

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 24 March 2014

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs M A G Versallion (Chairman)
A L Dodwell (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs A Barker
D Bowater
Mrs S A Goodchild
B Wells

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Ogley – Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs C Andrews
Mrs N Banks
Mrs H Philips MBE

Apologies for Absence: Mrs J Dickinson
Mrs E Grant
Miss D Jeeves

Officers in Attendance: Mrs M Brown – Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager
Mr G Jones – Assistant Director Children's Services
Operations
Ms J Edwards – Interim Virtual School Head Teacher
Mr L Manning – Committee Services Officer
Mrs C Seamarks – Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker
Mrs J Stanton – Interim Participation Support Worker
Mr N Wood – Interim Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering

Others in Attendance: Representatives – Children in Care Council

CPP/13/41 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 3 February 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/13/42 Members' Interests

None.

CPP/13/43 Chairman's Announcements and Communications

At the request of the Chairman, and with the approval of the Panel, the running order of the agenda was revised so that item 8 (Update Report: Fees and Allowances for Foster Carers) was considered before item 7 (Recruitment & Retention Strategy 2014-15).

CPP/13/44 Children in Care Council Annual Report for 2013

The Panel considered a report from the Executive Member for Children's Services which set out the Children in Care Council Annual Report for 2013. The Annual Report included the Participation Forward Plan for 2014.

The report was accompanied by a presentation from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) representatives attending the meeting. A copy of the slide pack is attached at Appendix A to these minutes.

Following a query by the Chairman discussion took place regarding Member attendance at CiCC meetings and events. The Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker undertook to notify the Panel, through the Committee Administrator to the Panel, of the dates where Member attendance was appropriate.

Full and open discussion then took place during which CiCC representatives outlined their own experiences as Looked After Children to illustrate policy areas which they felt required review, including that of education, accommodation and placements. In response the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing and Assistant Director Children's Services Operations assured the meeting that officers were aware of the issues raised and advised of the action being undertaken with regard to accommodation. Arising from this discussion it was agreed that there would be an update report to the next Panel meeting.

Debate also took place on the support that was offered to Looked After Children in the move to independence, the impact on educational attainment and need to assess individual needs and requirements.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the local consultations which took place with Looked After Children and young people and queried what was done with the responses received. She explained that knowing what problems existed would enable Members to raise and discuss the issues with officers. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that the information was not systematically being fed back to Members in terms of improvements made and he undertook, in conjunction with the Personal Advisor/Participation Support Worker, to establish the most suitable means of reporting this information to the Panel.

In response to a Member's query regarding the representation of those under eight years old and of those over sixteen on the CiCC the Personal

Advisor/Participation Support Worker advised that CiCC membership was open to the age of 24 whilst the views of those under eight were established through discussions with the fostering team in an informal, relaxed environment. However, the Member expressed concern at the loss of knowledge and experience from the CiCC as those young people in their late teens moved on. It was agreed that this would be reviewed.

On behalf of the Panel the Chairman thanked the CiCC representatives for attending the meeting.

NOTED

- 1 the Children in Care Annual Report 2013;**
- 2 the Children in Care Council Participation Forward Plan 2014;**
- 3 the presentation by the Children in Care Council representatives.**

(Note: The CiCC members left the meeting room at the conclusion of this item).

CPP/13/45 Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children

The Panel considered a report from the Executive Director for Children's Services which explained the role of the Central Bedfordshire Virtual School, provided the outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2012/13 and identified the impact of the steps taken since September 2013 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people.

Information relating to the Virtual School Development Plan 2013-15 and Looked After Children Validated Outcomes in 2013 were attached to the report at Appendices A and B respectively.

The Interim Virtual School Head Teacher introduced the report and drew Members' attention to points of specific interest. Reference was made to those students (Y12/13) who chose not to engage in the in the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process but favoured other opportunities. A Member advised the meeting that he had been made aware of the apprenticeships that were available at Amey plc, one of the Council's consultants, and the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher undertook to notify the Youth Support Service of these.

The Chairman then reminded the meeting that the Council itself also provided apprenticeships. He sought clarification on the outcome of recent Member discussions on whether or not an applicant, who was one of the Council's Looked After Children, should be guaranteed an apprenticeship on the Council's scheme. In the absence of a conclusive answer both the Chairman and the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to seek further information on this matter. However, the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher stated that applicants would be required to have a certain level of academic achievement and some Looked After Children were still failing to reach that required.

In connection with underachievement a Member suggested that it would be beneficial for some Looked After Children if there was a greater focus on the teaching of English and Maths. She also emphasised the need to ensure that those Looked After Children who were experiencing long term sickness received tuition. In response the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher stressed that English and Maths were already ranked as the most important. She also stated she could supply further tuition if this was required.

The Panel then turned to consider Pupil Premium funding and its impact on the achievements of Looked After Children. Concern was expressed that some schools were not using the Pupil Premium for eligible children but were diverting funds into a general 'pot'. However, in contrast, a Member commented that he was readily provided with data on this topic and it was noted that, through PEP reviews, schools were being challenged to identify the impact of Pupil Premium funding on Looked After Children's achievements. In addition the impact of the Pupil Premium on the progress and outcomes of Looked After Children was now a core focus for Ofsted inspection.

Following further discussion the Chairman queried what, if any, further action could be taken by the Council to improve educational outcomes for Looked After Children. In response the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher stated that, despite funding being available, the provision of one to one tuition was challenging because there were so few good quality tutors available to provide this service.

Following further discussion and comment the Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, thanked the Interim Virtual School Head Teacher and her team for the improvements which had been made and expressed confidence in the action being taken.

NOTED

the outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2012/13 and the impact of the measures taken since September 2013 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people.

CPP/13/46

Update Report: Fees and Allowances for Foster Carers

The Panel considered a report by the Council's Executive Member for Children's Services which outlined a review of the foster care allowance scheme. The meeting noted that the review increased remuneration to the Council's own foster carers in an attempt to both retain existing foster carers and increase their number, thereby reducing the current high use of the more expensive foster placements purchased from Independent Foster Agencies (IFA's).

Members were advised that the Executive had agreed a plan in September 2013 to increase recruitment and retention through the introduction of a fee based scheme to improve rewards to in-house carers. Further, the end of the

joint service with Bedford Borough Council in January 2014 had seen additional work undertaken to ensure the scheme was as competitive as was possible given the resources available. The scheme, details of which were set out in full in the report, was due to be implemented with effect from 1 April 2014.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations advised that discussions on the revised scheme had been held with carers. The Panel then considered how the fee based scheme would provide an incentive to foster carers to undertake training beyond the basic level and the benefits that would arise.

NOTED

the progress made in the development and implementation of the revised foster care allowance scheme.

(Note: Minute CPP/13/47 below also refers).

CPP/13/47 Recruitment & Retention Strategy 2014-15

The Panel received a presentation from the Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager which set out the 2014-15 recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers. The presentation included the current recruitment situation, the overall marketing objectives, the overall retention objectives, the number of foster carers needed and the various, wide ranging means to be employed to achieve the recruitment and retention objectives. The meeting was aware that the strategy was linked to the review of the foster care allowance scheme (minute CPP/13/46 above refers).

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

Members noted the competition with both neighbouring local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) to recruit foster carers. Arising from this discussion took place on how to make the most effective use of recruitment activity with regard to both content and location. The Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager welcomed Members' suggestions on this issue.

In response to a Member's query the Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager confirmed that an element of the recruitment strategy would focus on the professional development and support offered by the Council to its in-house foster carers.

During further discussion a foster carer representative explained why she had become a Council foster carer rather than join an IFA, whilst another explained how she had been successfully recruited by the Council and how the recruitment process could be improved. A third commented on the level of support offered by the Council and the need to prevent over commitment by some foster carers.

In response to concerns over the impact of the recruitment campaigns being undertaken by neighbouring local authorities on the outcome of the Council's strategy, the Interim Marketing & Recruitment Manager referred Members to

the success of a previous foster carer recruitment strategy she had conducted for a London borough. The Assistant Director also stressed the ambition which lay behind the implementation of the recruitment and retention strategy before advising the meeting that the strategy would be launched in the foyer of Priory House on 15 April.

NOTED

the 2014-15 recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 11.00 a.m. and concluded at 1.20 p.m.)