



Appendix A

# **Fostering Agency**

**Annual Report**

**For the period  
2014 - 2015**

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## SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 This has been the first year that Central Bedfordshire Council has operated as a single agency following the disaggregation of the shared service with Bedford Borough Council on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013. This report describes the activities of Central Bedfordshire Council Fostering Service between the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015.
- 1.0.2 The report will note the Fostering Agency's achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of its work and identify recommendations for the development of the service. Attached to the report is the Fostering Panel Chair's report and the Panel Activity Statistics.
- 1.0.3 The Fostering Service along with the Adoption Service moved to Stephenson Court in Bedford, (where they are currently based), on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2014 becoming part of the Corporate Parenting Service.
- 1.0.4 The Fostering Service introduced a Fees Scheme for foster carers on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 whereby foster carers not only received an allowance to care for any children placed but a fee on top of the allowance. This is a tiered fees scheme which relates to the foster carers length of service and training completed. It is in recognition of the work foster carers do and is hoped to encourage them to develop their skills and knowledge as foster carers.

### 1.1 STAFFING/SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The Fostering Service was made up of the following full-time equivalent staff as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015:
- 1 x Practice Manager
  - 2 x Team Manager
  - 4.7 x Senior Social Workers
  - 9.4 x Social Workers
  - 1 x Senior Social Work Assistant
  - 1 x Training Co-ordinator for Fostering and Adoption
  - 1 x .81 Recruitment and Marketing Manager for Fostering and Adoption
- 1.1.2 The service is supported by 2 full time administrators.
- 1.1.3 The workforce is diverse and includes staff of both genders, and from different European and black and minority ethnic groups.
- 1.1.4 All staff have access to the Council's extensive learning and development programme, and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. The Council's Learning and Development Programme also provides diversity training for staff in order to ensure they understand and address issues of diversity when working with foster carers and children in care. Staff are encouraged to embrace and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.
- 1.1.5 Most staff have extensive post-qualifying experience, and a programme of induction and additional support is in place for those newly-qualified or in the early years of their social work career.
- 1.1.6 The Fostering Service is supported by specialist staff who work across the Fostering, Adoption and Placement and Resources Teams. These staff include, placement and

resource officers who are responsible for making placements and foster care payments. There is a Recruitment and Marketing Manager and Training coordinator who work across the Fostering and Adoption Services. Panel Advisors and Secretaries are also in post to support the Fostering and Permanence Panel and Adoption Panel.

## **SECTION 2 – THE PANELS**

### **2.1 REPORT FROM FOSTERING PANEL CHAIR**

- 2.1.1 The attached Fostering Panel Chair's Report (Appendix B), includes valuable information and feedback on the function of panel business. Statistical information regarding panel business is attached (Appendix C). All areas of improvement highlighted in the Panel Chair's Report will be taken forward in the Corporate Parenting Plan.

## **SECTION 3 – SPECIALISED FOSTERING**

### **3.1 THE FAMILY LINK SCHEME**

- 3.1.1 The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability. Family Link carers are foster carers who are recruited, approved and trained in the same way as other foster carers. They receive regular support and guidance from a supervising social worker.
- 3.1.2 Family Link Foster Carers can care for a child in their own home, the child's home or by taking the child to an activity. Periods of short breaks will be carefully planned and can be for a few hours occasionally or whole weekends on a regular basis.
- 3.1.3 Once agreement has been given for the care package from the Resource Panel, a careful process of matching takes place, taking into account the individual needs of the child and their family and the carer's abilities.
- 3.1.4 On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, there were 7 Family Link carers approved. These carers were supporting 10 children by providing regular short breaks. There was also 1 salaried family link fee-based carer who was linked to 4 children and 1 adult who had complex medical needs.

### **3.2 THE YOUTH CARE SCHEME**

- 3.2.1 The Youth Care Scheme is a comprehensive and enhanced fee paid scheme which provides specialist care to young people over the age of 10 years who have needs which are particularly challenging or complex.
- 3.2.2 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, there were 6 approved Youth Care households, caring for 8 children.

## SECTION 4 – CHILDREN AND FOSTERING

### 4.1 CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

- 4.1.1 Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, the Fostering Service received a total of 281 referrals for foster placements of which 107 were for children becoming newly looked after, 94 were for a change of placement. The remainder 80 referrals did not proceed either because Section 20 agreement was withdrawn or Court Orders were not granted as anticipated.
- 4.1.2 Of the 107 newly accommodated children 54 were placed with in-house career foster carers, 22 were placed temporarily with Family and Friends foster carers under Regulation 24 (Fostering Regulations 2011) or fully approved Family and Friends foster carers, 20 were placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (I.F.A.'s), 2 were placed in children's homes, 2 were placed in parent and child units, 5 were placed in semi independent living and the remaining 2 were placed by the Police in Secure Training Centres.
- 4.1.3 The referral for the child includes the matching criteria that are essential and preferable when looking for a placement for a child, and a risk assessment is also considered. This is crucial to identifying which carers may be able to support a child. Where a placement does not meet the essential criteria or where any identified risks cannot be managed an alternative placement is sought.
- 4.1.4 Respite placements were provided as and when needed on 55 occasions. In addition 5 children had regular monthly respite as part of their care plan. Youth Care placements were provided with 16 periods of respite as part of the Youth Care agreement.
- 4.1.5 Of the new referrals for foster placements, 16 came through the Emergency Duty Service. This is the same number as the previous year although it is difficult to make comparisons with previous years as the service was shared with Bedford Borough Council until the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013.
- 4.1.6 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were a total of 105 children living with in-house foster carers (compared to 93 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014) and 90 living in Independent Fostering Agency provision (compared to 108 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014). This represents 54% children placed with in-house carers (compared to 46% as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014) and 46% with I.F.A.'s (compared to 54% as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014) This means that over the year there has been a 14% increase in the number of children being placed in house and a 17% reduction in numbers of children in I.F.A. provision. This has been achieved not only by the increase in number of career carers being approved, but also in supporting existing foster carers to consider changes in their approval so as to enable them to care for a wider variety of children and increase the number of children they can care for. This has enabled CBC to make significant savings in terms of placement costs as more children have been accommodated in house which is a much cheaper option than placing children in I.F.A. placements. As a result of this success consideration may be needed in the next financial year regarding recruiting additional supervising social workers in order to appropriately support/supervise the additional foster carers being approved.

## 4.2 AGE, GENDER AND ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

4.2.1 Over half the children accommodated between the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> April 2015 were aged 0-5 years, the age distribution was as follows:

0-5 years	55 children
6-12 years	28 children
13-18 years	24 young people

4.2.2 The age profile of children accommodated this year is similar to 2013/2014

4.2.3 Of the 107 children accommodated between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, 55 were female and 52 male.

4.2.4 In terms of recording of ethnicity of the 107 children accommodated between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, 78 were White/British, 4 were White/European, 1 was White/Traveller, was White/Black Caribbean, 1 was White/Asian, 2 were White/Other, 1 was Asian, 3 were Asian/British, 4 were Asian/Pakistani, 1 was British/Black Caribbean, 4 were Black/African, 1 was Black/British, 1 was Eritrean, 1 was Iranian, 2 were Kurdish and 2 were mixed race.

## 4.3 SIBLING GROUPS OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR FOSTERING

4.3.1 There were 17 sibling groups within the children referred for fostering during the year. One of the significant criteria for matching children with carers is enabling them to be placed with siblings wherever possible. 2 of the sibling groups comprised 3 or more children. Large sibling groups are more difficult to match with suitable foster placements, particularly when seeking to place them together, which is the aim wherever possible.

## 4.4 CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT AT 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2015

4.4.1 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, there were 105 fostering households with full fostering approval, 28 of which were Family and Friends carers (Connected Persons) or Regulation 24 carers (temporary approval).

4.4.2 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 a total of 105 children were placed with in-house foster carers (compared to 93 as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014), while 90 children were placed in IFA placements (compared to 108 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014).

4.4.3 Central Bedfordshire Council is in a regional Framework Agreement for the commissioning of placements in Independent Fostering Agencies. This agreement sets out quality and cost standards for placements with 18 preferred providers. This agreement has enabled the Council to reduce the average costs of placements and there are clearer expectations in respect of quality and outcome for children.

4.4.4 The number of children in external placements over recent years had significantly increased, however, this trend is now changing. With the re-launch of the Fostering Service as a single agency, with the introduction of a fees scheme and with significant work being undertaken with existing foster carers to expand/increase their approval range this financial year has seen

a significant increase in the number of children placed with in house foster carers and therefore less reliance on I.F.A. placements. As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were 14% more children placed in house compared to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were 17% less children in I.F.A. placements compared to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014.

## **SECTION 5 – FOSTER CARERS**

### **5.1 FOSTERING ENQUIRIES**

- 5.1.1 In 2014/15, there were 244 enquiries by people who were interested in becoming Foster Carers compared with 164 in 2013 -14 when the Service was a shared one with Bedford Borough. This is a 49% increase and is an impressive increase considering the Service is now a single agency with half the staff in place.
- 5.1.2 The best 3 months for enquiries were May 2014 with 45, January 2015 with 36, then September with 24. The worst 3 months were August 2014 with 4, November 2014 with 6 and February 2015 with 7.

### **5.2 THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR FOSTER CARERS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS**

- 5.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and their Statutory and Practice Guidance. All prospective foster carers are required to attend in-depth preparation training as part of the preparation and assessment process.

In terms of assessments started between April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 and March 31<sup>st</sup> 2015 there were 109. These assessments would have been a mixture of Regulation 24 assessments, full Family and Friends assessments, Career Carer assessments or Special Guardianship assessments. During the year there were 28 requests to agree temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer to allow an immediate placement (Regulation 24 of Care Planning, Placements and Care Review (England) Regulation 2010). 22 of these carers were given temporary approval and went on to be fully assessed as Family and Friend carers. 6 of these Regulation 24 placements were not agreed.

### **5.3 ETHNICITY OF CARERS**

- 5.3.1 At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, there were a total of 192 foster carers living within 105 households. The breakdown of ethnicity regarding these carers were described as follows: 169 were White/British, 2 were White/Irish, 1 was White/European, 5 were White/Other, 3 were Asian/Indian, 5 were Black/African, 4 were Black/Caribbean, 1 was Mixed/Black, 1 was White/Black, 1 was described as Other.

## **SECTION 6 – TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FOSTER CARERS**

6.0 All foster carers are expected to attend relevant training recommended by their supervising social worker. The service has a full and comprehensive training programme for carers, from preparation training, through induction and core training through to more complex post-approval training.

### **6.1 SKILLS TO FOSTER**

6.1.1 New fostering applicants have many questions prior to and during the assessment process. As an essential part of the fostering assessment, the 'Skills to Foster' course examines issues that are relevant, such as what it will be like to have children placed with them, or working in tandem with the local authority in order to reach positive outcomes for children.

6.1.2 Spread over several dates, this course provides an opportunity for prospective carers to reflect on their values and attitudes to caring and learn more about the skills and attributes needed to become a foster carer.

6.1.3 During 2014/2015, the Fostering Service ran 3 'Skills to Foster' courses for career carers with 25 delegates attending. In addition, 3 preparation training courses were offered to family and friends foster carers with 25 delegates attending.

6.1.4 As part of the application and assessment process, all applicants must complete an Emergency First Aid course. 8 courses were held during 2014/2015 and these were attended by a total of 42 delegates.

### **6.2 SONS AND DAUGHTERS**

6.2.1 The Fostering Service run holiday activities for sons and daughters of foster carers which are activity based and aimed to support them with the impact of fostering on their family. This year two events took place, one event was to an indoor trampoline centre (13 children attended) and the other was to a Christmas Pantomime (17 children attended).

### **6.3 INDUCTION**

6.3.1 Following approval, foster carers enter their 12 month induction phase into the service and are required to complete Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards. The implementation of the standards has been supported by ongoing workshops for carers alongside group supervision for supporting social workers. Aside from having the opportunity to meet members of the service who work with looked after children, there are also opportunities to ask questions and receive essential information about the agency's policies and procedures. In addition, carers are made familiar with the comprehensive training opportunities available throughout their fostering career.

## **6.4 THE FOSTERING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

- 6.4.1 Each year, the service devises a comprehensive training programme covering a wide range of topics to help foster carers develop their skills and knowledge. There were a total of 43 different courses on 24 subjects held over the year.
- 6.4.2 Each carer is required to have a record of their training and development needs, although other alternatives to formal training courses are encouraged in order to meet the minimum standards. This can include home study, training, reading and on-line training. This can be especially helpful for carers who find it hard to attend training dates. There is also the opportunity for carers to complete an NVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People or BTEC in Advanced Foster Care Skills.
- 6.4.3 In total, 382 delegates attended training courses held over the year, which is an increase on the previous year. Whilst this was mainly approved foster carers, 78 prospective foster carers attended training and 9 others in the carers support network i.e. children of foster carers also attended some training. This demonstrates the commitment that the agency has towards training foster carers and illustrates the willingness of carers to develop their own knowledge and skill base.
- 6.4.4 As at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 a total of 69 households had completed their TSD standards. 21 were yet to complete their portfolio's but still had time to address within the required timescales. 2 households were overdue in completing their TSD portfolios and social workers and the training officer were working with these households to address.

## **SECTION 7 – SUPPORT FOR CARERS**

- 7.0.1 Every foster carer in the Service receives regular supervision and support from a Fostering Social Worker. In addition, the agency provides foster carers with an Independent Advise and Mediation Service which is provided via The Fostering Network, a national organisation for foster carers. There are local support groups held regularly for foster carers across the County and a specific support group for the Youth Carers. Social events are provided such as the annual Celebration of Fostering Event, fish and chip suppers or cheese and wine evenings. Foster carers also have access to a telephone support service out of office hours which is provided by staff from within the Fostering Service. Foster carers can also access the Bedfordshire Foster Care Association, which is run by foster carers, for foster carers.
- 7.0.2 All new carers are matched to a foster carer mentor who provides formal and practical guidance and support through the carer's first placement and beyond.

### **7.1 FOSTER CARER SUPPORT GROUPS**

- 7.1.1 Foster Carers' Support Groups meet regularly in north, mid and south of the county. A total of 38 support groups ran during the year with 273 delegates. Additional and regular support groups were also provided for Youth Carers. Many of these support groups had speakers on relevant subjects. Although educational, foster carers were also able to enjoy socialising with other foster carers in an informal setting.
- 7.1.2 The number of Family and Friends foster carers becoming Special Guardianship Order (S.G.O.) carers is increasing year on year. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were 114 S.G.O.'s in

place compared to 82 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. The majority of S.G.O. carers do not receive ongoing support (apart from a financial allowance) as they access universal services. There are, however, a small number of families who contact the Service for specific support when issues arise. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 the Fostering Service worked with 29 families. The areas of support requested from families were as follows:

• Contact	10
• Behavioural management issues	7
• Financial support	6
• Support at meetings	2
• Housing	1
• Respite Care	1
• Impact on other children in the household	1
• S.G.O. breakdown	1

7.1.3 Support regarding the above requests has generally included phone calls, visits to the carers' home or attendance at meetings in order to support/advocate on behalf of the carers and have been very short pieces of work which have been in response to support requested.

7.1.4 A support group specifically for Family and Friends carers was held on 3 Saturdays in June, September and December but due to low numbers attending it is planned for 2015/16 to open this up to include other foster carers who may also benefit from attending a support group at the weekend.

7.1.5 Foster Carers Talk Time is organised every 3 months (previously known as the foster carers forum). These meetings give foster carers the opportunity to meet with managers and senior managers to discuss fostering issues. It also allows the Corporate Parenting Service to update foster carers on developments within the service. Following the Talk Time meeting a newsletter is sent out to all foster carers updating them of areas discussed at Talk Time as well as providing information on a whole host of other topics relevant to fostering.

7.1.6 The annual Foster Carers Celebration of Fostering Event was held in September 2014 which was well attended by foster carers, their children and children in care. Staff and elected members also attended, including the Chief Executive, Deputy Director for Children's Services and the Councillor with portfolio for Looked After Children. Long service awards were presented on the evening to 5 sets of foster carers who had fostered for 5 years and to 3 sets of foster carers who had fostered for 15 years. New awards were introduced this year in the following categories: Outstanding contribution to caring for children with disabilities, Outstanding contribution to Fostering, My Brilliant Foster Carer and My Brilliant Family and Friends Foster Carer.

## 7.2 THE MENTORING SCHEME

7.2.1 The Fostering Service offers peer mentoring to all new and existing carers. This service for carers, staffed by carers, offers encouragement, support, and opportunities for collaborative working. It also allows experienced foster carers the chance to develop professionally.

7.2.2 Carers who join the scheme are linked with a mentor who is an experienced foster carer themselves. Mentors are trained to support foster carers in their role. As well as offering support to new carers, sometimes mentoring can be offered to experienced carers when they are undergoing a particularly challenging time. The service currently has 5 mentors who have varying experiences of fostering, including age ranges and types of approval.

### 7.3 THE OUT OF HOURS SERVICE

7.3.1 Fostering Managers and Social Workers from the Fostering Service offer an 'out of hours' telephone service for foster carers. A mobile telephone number has been dedicated to this service and all carers have access to the number. The service is available from 5.20pm – 11pm weekdays and from 9am-11pm during weekends and bank holidays. This service ensures that foster carers can readily access telephone support from an experienced fostering worker. Feedback from foster carers indicates that this service is highly valued. Outside these hours foster carers can contact the Emergency Duty Team.

### 7.4 THE FOSTER CARERS ASSOCIATION

7.4.1 The Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association is run by foster carers and provides local support and social activities for foster carers. The Council actively encourages and supports the Association and provides financial support and services in kind to assist with producing and circulating a quality newsletter. With the disaggregation of Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough's Fostering Service, Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association continues and has widened its remit. As well as supporting carers from the 2 Local Authorities they now work closely with carers from I.F.A.'s in the local area too.

### 7.5 BAAF AND THE FOSTERING NETWORK

7.5.1 Central Bedfordshire Council is a full member of the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) which is a leading national voluntary organisation working to promote best practice for children separated from their birth families. It is the leading organisation representing local authority and independent fostering agencies and provides training courses, practice guidance, research material, and a consultation and advice service to all its members.

7.5.2 The Fostering Service is a corporate member of The Fostering Network that works to promote fostering in the UK. All approved foster carers are also provided with individual membership, funded by the Fostering Service. During this year the Fostering Service also provided foster carers with an independent Advise and Mediation Service which carers could access via The Fostering Network.

### 7.6 NOTIFICATIONS

7.6.1 The Fostering Service has to notify Ofsted (Schedule 7) of any significant events, accidents or incidents that occur for children whilst placed in foster care.

7.6.2 Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were 19 notifications sent to Ofsted. Notification categories were as follows:-

- A child placed with foster parents is missing from placement (11 for less than 24 hours; 2 between 1-6 days; 1 between 1-28 days) - 14
- Children requiring hospitalisation - 3
- Incident necessitating call the police - 1
- Child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster carers - 1

It is important to note that although 14 children were recorded as missing, some of these should actually have been recorded as unauthorised absences.

## 7.7 ALLEGATIONS

- 7.7.1 Allegations against foster carers are dealt with in accordance with local Safeguarding Children's Board procedures for managing allegations and concerns about Foster Carers. All foster carers, subject to any allegation, are offered independent support from the Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation Service.
- 7.7.2 Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were 4 allegations of misconduct made against foster carers.
- 1 Section 47 enquiry was made in May 2014 regarding CBC Family and Friends Foster Carers living in Wales in relation to caring for 2 children aged 7 and 6. The concerns were in relation to emotional and physical abuse. The children were removed, a Section 47 Investigation was instigated, the outcome of which was that the allegations were substantiated and the foster carers' approval was terminated.
  - The 3 other allegations made were all referred for the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) but did not reach the threshold for investigation.

## 7.8 COMPLAINTS

- 7.8.1 The Fostering Service uses the Children's Services Complaints Procedure for dealing with and monitoring complaints by foster carers, birth parents and relatives, staff and other partners with a relevant interest in the way CBC fostering services are provided.
- 7.8.2 Between April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 and the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 there were 6 complaints made about the Fostering Service, 2 from a birth parent/family member, 3 from existing foster carers and 1 from a prospective foster carer.
- 7.8.3 Out of these complaints the overall outcomes were that 2 complaints were upheld and 4 were partially upheld.

## 7.9 COMPLIMENTS

- 7.9.1 Compliments about service delivery from customers and for their representatives are recorded within the service as these, along with complaints and comments, can be shared to promote learning and improvement.
- 7.9.2 Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 the Fostering Service received 15 compliments: 6 were from foster carers praising the support they received from individuals within the fostering team; 1 was from a foster carer who had attended a Talktime meeting with senior managers who stated; "how refreshing to discuss matters so dear to foster carers

hearts and to feel heard". Assessing social workers also received compliments, with 1 Family and Friends Carer stating "thank you for your help, guidance and understanding through what had been a difficult and often tearful assessment". Another Special Guardianship Order carer stated "thanks for everything you have done for us and E (the child), words cannot describe how we feel". Fostering panel also provided positive feedback on assessing social workers assessments. Other compliments included IRO's (Independent Reviewing Officers), or childcare social workers regarding the excellent care provided by our in house foster carers.

## 7.10 OFSTED

- 7.10.1 Ofsted last inspected the Fostering Service in December 2012 when the service was judged to be good overall.
- 7.10.2 Ofsted have now changed their format for inspections so the Fostering Service will no longer have a stand alone inspection. Ofsted will now inspect the Fostering Service as part of the Children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers Inspection process. Inspections now take place at any time and one is likely to take place in the near future.

## SECTION 8 – CONCLUSION

- 8.0.1 This has been a successful year for the Fostering Service. There have been many changes that have taken place i.e. the Fostering Service moving offices and becoming part of the Corporate Parenting Service. New initiatives have been introduced such as the foster carers fees scheme and the service has totally re-branded. The main focus for the Service this year has been to increase the number of in-house foster carers as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 there were more children placed in I.F.A. placements (54%) than there were in house (46%). These figures have now reversed with 54% of children in house and 46% in I.F.A.'s (54%). The Service has met its recruitment target to recruit a net gain of 10 foster carers for the year which has also enabled significant savings to be made in terms of placement costs as we now have less reliance on I.F.A. placements. With the growing number of foster carers already recruited in 2014/15 and with the new recruitment target set for 2015/16 the Service will need to recruit additional supervising social workers to ensure that new and existing foster carers receive the high standard of support/supervision they currently receive in order for them to undertake their fostering role appropriately.
- 8.0.2 This year has seen a number of foster carers and children of foster carers receive local and national recognition for the work they do in relation to fostering. A number of male carers received local recognition for their roles as male carers/role models as part of Central Bedfordshire's 'Great Dads' initiative. Fostering Network (one of the leading national voluntary organisation focusing on fostering) also gave recognition to 1 foster carer in relation to her outstanding contribution to fostering and to 3 sons and daughters of foster carers in recognition of their contribution to fostering and support to their parents as foster carers.
- 8.0.3 Whilst Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough have now disaggregated the two Local Authorities continue to work in partnership as there are still children placed across in each others locality/authority and the services continue to work together in relation to these children as well as on other initiatives such as training and recruitment.

- 8.0.4 Regulation 24., family and friends and S.G.O. placements have continued to present challenges to the service mainly in terms of the increased number coming through, the tight court timescales needed to assess, the complexity often involved in this area of work but also in terms of the number of different types of assessments often needed for one family i.e. Viability, Reg. 24, Full Family and Friends and S.G.O. Whilst this has created a lot of work for the Service a large number of children have been able to move out of the care system when S.G.O.'s have been granted. With the number of S.G.O. carers growing significantly over recent years a review of the structure of the teams will be undertaken in the next financial year to decide whether developing a specific Family/Friends and S.G.O. team may better meet the needs of these specific carers.
- 8.0.5 The Service has provided a responsive and supportive service to foster carers as a result there have been very few allegations and complaints and a good number of compliments. In the forthcoming year the Service will continue to utilise the support and feedback from foster carers in order to develop the service so that it is not only sensitive and responsive to their needs but also continues to be child focused.
- 8.0.6 The service has to be able to respond to the identified needs of children needing placements in the Central Bedfordshire area. For the forthcoming year the Service needs to concentrate on increasing the number of in-house foster carers so that more of our children can be placed with carers who can appropriately meet their needs more locally. For 2015/16 the Service, therefore, aims to recruit 15 new fostering households (net gain) which includes Family and Friends carers for children who otherwise would be placed outside their family network.

This Report has been composed and presented for members to consider and note by:

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**Produced by Central Bedfordshire Council**

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