

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Monday, 13 October 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
N J Sheppard
B Wells

Officers (voting)

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

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs J Crawford
Mrs H Philips MBE

Apologies for Absence: **Officers (voting)**

Mrs J Dickinson - Head of Leisure and Libraries

Members in Attendance: Cllrs P N Aldis
J G Jamieson

Officers in Attendance:

Mr N Costin	–	Head of Housing Solutions
Ms A Craig	–	Fostering Team Manager
Mr G Jones	–	Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Mr T Keaveney	–	Assistant Director Housing Services
Mr L Manning	–	Committee Services Officer
Ms M Short	–	Participation Officer
Mr E Wong	–	Head of Corporate Parenting

Others in Attendance: Children in Care
Council
Representative

CPP/14/19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 21 July 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/14/20. **Members' Interests**

None.

CPP/14/21. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman reported on the recent Foster Carer Awards evening at Woburn Safari Park. He thanked the Head of Corporate Parenting and his team for their efforts which had resulted in an excellent event and the raising of public awareness with regard to foster carer work.

The Chairman reminded the meeting of the forthcoming Children in Care Council annual awards evening on 24 October.

CPP/14/22. **Children in Care Council - Presentation**

The Panel received a presentation from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) representative which updated the meeting on the following matters:

- The CiCC & Young Voices
- Passport to Independence
- The Key Messages
- Summer Activities Programme
- The Frontline Programme
- Frontline Feedback
- CiCC Work
- Future Work

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

In addition an example of a box which represented a social worker's 'Tool Box' was circulated for Members' examination.

During the introduction by the CiCC representative Members raised various questions and made a number of comments. In response to a query by the Chairman on the provision of information on entitlements by social workers the CiCC representative stated that, whilst there had been improvements, both social workers and personal advisors needed to keep up to date with this information. She also advised of her own move back into employment.

Arising from a Member's query the meeting considered the development opportunities available for Looked After Children (LAC) and young people and the encouragement and support that they received. The challenges they experienced were also discussed. A Member referred to the Council's apprenticeship scheme and the work experience available. However, the CiCC representative explained the financial downside of accepting an apprenticeship offer. The Chairman commented that, whilst the Council was committed to providing apprenticeships and prioritising availability to Looked After Children

and young people, it was apparent from the CiCC representative's response why there could be a reluctance to take up these positions.

A Member emphasised the need to supply more information to young people on how apprenticeships could affect their life in a beneficial way and what financial assistance was available to them. The meeting noted that the apprenticeships were also open to those young persons fostered through an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). The Participation Officer stated that relevant information had been sent directly to LAC and young people.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations advised of the alternatives to undertaking an apprenticeship to gain workplace experience.

The Participation Officer referred to the highly beneficial experience gained by Looked After Children by working in the CiCC as this helped to develop their portfolio. The CiCC representative stated that this had been a major contributory factor in her gaining employment.

The Chairman commented on the presence of only one CiCC representative at the meeting and raised the issue of whether the Panel's times and dates required revision. In response the Participation Officer suggested that meetings be held during the day at half term.

NOTED

the presentation by the Children in Care Council representative.

CPP/14/23. Update Report: Fees and Allowances for Foster Carers

Members considered a report from the Executive Member for Children's Services which provided an update with regard to the implementation of the Foster Carer's Fee Scheme introduced on 1 April 2014.

The report was introduced by the Fostering Team Manager who drew the meeting's attention to the implementation of the new Scheme to date, its benefits and the impact on the recruitment of in-house foster carers mindful of the adopted aim of reducing the number of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements. She stressed that all foster carer applicant assessments were completed within a six month timescale which meant that any obvious benefits in recruitment arising from the Scheme would not be apparent until October/November 2014. However, the Fostering Team Manager was able to refer to the recruitment activities undertaken since April and the increase in recruitment enquiries up from 62 for the period April to July 2013, when the service worked as a joint one with Bedford Borough Council, to the same period in 2014 when Central Bedfordshire's stand alone service received 104 enquiries. Further, there were currently 15 fostering carer assessments in progress.

In response to a query by the Chairman the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations and the Fostering Team Manager both confirmed that the recruitment figure for in-house carers was on target to be met. The Assistant

Director also referred to the work undertaken by the Head of Corporate Parenting to bring teams together and implement a joined up approach to recruitment.

Discussion then turned to efforts to increase the range and capacity of carers as well as their overall number, the migration of some IFA carers towards the Council and the difference in local authority and IFA approaches regarding the consistency of foster carer placements. During the discussion concern was expressed by a foster carer representative regarding her personal experience of the quality of support offered by the Council to its foster carers during times of need in comparison to that offered by an IFA. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to fully examine the issues she had raised. The Chairman requested that he be kept fully informed.

A Member was of the opinion that a focus on targets was incorrect and that, instead, the focus should be on improving support and experience for foster carers and the Looked After Children and young people. She was also of the opinion that some members of the public did not understand what fostering involved and the Council failed to fully explain this. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged the importance of quality of service but explained that aspirational targets were necessary to increase carer numbers, range and capacity and reduce the need for local children to be placed out of area and/or with IFAs. However, he also acknowledged that there were some enquiries on becoming a foster carer which revealed a lack of public awareness and which did not proceed. The Fostering Team Manager confirmed that quality of service standards were robust and stated that the intention was to educate members of the public on the role of foster carers and, through this, encourage recruitment.

A foster carer representative expressed concern that some carers undertook fostering because of the financial rewards rather than to benefit the children. The Chairman also expressed concern that some foster carers had been attracted to the role for financial reasons. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stressed that IFAs were not solely financially focused. Further, the government was not going to constrain the market by limiting the role of IFAs and so the Council had to attempt to encourage carers or potential carers to work for it. As such, the Council needed to ensure that carers were properly supported and rewarded. He stated that he would welcome any new ideas regarding this. The Fostering Team Manager stressed that the consideration of foster carer applications focused on motivation and those applications that appeared driven by other matters, such as financial reward, would not be progressed.

Following further Member comment, and on behalf of the Panel, the Chairman expressed congratulations to the Head of Corporate Parenting, the Fostering Team Manager and the other officers involved for their achievements.

NOTED

the progress made in the implementation of the new Foster Carers' Fee Scheme.

RESOLVED

that an update report on the impact of the Foster Carer's Fee Scheme be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 2 February 2015.

(Note: the meeting adjourned at 11.50 a.m. and reconvened at 11.55 a.m.)

CPP/14/24. Meeting the Housing and Support Needs of Vulnerable Young People

The Panel considered a report from the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing which provided an additional perspective to the report on the provision of accommodation to care leavers submitted to the Panel on 21 July 2014 (minute CPP/14/18 refers) and to the presentation to the Panel on 3 February 2014 (minute CPP/13/38 refers).

The report outlined the strategic drivers that were acting to bring the Children's Services and Social Care, Health and Housing Directorates into closer collaboration and discussed the emerging strategic and operational response from a Housing service perspective. In addition the report set those activities in context by outlining the barriers that care leavers and vulnerable young people experienced in their access to housing including the potential 'blockages' within the system.

The Assistant Director Housing Services introduced the report, highlighting and developing issues for consideration. He also emphasised that meeting the housing and support needs of care leavers and vulnerable young people was the responsibility of the whole Council and that only the whole Council, acting with a unified approach could, ultimately, meet the demands emanating from this area.

The Assistant Director Housing Services referred to the need to optimise the supply of new build housing but added that new developments were not necessarily in those areas which were suitable for use by care leavers and vulnerable young people. Instead he suggested the use of commuted sums for the development of infill sites in established communities. The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing also referred to the challenge of understanding the need and the type and location of suitable accommodation and ensuring that this information was communicated to partners and stakeholders across the Council, especially to those responsible for planning.

Discussion took place on the circumstances leading to tenancy failure by care leavers and the importance of semi independent accommodation, especially for younger care leavers, as an opportunity to gain life skills before moving to fully independent accommodation. The meeting noted the input from the Children in Care Council representative. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations emphasised that, if possible, foster placements were retained for young people until post 18 mindful that there was a background of young care leavers losing their accommodation and becoming homeless as a result of premature entry into the adult world. Members concurred with this approach, drawing on personal family experience in support of young people remaining in

foster care with their families whenever possible and until they were suitably experienced.

The Panel welcomed the report and expressed its support for the content.

RESOLVED

that an update report relating to the Improvement Plan being developed by the Corporate parenting Operations Group be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel in October 2015.

NOTED

- 1 the closer operational collaboration between Housing and Children's Services colleagues in order to improve the Council's approach to housing and supporting Care Leavers/Looked After Children;**
- 2 the need to provide for-:**
 - a) access to accommodation (supported housing and permanent settled accommodation) including needs assessment, advice and problem resolution**
 - b) access to appropriate support services to enable young people to secure and then maintain their accommodation**
 - c) Tenancy Sustainment, to manage risk and avoid tenancy failure or crisis**
- 3 the wider context in which the Housing Service operates to provide services to a broader cohort of Young People requiring housing assistance;**
- 4 the commitment of colleagues in the Social Care, Health and Housing Directorate to the establishment of a Corporate Parenting Operations Group, its proposed Terms of Reference and the proposed Improvement Plan;**
- 5 the importance of additional provision of accommodation based supported housing services for young people, that can be achieved through the affordable housing programme and the Housing Service Investment Plan, where the aims are specifically:**
 - a) to create new supply so as to improve access to mainstream accommodation with support**
 - b) to create new supply so as to improve access to supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds and 18+ Care Leavers.**

CPP/14/25. **Central Bedfordshire Council Looked After Children Annual Health Report - 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014**

The Panel considered a report from the Director of Nursing and Quality NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG) describing the achievements, progress and challenges of the Looked After Children (LAC) health service in meeting the health needs of Central Bedfordshire's children and young people in care and care leavers during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. Key developments for 2013/14 were also detailed in the report.

The Chairman advised Members that the author of the report, the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, was unable to attend the Panel due to illness and so the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations would present highlights of the report on her behalf.

The Assistant Director drew Members' attention to the following issues:

- The large increase in out of county placements and the delays or poor quality experienced by many of the children and young people with their Review Health Assessments due to the level of service provided by the external health providers. In response the BCCG had reviewed the commissioning arrangements for 2014/15
- The working hours of the Designated Nurse had been increased from 0.6 whole time equivalent to full time. Whilst this represented a positive development the Designated Doctor's working hours remained at four hours a week which failed to reflect both the service demand and the need for clinical leadership
- A short questionnaire (the Health Assessment Service User Questionnaire) had been developed by the Designated Nurse for children and young people to complete to provide feedback on service provision
- Mental health support was not as strong as it should be and service provision was being recommissioned
- Partnership development of a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Pathway which had been finalised in September 2013. Though the Questionnaire had revealed that LAC were mainly happy and settled improvements were still required compared to the Central Bedfordshire's statistical neighbours.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations concluded by stating that the report was, overall, positive with good working between teams and good communications.

A Member stated that the six monthly Review Health Assessments for LAC failed to meet the required deadlines and she queried whether it would be possible to improve GP's assessment rate to overcome this issue. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that there had been significant improvements in this field to the extent that the Central Bedfordshire stood at 94.7% in 2013/14 in comparison to the statistical neighbour average in 2012/13 of 86.3%. The Chairman requested that the Panel's thanks be formally recorded for this improvement.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the time taken to refer LAC with mild to moderate mental health issues to appropriate services. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting acknowledged that difficulties existed with regard to timescales but assured the meeting that alternative provision would be used if necessary. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations added that the Early Intervention Children Looked After Service (EICLAS) was commissioned to provide an early intervention service but a new contract was due to be issued and it was anticipated that the new service provider would provide significant improvements.

Further comments and queries followed.

NOTED

the Looked After Children Annual Health Report for 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.30 a.m. and concluded at 1.00 p.m.)