

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Monday, 21 July 2014

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs M A G Versallion (Chairman)
Mrs S A Goodchild
B Wells

Officers (voting)

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

Apologies for Absence: **Elected Members (voting)**

Cllrs Mrs A Barker
D Bowater
N B Costin
A L Dodwell
N J Sheppard

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Dickinson

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs J Crawford
Mrs H Philips MBE

Substitutes: Cllrs K Janes (In place of D Bowater)
 A M Turner (In place of A L Dodwell)

Officers in Attendance:	Mr A Ahmed	– Team Manager 13+ Transition and Leaving Care
	Ms A Craig	– Fostering Team Manager
	Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Ms M Short	– Participation Officer
	Ms I Wilks	– Team Manager Conference and Review
	Mr E Wong	– Head of Corporate Parenting

Others in Attendance: Children in Care
 Council
 Representative

CPP/14/12. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 2 June 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

Officers in Attendance

Delete 'Panel Professional Advisor' as Ms A Craig's job title and insert 'Fostering Team Manager'.

Minute CPP/14/5 – Quarter Four Report on the Fostering Service

Delete the references to 'Panel Professional Advisor' in paragraphs three and four of the minute and insert 'Fostering Team Manager'.

CPP/14/13. Members' Interests

None.

CPP/14/14. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman apologised to Members for the changes to the Panel's meeting time and venue. He explained that he, the Vice-Chairman and other Members had found it necessary to attend a special Development Management Committee which had been scheduled for the same time that the Panel was originally due to meet. It had not been possible to reschedule the Committee so the Panel's meeting time and venue had been changed instead.

The Chairman reported that the Council's new Director of Children's Services, Sue Harrison, would start on 22 September. On behalf of the Panel the Chairman thanked the outgoing Director, Edwina Grant, for her hard work and commitment during the challenging times over the last five years. The Panel expressed its best wishes to her.

The Panel noted the launch of the Corporate Parenting Service on 13 June at Stephenson Court, Bedford.

The Chairman announced that he had given an interview early on the previous Saturday morning in which he had explained the challenges associated with securing the adoption of older children and the good work being undertaken in this area by the Council.

CPP/14/15. Quarter One 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 One (April to June 2014).

The report contained updates on the following areas:

- Recruitment of Foster Carers
- Assessments
- Referrals/Placements
- Training
- Ofsted Notifications
- Allegations
- Complaints
- Next Steps

Following an introduction by the Fostering Team Manager a Member referred to the four Ofsted notifications made during this period. He commented specifically on the deregistration of two carers and expressed concern at this development. In response the Fostering Team Manager assured the meeting that the Council had a rigorous recruitment process and referred to the specific issues relating to these events. She added that the reality of caring sometimes proved different from how it was sometimes envisaged. Following further comment by the Member the Fostering Team Manager undertook to update the Panel at its next meeting and advised that a review would be undertaken to learn, in particular, from one of the events referred to. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations fully acknowledged the need to monitor the increase in notifications and confirmed that an update would be provided in each quarterly report.

Discussion took place on the efforts undertaken to recruit foster carers and the success of the recruitment programme during this period. The Fostering Team Manager referred to the high level of resources required to achieve this level of interest. Following a suggestion by a Member the Fostering Team Manager undertook to examine the possibility of recruitment activities in Houghton Regis.

Further discussion followed with particular reference to the substantial increase in Special Guardianships and the greater stress on the use of such placements. The meeting noted the circumstances behind this increase and the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to submit a report to the Panel on this topic.

NOTED

the content of the Quarter One report on the Fostering Service for the period April to June 2014.

CPP/14/16. Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2013-14

Members received a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which outlined the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers/Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2013/14.

The meeting noted that, under the statutory guidance, the IRO Manager was responsible for the production of an Annual Report for consideration by Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. To this end a copy of the IRO Manager's Annual Report was attached at Appendix A to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services.

The Team Manager Conference and Review worked through the Annual Report and highlighted matters for Members' information. A brief discussion followed.

NOTED

the activity of the Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2013-14 as set out within the Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report.

CPP/14/17. Audit Outcomes of Pathway Plans for Looked After Children & Care Leavers

The Panel received a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which outlined the steps taken to improve the quality of Pathway Plans for Looked After Children and care leavers. Members noted that a Pathway Plan was a detailed plan which was required for each young person looked after by a local authority by the age of 16 years and 3 months. The Plan needed to be reviewed every six months until the young person ceased to be the responsibility of the local authority at 21 or 25 if the young person was in further or higher education.

The meeting further noted that a comprehensive audit of Pathway Plans had been carried out in December 2012 and a number of weaknesses discovered. As a result remedial action had been taken and then a further audit carried out on a sample of Pathway Plans in May 2014. Members noted that whilst the overall findings of the 2014 audit indicated that the quality of Pathway Plans had improved considerably some issues still remained. The report set out the measures which would be taken to address these remaining issues.

Following Members' queries the Team Manager 13+Transition and Leaving Care stated that 15-17 year olds were strongly encouraged to undertake voluntary work and assistance was sometimes provided to help them to do so. With regard to help to remain in education he stated that college advice was available as were favourable incentives including allowances to attend university. He added, however, that young people became entitled to a personal allowance at 18 years old and this, coupled with a growing sense of independence, made it difficult for some to focus on educational attainment. Further discussion followed on this matter, including highly favourable comments from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) representative regarding the level of encouragement which was provided by the Council.

NOTED

the outcome of the steps taken to improve the quality of Pathway Plans for Looked after Children and care leavers and the measures to be implemented to rectify any outstanding issues.

CPP/14/18. Access to Suitable Accommodation for Care Leavers

The Panel received a report by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services which updated Members on the provision of accommodation for care leavers. The report followed the submission of a presentation on this matter to at the meeting of the Panel held on 3 February 2014 (minute CPP/13/38 refers).

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that the report should also include input from the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing and future updates would be in the form of joint reports. The Team Manager 13+ Transition and Leaving Care then introduced the report before Members which set out the current situation and the accommodation issues faced. The outcome of a tendering exercise undertaken in March 2014, which had aimed to ensure the Council could meet its sufficiency duty and provide a sufficient range of accommodation for care leavers, was described as were proposed measures to widen the housing offer for young people. The Team Manager also reminded Members of the Executive's approval of a new allocations policy in May 2014 which highlighted care leavers as a vulnerable group and entitled them to housing accommodation under Band B of the Council's Quota Housing Scheme.

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) representative commented on the difficulty she was experiencing in securing accommodation and felt that additional work in this area was required. The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing also referred to the use of the Quota Housing Scheme and its implementation in September/October. Following further comment she indicated that she would be submitting a report to the next meeting of the Panel, following discussion with officers and the CiCC, which reflected the different viewpoints on housing need and support for young people.

NOTED

- 1 the report of the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services and the steps identified to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and care leavers;**
- 2 that the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing is to submit a report to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel on 13 October 2014 on housing need and support for young people following consultation with relevant parties.**

RESOLVED

- 1 that the establishment of a Care Leavers Accommodation Working Group, with representatives from Housing, Adult Social Care, Health, Children's Social Care and the independent and voluntary sector and chaired by the Head of Corporate Parenting be supported;**
- 2 that the Terms of Reference for the above Working Group be as follows:**
 - To ascertain the views, wishes and feelings of Looked After Children and care leavers**
 - To review evidence and monitor current process and ways of working from a results/outcomes perspective**
 - To develop an Improvement Plan**
 - To maximise the benefits of collaboration and joint working**
 - To strengthen local partnerships**
 - To address specific issues to improve housing outcomes for care leavers**
 - To input directly into the new Annual Lettings Plan being developed, so as to establish a quota of properties that shall be available to Children Leaving Care, as well as foster parents and adopters.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 2.30 p.m. and concluded at 3.46 p.m.)