a real life private foster carer. A press release was sent out by Central Communications but only one magazine published it.

The Central Bedfordshire Council was the most cited source of advertising during this month. Two enquiries came from word-of-mouth referrals and one from a flier, though the location is unknown.

## **March**

Throughout March, the new marketing and recruitment manager put together the Marketing and Recruitment Strategy and Outreach Plan for 2014-15 and started the full re-brand on all publicity items, display items and advertising. Two new email addresses were set up to separate Fostering enquiries from Adoption enquiries and an online form was introduced to the Central Bedfordshire Council website, to allow the public to submit an enquiry online. At the start of March, the rebranded bookmarks were distributed across Central Bedfordshire and a Facebook campaign was implemented to run in the last two weeks of March.

In March, all enquiries apart from one were due to Facebook advertising and the Central Bedfordshire Council website.

13. In Quarter four, 19 assessments of new Foster Carers commenced of which 12 were assessments of family/friends carers where the child was previously known to them as an extended family member/ connected person.
14. Two new fostering households were approved by the Fostering Panel in Quarter four.

15. 19 children became Looked After during Quarter four. 14 of these were placed with Family/Friends in Regulation 24 placements. The remaining 5 children were placed with in-house carers.
16. At 31March 2014 there were a total of 85 children living with in-house foster carer (43 with general foster carers and 42 placed with family and friends carers). 109 children were living in Independent Fostering Provision. This represents 56% children placed with IFA carers and 44% placed with in-house carers (including Family and Friends Carers). As of the 31March 2014 there were 29 family and friends carers looking after 42 children.
17. During this quarter a lot of work went into setting up a fees scheme for foster carers which went live on the 01April 2014. The fees scheme will help the service become more competitive with its neighbouring Local Authorities and I.F.A.'s and help us to recruit carers who might otherwise not be able to afford to foster. The new scheme offers a financial reward element rather than just pay a boarding out allowance which covered the cost of caring for the child/children

### **Training for Foster Carers**

18. 12 Training Courses took place during Quarter four, involving 79 delegates. This included preparation training for prospective foster carers as well as a separate preparation course for prospective family and friends carers. The other training provided were short courses and workshops for approved foster carers.

All foster carers in their first year of approval have to complete an induction programme which includes completion of their T.S.D. (training, support and development) standards. 56 households have now achieved the standards. This is an increase of 5 households since last Quarter. 15 households are in the process of completing their TSD standards within the agreed timescale. A further 14 are still outstanding and additional support is being put in place to help these carers achieve the standards as a matter of urgency.

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

19. The Fostering Service joint arrangement with Central Bedfordshire providing a service for Bedford Borough Council, ended on 31December 2013. The disaggregation process was successful with no significant risks/issues occurring during the process. As a single agency, Central Bedfordshire Council Fostering Service moved to new premises in Stephenson Court on 16 March 2014 and new working styles were introduced as part of the My Space project. Many of the staff group are now either mainly home based or working in and out of Stephenson's court or other offices around the county rather than being based entirely in one office. The move went smoothly and staff have adjusted well to these changes and to being part of the new Corporate Parenting Service.

Following the disaggregation, some Foster Carers have been re-allocated new supervising Social Worker due to some staff moving over to Bedford Borough.

All Foster Carers have now had an opportunity to start working with their new supervising Social Workers. There are currently no gaps in service provision.

### **Plans for the next financial year**

20. Whilst this report reflects the work of the fostering service for the quarter 4 period, it is also important to plan ahead and outline our priorities.
21. The Fostering Service has been through many changes during quarter 4 and it will be important in the next quarter to help staff settle into their new environment, new working style and within the newly created Corporate Parenting Service. Staff are already benefitting from developing closer working relationships with their colleagues, supporting each other, foster carers and children so that they receive an improved service.
22. During the next quarter work will be done to ensure our readiness for any inspection should Ofsted decide to inspect the service in the near future.
23. The other main priority for the service will be to recruit more foster carers. We need to increase the pool of foster carers and decrease reliance on the use of I.F.A. placements. With a new interim marketing and recruitment manager in post and the new fees scheme in place it is likely that the service be able to recruit a net gain of 20 more fostering households during the next financial year. This will give more placement choice and, where appropriate, consideration will be given to take opportunities to bring children back from I.F.A. placements to more local in house placements where children's needs can be better met.

### **Appendices:**

None

### **Background Papers (Open to public inspection):**

None