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## Fostering Agency Annual Report 2014/15

Report of (Cllr Hegley) Executive Member for Social Care  
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### Purpose of this report

1. The report sets out the Fostering Agency's achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of its work and identifies recommendations for the development of the service.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

1. Comment on the annual Report of the Fostering Service 2014/15
2. Members may wish to consider how they can assist in raising the profile of fostering for the Council in their Wards to help with recruitment

### Background

2. The Council has a duty to provide a range of types of placements for looked after children which meet their needs. In most cases a child's needs should be met by living in a family setting, either with someone known to them (known as a friends and family or connected person foster placement) or with foster carers.
3. The Council recruits its own foster carers, known as 'in-house' foster carers and also has the legal responsibility for assessing and approving friends and family foster carers. In order to meet the demand for placements for children in care, foster placements are also bought from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). Central Bedfordshire Council, in conjunction with Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council

has a Framework Agreement with 18 such agencies to offer suitable and sufficient IFA placements within a tight cost and quality framework.

### **Council Priorities**

4. Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable
5. The Children and Young People's Plan, Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.
6. Providing a sufficient number and range of foster placements is a key statutory responsibility to Looked After Children

### **Corporate Implications**

#### **Risk Management:**

7. Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable foster placements is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked After Children.
8. Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.
9. Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.
10. Looked after Children placements is a demand led activity. Independent Agency Placements are high cost, and variations in the proportion of independent versus in-house placements can have significant and immediate impact on forecast spend.

### **Legal Implications**

11. The Children Act 1989 identifies a statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide sufficient accommodation in their local area and to provide maintenance for children who are looked after.
12. The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the Local Authority's responsibility to ensure that foster carers are given clear information about the allowances, fees and expenses available to them. The allowance must be sufficient to cover the cost of caring for a child placed with them and must be reviewed annually.
13. The Local Authority must provide support to all foster carers according to objective criteria that do not discriminate against foster carers that have a pre-existing relationship with the child.

### **Financial Implications**

14. Overheads for the Fostering Service are fixed and will not be increased as a result of the proposed increase in number of in-house placements.

### **Outcome to 31 June 2015**

15. The New Foster Scheme has achieved all the targets set for the first year.

### **Impact of proposed variation**

16. The proposed variation clarifies the rate of allowance to be paid to Foster Carers in their respective tier bands and reflects that payments reflect appropriate skills. It will have no direct financial impact.

### **Equalities Implications**

17. Fostering allowances must meet the cost of caring for a child. The allowance scheme must ensure that any additional costs incurred in caring for a disabled child or a child with other specific needs is met.

### **Appendices**

The following Appendices are attached

Appendix 1 - Fostering Agency Annual Report 2014/15

Appendix 2 - Fostering Panel Overview Report – Panel Chair April 2014  
to March 2015

Appendix 3 - Panel Activity

### **Background Papers**

18. None