

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Monday, 1 December 2014

### **PRESENT**

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

Cllrs M A G Versallion (Chairman)  
Mrs A Barker  
D Bowater  
Mrs S A Goodchild  
A M Turner (in place of A L Dodwell)

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

Mr N Costin – Head of Housing Solutions  
Mrs S Harrison – Director of Children's Services

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

Mrs H Philips MBE

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

A L Dodwell  
N B Costin

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

Mrs J Dickinson – Head of Leisure and Libraries  
Mrs J Ogley – Director of Social Care, Health and Housing  
Mr T Keaveny – Assistant Director Housing Services

|                         |                 |   |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Officers in Attendance: | Ms A Craig      | – Practice Manager Fostering                        |
|                         | Ms J Edwards    | – Virtual School Head                               |
|                         | Mr K Harvey     | – Head of Service Children with Disabilities        |
|                         | Mr G Jones      | – Assistant Director Children's Services Operations |
|                         | Ms E Kilcommins | – Commissioning Manager                             |
|                         | Mr L Manning    | – Committee Services Officer                        |
|                         | Miss H Redding  | – Assistant Director School Improvement             |
|                         | Ms M Short      | – Participation Officer                             |
|                         | Mrs J Singh     | – Adoption Practice Manager                         |
|                         | Mr E Wong       | – Head of Corporate Parenting                       |

Others in Attendance: Children in Care Council Representatives  
SEND Representatives  
Ms E Orchard – Project Reseacher, Shortland-Palmer  
Consultancy  
Mr B Palmer – SEND Consultant, Shortland-Palmer  
Consultancy  
Ms S Walker – Project Manager, Shortland-Palmer  
Consultancy

CPP/14/26. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 13 October 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/14/27. **Members' Interests**

Councillor Mrs A Barker declared an interest as a member of the Council's Adoption Panel.

CPP/14/28. **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman welcomed the Director of Children's Services to her first meeting of the Panel.

The Chairman referred to the recent Looked After Children awards evening on 24 October which he described as the best held too date. He congratulated those involved; in particular the Children in Care Council and the Assistant Director of Children's Services Operations.

CPP/14/29. **Engagement and Involvement of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

The Panel considered a report which set out how Children's Services were responding to the requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014 to include children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the development of the Local Offer. Members were aware that the Local Offer set out, in one place, information about the local provision of education, health and social care for children and young people who had special educational needs or were disabled.

A copy of a paper setting out an overview of the SEND participation project as well as learning, recommendations and structures was attached at Appendix A to the report and a slide pack by the Shortland-Palmer Consultancy entitled 'The *'Effective and Meaningful'* Participation of Children and Young People with SEND' was attached at Appendix B.

The Head of Service Children with Disabilities introduced the report, explaining the role played by parents and carers of children and young people with SEND in the form of a parent carer forum known as the Special Needs Action Panel (SNAP). He also described the commissioning of the Shortland-Palmer Consultancy to begin the work of ensuring that effective and meaningful participation for children and young people with SEND was evident in the reforms.

The Shortland-Palmer SEND Consultant, Project Manager and Project Researcher then worked through the appendices highlighting and developing aspects of the project and its aim of producing a strategy for the effective and meaningful participation of children and young people with SEND in the decisions that affect them as individuals.

Full discussion took place on various related issues including developments in other local authorities, funding, implementing cultural change to involve children and young people in decision making and assisting individuals to reach their potential, the involvement of children and young people with SEND within the CiCC and the extent to which children and young people with SEND could obtain their independence.

In conclusion the Chairman expressed his appreciation of the time and effort taken on the project and looked forward to receiving a further report on this matter in 2015.

#### **NOTED**

**the progress made by Children's Services in responding to the requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014 and, in particular, in implementing the engagement and involvement of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities to enable them to contribute to the Local Offer.**

#### CPP/14/30. **Children in Care Council - Update**

The Panel received a verbal update from two Children in Care Council (CiCC) representatives. The report focused on the latest edition of the CiCC newsletter 'Say It Loud' and copies were circulated at the meeting.

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

Following the introduction to the newsletter discussion took place on a number of issues including the recruitment of additional Looked After Children to the CiCC, the contribution by CiCC members in helping to train ASYE (assessed and supported year in employment) social workers and participation in the introduction to a Central Bedfordshire Council DVD.

A Member referred to the article in the newsletter on the Looked After Children awards evening on 24 October and commented on how successful it had been. She added that a number of professional people had been present and that

their attendance, on a Friday evening, reflected the high regard in which the event was held.

**NOTED**

**the verbal report.**

CPP/14/31. **Out of County Residential Placements**

The Panel received a slide pack setting out the use of residential placements outside Central Bedfordshire for some Looked After Children together with the related monitoring and quality assurance measures that were undertaken.

The Commissioning Manager worked through the slides drawing Members' attention to particular points of interest. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stressed that the use of out of county residential placements arose because of the need to match the specific, complex needs of some Looked After Children with the most appropriate residential homes. However, the meeting was also advised that, whilst some children's needs required access to a national resource, consideration was currently being given to the possible relocation of others back to local residential care within Bedfordshire.

In response to a Member's query regarding the standard of health care provided to those Looked After Children in out of county placements the Commissioning Officer explained that that they received the same level of medical attention as the children in Bedfordshire and standards were monitored through the submission of monthly outcome reports on each child. Social care professionals were also updated on annual check ups and outcomes related to these.

The Member then referred to the proposed possible relocation of some children to local residential homes within Bedfordshire and the possible negative impact on those children who had settled and established friendships in their out of county placements. In response the Director of Children's Services explained that the individual circumstances of each child would be considered before any decision was made to relocate.

In response to a Member's query regarding regular and regulatory visits to children in out of county placements the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that such checks took place at least every six weeks but, based on individual requirements, could occur more often. Their aim was to establish that the placement was, and remained, suitable for the child.

**NOTED**

**the slidepack setting out the use of out of county placements for some Looked After Children and the related monitoring and quality assurance measures.**

CPP/14/32. **Interim Report of the Virtual School for Looked After Children**

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided information on the role of the Virtual School for Looked After Children and the indicative outcomes for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire in the Academic Year 2013/14. In addition the report identified the steps taken since September 2013 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and identified the next stages of its development.

The Assistant Director School Improvement and Virtual School Head worked through the report introducing and developing the information contained under the following headings:

- The Virtual School
- Background
- Exclusions
- Attendance
- Pupil's Achievement  
(including Key Stage 1 provisional results 2013/14, Key Stage 2 provisional results 2014, Key Stage 4 provisional results 2014)
- Governance
- Priority actions for 2014/15

Members' attention was drawn to how schools used the Pupil Premium funding to improve the progress and outcomes of Looked After Children. The meeting was advised that the Pupil Premium had been increased to £1900 per pupil in April 2014 and that how, after consultation with schools and other stakeholders, it had been agreed that the Virtual School would retain £400 from the £1900 allocated to each pupil. The remaining £1500 would be given to schools on a termly basis to support them in raising educational achievement whilst schools could request additional funding to support Looked After Children, if needed, using the clearly defined application process.

With regard to permanent exclusions the meeting noted that the national comparative data would be released later in December 2014 and it would be included in the Virtual School annual report in March 2015.

The Assistant Director School Improvement advised the meeting of the forthcoming introduction of a Pupil Premium for pre-school children and the support for the introduction of a Pupil Premium to be paid to students post 16 as there was nothing currently in place for this age group. The Virtual School Head referred to the significant positive impact the latter would have for students if it were to proceed.

A Member queried the level and type of support offered to foster carers who were experiencing challenging behaviour by Looked After Children with regard to school attendance. In response the Virtual School Head, whilst acknowledging the emotional problems so often experienced by Looked After Children, stressed that expectations of such children should be the same as those living with their birth parents. She explained that a package of measures

to assist children could be provided, as could alternative pathways, with each case being considered on an individual basis. The Head of Corporate Parenting added that foster carers were supported by social workers.

The Chairman referred to the performance by Year 11 Looked After Children in GCSE English and mathematics and discussion took place on whether the level of attainment could be improved. Some Members expressed concern that expectations were set too high and that it was unrealistic to expect all children to reach the required standard. In response, however, the Virtual School Head explained that a support system was offered to students to assist them and that expectations of examination performance were based on the outcomes of the children in Year 6. She emphasised that Looked After Children should be given the opportunity to reach their potential.

Further discussion on this issue including the cause of the disengagement by some Looked After Children in Year 11 which adversely affected their examination results. A Children in Care Council representative commented that disengagement took place because of the feeling of uncertainty regarding future direction.

#### **NOTED**

**the progress made to date through the work of the Virtual School in improving the educational achievements by Looked After Children and the measures identified to develop the role of the School in order to further improve the academic outcomes of Looked After Children in the future.**

#### CPP/14/33. **Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter Two (July to September 2014).

The report contained updates on the following areas:

- Recruitment of Foster Carers
- Assessments
- Referrals/Placements
- Training
- Ofsted Notifications
- Allegations
- Complaints
- Complements
- Great Dads Award
- Conclusion

The Practice Manager Fostering introduced the report and highlighted items for Members' attention. She referred to the apparently high number of Ofsted notifications which had taken place as a result of what were defined as

'significant events' occurring, such as a child going missing or a serious accident or emergency. However, she added that the current logging procedure generated a false impression of the number of significant events and the procedure was to be revised.

Turing next to fostering placements the Practice Manager Fostering stated that there had been an increase of 29 available placements in comparison to the beginning of April. This had been achieved through the commitment and hard work of the fostering team and resource team working with foster carers to expand their approval range and support them in taking on more children.

Members noted the positive developments in relation to placements including the increase in the number of children living with in-house foster carers compared to the last quarter, up from 86 to 99. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations commented, however, that the recruitment of in-house foster carers at a level which would meet the target figure remained a challenge.

Last, the Chairman praised the 'Celebration of Fostering' event held in recognition of those carers who had been fostering for many years and how the event had been genuinely appreciated by the participants.

#### **NOTED**

**the content of the Quarter Two report on the Fostering Service for the period July to September 2014.**

#### **CPP/14/34. Six Monthly Report on the Adoption Service - April to September 2014**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined the activity in the adoption service over the six month period from April to September 2014.

The six month update, attached at Appendix A to the report, covered the following areas:

- Introduction
- Children and Adoption
- Adopters
- Adoption Support Services
- Other Activities
- Conclusion

For Members' benefit the Adoption Practice Manager introduced the report. She drew Members' attention to the reduction 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 represented the first decrease in three years. In connection with this issue the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations advised the Panel of the impact of recent case law on adoption rates and the current national debate on adoption.

**NOTED**

**the content of the six monthly report on the Adoption Service for the period April to September 2014.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.30 a.m. and concluded at 1.05 p.m.)