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**Meeting:** Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 16 September 2014  
**Subject:** Annual Report for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service and Private Fostering  
**Report of:** Cllr Mark Versallion, Executive Member for Children's Services  
**Summary:** The report outlines the statutory framework regarding Annual Reports and summarises key points contained within the reports.

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**Advising Officer:** Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Children's Services  
**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 Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable

The Children and Young People's Plan 2013-2015 Priority – Protecting Vulnerable Children

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

Private Fostering is a statutory service as defined by the Guidance.

##### **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 outlines 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 in relation to the reports.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

5. Adoption, Fostering and Private Fostering affect all sectors of communities.

**Community Safety:**

6. There are no community safety issues.

**Sustainability:**

7. There are no sustainability issues.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Committee comments on 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 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, Fostering and Private Fostering services 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 till the end of December 2013. Thereafter the reports focus on activity as a single Central Bedfordshire Council service.

## **Adoption Services**

10. 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 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 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 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' on performance for each Council, changes to adopter recruitment processes and the setting of challenging targets to reduce delay. The Adoption Service 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. 224 children were placed in full-time in-house 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 were 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.
18. 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 carer 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.
19. 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.

### **Private Fostering**

20. The joint service ended on 31 December 2013. This had little impact on the Central Bedfordshire Private Fostering Service. Raising awareness of private fostering has become more straightforward because there is now a smaller area to cover. Networking with partner agencies and other professionals is therefore less time consuming.
21. The number of notifications has gradually increased since 2006 when the requirement was first enacted and levels are now broadly similar to those of comparator authorities. Awareness- raising activities and advertising campaigns continue and there is a good level of awareness amongst local professionals. However National campaigns have stopped, as have campaigns through BAAF, because of lack of funding. Therefore there is more pressure on Local Authorities to intensify their own campaigns of raising awareness.
22. The new client database in Central Bedfordshire has now been configured to enable referrals to be made easily and to give management information to support timely allocation of work. There are also contingency plans in place if the lead worker is absent for any unplanned reason.
23. Central Bedfordshire has continued to proactively promote private fostering awareness raising and to work with the children and young people in these situations to ensure they are safe, well cared for and reach their full potential to become positive citizens.

## **Shared Service Arrangement**

24. 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 was established to plan the arrangements for January 2014 and beyond. This planning process involved consultation with key stakeholders and staff to ensure that an effective adoption and fostering service that meets the needs of children was maintained and developed.

### **Appendices:**

- Appendix A – Adoption Agency Annual Report
- Appendix B – Fostering Agency Annual Report
- Appendix C – Private Fostering Annual Report