

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 2 June 2014

### **PRESENT**

#### **Elected Members (voting)**

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

#### **Officers (voting)**

Mrs J Ogle – Director of Social Care and Housing

#### **Carers (non-voting)**

Mrs C Andrews  
Mrs N Banks  
Mrs H Philips MBE

Officers in Attendance:	Mr A Ahmed	– Team Manager 13+ Transition and Leaving Care
	Mr M Ciuro	– Deputy Team Manager
	Ms A Craig	– Panel Professional Advisor
	Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Mrs C Seamarks	– Personal Advisor / Participation Support Worker
	Ms M Short	– Participation Officer
	Ms J Singh	– Adoption Team Manager
	Mr E Wong	– Head of Corporate Parenting

Others in Attendance: Former Looked After Child

CPP/14/1 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 24 March 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/14/2 **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/14/3 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman announced that he and the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations would leave the meeting at approximately 12.30 p.m. to attend the official opening of the Academy of Social Work and Early Intervention at 1.00 p.m.

The Chairman then stated that the young man referred to in agenda item 11 was expected to arrive earlier than originally intended. Rather than delay the young man unnecessarily, and in order to allow him to return to work as quickly as possible, item 11 would be brought forward for consideration at the most suitable point in the meeting.

CPP/14/4 **Involving Young People in the Corporate Parenting Panel**

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations reported verbally on ways of engaging with the young people from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) who attended the Panel's meetings. In connection with this matter the Assistant Director circulated a document entitled 'Group Discussions with the CiCC' which set out the CiCC's advice for those taking part in group discussions with young people.

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

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stressed the sensitivity of the issues raised at Panel meetings and requested that the young people's wish for personal privacy be respected. A Member suggested that short profiles setting out the age, time in care and so forth of the young people attending the Panel's meetings be provided to assist Members. In response the Participation Officer undertook to raise this suggestion with the CiCC. The Assistant Director added that the content of the profiles should be left to the discretion of the individuals and suggested that it would, in turn, be helpful to the CiCC if Members provided their own profiles.

**NOTED**

**the verbal report of the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations.**

## RESOLVED

- 1 that the advice for group discussion drawn up by the Children in Care Council (CiCC), and contained in the document entitled 'Group Discussions with the CiCC', be approved and adopted;
- 2 that the CiCC consider the suggested creation of short profiles for those CiCC members attending the Corporate Parenting Panel's meetings, the content for each profile being subject to the wishes of the individual concerned;
- 3 that the members of the Corporate Parenting Panel consider creating their own profiles for use by the CiCC.

### CPP/14/5 Quarter Four Report on the Fostering Service

The Panel received a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter Four (January to March 2014). Members noted that it had not proved possible to provide the usual comparison to previous quarters because the joint service arrangement with Bedford Borough Council had ended on 31 December 2013 and the data previously reported to the Panel was based on a shared service.

The report contained updates on the following areas:

- Background
- Recruitment of Foster Carers
- Training for Foster Carers
- Ending of the Shared Service Arrangement
- Plans for the Next Financial Year

The Panel Professional Advisor introduced the report drawing Members' attention in particular to the growth in recruitment enquiries following the rebranding exercise and recruitment strategy, and the provision of training for foster carers.

In response to a Member's query regarding the introduction of a fees scheme for foster carers the Panel Professional Advisor explained that the scheme involved a payment to foster carers which was, in effect, a financial reward to the carer, and not intended to contribute towards the cost of caring for a child. It was envisaged that the payment of the fee would help the service become more competitive with both neighbouring authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and enable people who couldn't, at present, afford to foster to consider doing so. The meeting noted that initial feedback indicated that the scheme was proving successful and had contributed towards the significant increase in enquiries over the last few months. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations added that the scheme was similar to those already in place in neighbouring local authorities.

The Member then sought clarification regarding the Fostering Service's relocation to Stephenson Court following the disaggregation process. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that Stephenson Court lay within Bedford Borough Council's boundaries but the lease for the property was longstanding and it remained in Central Bedfordshire's interest to continue to use it. Comment was passed that the property was located close to the boundary with Central Bedfordshire and that many of that Council's foster carers actually lived in Bedford. Nonetheless the Member reminded the meeting of the principle that all Central Bedfordshire Council staff should be based within Central Bedfordshire.

Discussion then took place on whether the new methods of working introduced under the MySpace project had resulted in a negative impact on the operational efficiency of some Fostering Service staff. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that the new ways of working could be challenging for staff but he stressed that the service was being monitored during this time of transition. The Assistant Director then offered to update the Panel on how staff were adapting to the new working methods and this was welcomed by Members.

With regard to the provision of training the Vice-Chairman referred to the apparent difficulties experienced by some foster carers to complete their training, support and development (TSD) standards. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations explained the various reasons why some foster carers found it difficult to complete their TSD standards and set out the alternative learning methods available to them. He also referred to the additional support that was being put in place to help the foster carers.

#### **NOTED**

**the content of the Quarter Four report on the Fostering Service for the period January to March 2014.**

#### **RESOLVED**

**that the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations update the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel on how staff in the Fostering Service were adapting to the new ways of working introduced under the MySpace project.**

CPP/14/6

#### **Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service**

The Panel received a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which outlined the statutory framework for the submission of annual reports on the Adoption and Fostering Services and summarised the key points contained in the Adoption Agency and Fostering Agency Annual Reports for 2013-14. Copies of the Annual Reports were attached as appendices to the report.

The meeting noted that the Annual Reports contained information for both Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council for the period up to the end of December 2013 because the Adoption and Fostering Service had been a shared service until that date. Following disaggregation, however, the Reports focused solely on Central Bedfordshire Council.

Following an introduction by the Head of Corporate Parenting and the Adoption Team Manager Members sought clarification on various matters within the Annual Reports. A Member also commented on the absence of a report by the Adoption Panel Chair in the Adoption Agency Annual Report. She pointed out that, in contrast, a report by the Fostering Panel Chair was included as an appendix to the Fostering Agency Annual Report. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to investigate this matter.

Following discussion Members indicated that, if possible, they would wish to be advised of the outcomes of adoption placements and queried if this was feasible. In response the Adoption Team Manager explained that it was not as once a child had been adopted the Council had no right of contact. She added that the legal relationship between an adopted child and its new parents was the same as that for any other family.

Further discussion then took place as Members sought additional information and clarification with regard issues contained in the Adoption Agency Annual Report.

**(Note: At this point in the meeting further discussion on the report was adjourned to enable the exclusion of the press and public at agenda item 10 and consideration of agenda item 11).**

CPP/14/7 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

**RESOLVED**

**that in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that consideration of the item is likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.**

CPP/14/8 **Celebrating the Journey of the Child**

The Panel welcomed a young man who had attended the meeting to tell Members of his 'journey' from Looked After Child to young adult. The Panel was first shown a video, following which the young man read out a statement which added additional information to his story. Arising from this Members asked the young man a number of questions. They also congratulated him on the progress which he had made, often against extremely difficult circumstances.

At the conclusion the Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, thanked the young man for his attendance and for sharing the story of his life with Members.

After the young man had left the meeting Members were advised of the training he was undertaking. Discussion then took place on related issues, including support arrangements and opportunities for life skills development for young people in similar circumstances. A foster carer representative cautioned the meeting from over emphasising educational attainment and reminded Members that many young people found practical training to be more appealing.

**(Note: At this point in the meeting the Chairman and the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations gave their apologies and left the meeting to attend the official opening of the Academy of Social Work and Early Intervention).**

#### **Councillor A L Dodwell in the Chair**

Further discussion took place during which Members congratulated the officers for their efforts in assisting the young man. Members also indicated that they would wish to be updated on the latter's progress.

The meeting noted the underlying challenges which some young people faced.

#### **NOTED**

**the video and statement presented to the meeting.**

**(Note: at the conclusion of the above item the Panel moved back into public session to consider its remaining business).**

CPP/14/9

#### **Annual Reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service (Conclusion)**

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations introduced the Fostering Agency Annual Report. He advised that some of the business covered had already been considered by Members under the Quarter Four Report on the Fostering Service (minute CPP/14/5 refers). The Assistant Director worked through the report drawing Members' attention to various matters. With regard to the support offered to carers he referred to the changes that had taken place in the supervision of social workers to ensure a return to continuity in this area over the coming months.

In response to a query on the foster carer recruitment enquiries for April and May the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that the April figure was the same as the previous year when a joint service with Bedford Borough Council existed and that the figure for May exceeded last year's joint service figure. He acknowledged the challenge in converting recruitment enquiries into placements. However, he also commented that if every enquiry received subsequently required a formal assessment it would place considerable pressure on the service and assistance would be required to

process the assessments. However, the drop out rate was substantial once many enquirers were fully aware of the demands they would face.

In response to a foster carer's query the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that some existing carers did not currently have placements. He explained that this was because of the mismatch between the areas of demand such as siblings, children with challenging behaviour and older children and the children that some carers were willing to foster. He added that carers were encouraged to consider taking in children which they had not originally felt able to. In response to a further query the Assistant Director stated that available suitable placements in other local authorities were used and, in turn, Central Bedfordshire reciprocated if it had available placements required by other authorities. In response to comments made by a foster carer regarding the difficulties she was experiencing when caring for a child from a neighbouring local authority the Vice-Chairman suggested that she raise the matter with the Assistant Director at the conclusion of the meeting.

**NOTED**

**the annual reports for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service.**

CPP/14/10 **Placement Stability & Suitability**

Members received a slide pack, circulated at the meeting, which outlined performance data relating to placement stability and suitability up to 31 March 2014. It included the stability of placements for Looked After Children, a summary of the performance data and plans to improve placement stability and suitability. Members' attention was drawn in particular the data revealing that approximately 30% of Looked After Children experienced two or more placement moves

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

Although noting that a Task and Finish Group had been set up to consider the improvement of placement stability, including the use of CAMHs, a Member expressed concern with regard to the time taken by the referral process. In response, however, she was assured that timescales had been set and performance was tracked and reviewed.

Following a further query by a Member as to whether any theme was apparent from the data which had been collected the Deputy Team Manager advised that additional work would be required to interpret the data for this purpose. However, he stated that work was being undertaken to establish which Looked After Children were most at risk of an unstable placement and this should be available within six months. The placements would then be monitored so that remedial action could be taken if required.

**NOTED**

**the slide pack outlining performance data relating to placement stability and suitability as circulated at the meeting.**

CPP/14/11 **Housing Issues**

The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing provided the Panel with a brief verbal update on developments related to housing matters. She referred to the Executive's adoption of Allocations Policy quotas for special groups which would enable the Council to plan for the needs of people as they moved through the care system and offer the appropriate support package to them. She stated that there would be a full report submitted to the next meeting of the Panel updating Members on housing issues.

**NOTED**

**the verbal update on housing matters.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.30 a.m. and concluded at 12.55 p.m.)