
Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 02 June 2014
Subject: Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service
Report of: Edwina Grant, Director Children's Services
Summary: The report outlines the Statutory framework regarding Annual Reports and summarises key points contained within the reports.

Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Operations
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.

Adoption and Fostering are key statutory services to Looked After Children.

Financial:

1. Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services has an annual budget of £8,044,710 million. 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 would be a breach of National Minimum Standard.

Child Protection Risks: Failure to assess risk may lead to unfavourable outcomes.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. There are no staffing issues.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Adoption and Fostering affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

6. There are no community safety issues.

Sustainability:

7. There are no sustainability issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

that the Corporate Parenting Panel notes the statutory reports.

Background

8. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Adoption Services and Fostering Services to report regularly on the operation of the services. The service specific regulations outline the frequency of reporting and to whom the reports must be submitted.
9. The Adoption and Fostering service continued to be a shared service with Bedford Borough Council until the end of December 2013. This was hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council. Therefore, the Annual reports contain information activity in respect of both Councils up to the end of December 2013. Thereafter, the reports focus on activity as a single CBC service.

Adoption Services

10. The Adoption Service is required to report at six-monthly intervals. In Central Bedfordshire Council, this will be to the Scrutiny Committee. An Annual Report will be produced by the end of May each year covering the preceding April to March period. In addition a six-monthly briefing update will be produced by the end of October each year and presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
11. In 2013/14 there was an increase in the number of children whose cases were presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a recommendation as to whether adoption should be the plan for the child. This was for 48 children, an increase from 41 children from the two authorities in the previous 12 months. 29 households were approved as adopters, an increase from 22 in 2012/13 and matches of 20 children to adopters were made.

12. 10 Adoption Orders were granted in respect of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire Council, with a further 20 being granted Special Guardianship. The number of adoptions was an increase from 6 the previous year, and the overall number of children where a permanent legal option was secured via adoption or Special Guardianship increased from 18 in 2012/13 to 30 in 2013/14
13. As of the 31 March 2014, 12 adopted children and their families were in receipt of support. In addition contact plans were being made on behalf of 92 children. Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family, which usually involves supporting the periodic exchange of letters or information between adoptive and birth families.
14. There were 17 referrals from adult adoptees and their birth relatives, a slight drop from the previous 12 month period. Post Adoption support in the form of tracing birth records, counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support was provided.
15. As part of the continued Government reform of adoption services, a range of measures is planned for implementation 2012 to 2015 to increase the number and speed of adoptions. Measures include addressing delay in Court Proceedings, the publishing of an adoption 'scorecard' for each council, changes to adopter recruitment processes and the setting of challenging targets to reduce delay. The Adoption Services is in a strong position to meet the requirements of the action plan, having robust performance monitoring and good practices in place in regard to planning for adoption.

Fostering Services

16. A report to Members is required at three monthly intervals. This is achieved by production of an Annual Report to this Committee in September each year covering the April to March period. In addition, three-monthly updates will be presented at the end of July, October and January each year to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
17. 30 new fostering households were approved during 2013-14, a decrease of 19 in the previous year.
18. 224 children were placed in full-time foster placements at the end of March 2014, of whom 85 were looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council. Across both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council up to December 2013, there have been 381 referrals for new or a change of placement. 85 children were placed with carers approved by Central Bedfordshire Council, 109 placed in Independent Fostering Agencies, 8 placed with other Local Authorities and 22 placed in residential units.
19. The number of enquiries from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers dropped in 2013-14 by -29% from 2012-13. All enquiries received prompt information and a visit from a social worker. 164 households made formal application to become a foster carers either from a follow up enquiry as a member of the public or because they wished to care for a looked after child known to them as a family member or friend. This was an increase from the 213 applications received in 2012/13.

20. Over the course of the year 77 training activities were provided for foster carers on 41 topics. 587 delegates attended. A range of support is provided to foster carers, including regular supervision from a social worker, support groups, peer mentoring and out-of-hours telephone support.

Shared Service Arrangement

21. In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement. This decision was subsequently reviewed in detail in Autumn 2012 with the decision being made for the disaggregation of the service to be effective from 1 January 2014. A project board comprising staff in both Councils has been established to plan the arrangements for January 2014 and beyond. This planning process will involve consultation with key stakeholders and staff to ensure that an effective fostering service that meets the needs of children can be maintained and developed.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Adoption Agency Annual Report

Appendix B – Fostering Agency Annual Report

Background Papers (open to public inspection):

None