

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 21 September 2015

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs C Hegley (Chairman)
Mrs A Barker
N B Costin
Mrs S A Goodchild
T Stock
M A G Versallion
B Wells

Carers (non-voting)

Mrs H Philips MBE

Apologies for Absence: Mrs J Dickinson, Head of Leisure and Libraries
Cllr Mrs A L Dodwell, Deputy Executive Member for Social Care and Housing
Mrs S Harrison, Director of Children's Services
Mrs J Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Officers in Attendance:	Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Mrs M Short	– Participation Officer
	Mr E Wong	– Head of Corporate Parenting

Others in Attendance: Children in Care Council Representatives

Ms T McDonald	Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
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CPP/15/9. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 6 July 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPP/15/10. **Members' Interests**

None.

CPP/15/11. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman reported that she had attended the recent Celebration of Fostering event and commented on the vibrant, lively atmosphere that she had experienced there. The Chairman stated she had been able to speak to various foster carers at the event including one who had fostered 100 children over a 25 year period. She thanked the officers for organising the event.

The Chairman advised the meeting of her attendance at meetings of the Central Bedfordshire Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Children's Trust Board. She then referred to the training which had taken place in the past with regard to the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Council's role as a corporate parent and suggested that it was appropriate that further training be arranged given that there were a number of new councillors following the elections in May. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to organise this training.

CPP/15/12. Children in Care Council - Presentation

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

- The CiCC (attendance at meetings and support activities)
- Children's Commissioner
- Young Voices Review Consultation
- University of Bedfordshire Sowing the Seeds and Aim for Uni Days
- Summer Activities
- Frontline Social Work Training
- Future Work.

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

A Member stated that she would like to see the events, such as those set out under Summer Activities in the presentation, dated in future so that the Panel knew when they took place. She then sought a gender and age breakdown of the CiCC membership and the numbers involved, especially regarding those who regularly supported the CiCC. The Member sought confirmation that the experience gained by the older members, such as those representatives who attended the Panel meetings, would be passed on to the younger members of the CiCC. In response a CiCC representative explained that the same CiCC members usually attended the Panel's meetings because others were attending school or had other matters to deal with.

The Chairman suggested that a calendar of CiCC events could be of assistance to the Panel so that Members were aware of what was happening. In response the Assistant Director Children's services Operations suggested including the CiCC Forward Plan with the Panel's work programme on future agendas for this purpose.

A foster carer suggested that calendars detailing forthcoming events should be purchased for all fostered children so that they could make their preferences known to their carers. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations welcomed this suggestion.

A Member expressed concern that some children were being called out of their classes for their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) reviews and asked that this practice be limited and, if possible, ended. Another Member referred to allowing a choice of venue for the child to pick from. He also felt that the Council was interrupting children's learning in apparent contradiction to its own stance of emphasising the importance of such time. The Member then queried whether children and young people were becoming involved in the CiCC, the attendance levels and whether they continued their involvement. In response to the latter query a CiCC representative explained the action taken to encourage interest in the CiCC including a recruitment day. The Participation Officer assured the meeting that there was a strong group of 8-15 year olds coming forward within the CiCC.

With regard to the matter of venue suitability for IRO reviews the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that there were a range of possible venues to choose from, including meeting at the child's home. He acknowledged the need to be more sensitive to the child's wishes and gave a commitment that such meetings would not take place during teaching time. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations added that there were 1600 IRO reviews a year and finding a suitable time and place for all parties involved was a challenge.

A CiCC representative reported on the My Care survey and the introduction of boxes on the survey form to allow respondents to write out their views and opinions in their own words. The representative stated that the response had not been particularly good but the boxes containing the children's views had provided valuable data.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that that it was time to refresh the CiCC representation and this issue should be examined by a working group. He added that the older representatives had grown to be young adults and ambassadors and, whilst forming the backbone of the CiCC, consideration needed to be given to their ongoing role. He indicated that it was also time to recognise their unpaid hard work. He offered to show a video to the Panel illustrating the work they had undertaken.

Members congratulated the CiCC for the high standard of work the body had carried out with the Council and the contribution it had made to the wellbeing of other Looked After Children.

A CiCC representative stated that she had seen the fostering service change for the better whilst another referred to the awards they had received for helping to train social workers, how much this had meant to them and how she wanted to continue working with the Council in the future. She stressed that both representatives had not undertaken the work for financial reasons. A Member referred to the leadership and teamwork qualities displayed by the CiCC representatives and queried how the Council supported them when they

applied for jobs. In response one of the representatives explained that she was able to use various officers as references.

Members acknowledged that the CiCC representatives were older, that they had made a positive impact on the Panel and that there was a desire to know more about the CiCC's meetings and work and to become more involved in this area. The Chairman confirmed this and added that there was a positive feeling amongst the Panel to move on and that the Council's officers could assist in the refresh of CiCC representation. She also commented on the need to inform and educate the remaining Members of the Council.

A Member referred to a previous meeting where some of those young people leaving foster care had spoken to the Panel about their experiences and issues and suggested that it would be useful if this exercise were repeated.

One of the CiCC representatives reported on her experience of other care councils across the country and the differences in how they worked. She stated that it had been useful to gain awareness of these differences.

The Participation Officer advised the Panel of a forthcoming conference in London on corporate parenting. She undertook to circulate details to Members so that they could consider whether they wished to attend or not.

RESOLVED

- 1 that activities outlined in future Children in Care Council (CiCC) presentations be dated so Members are aware of when they had occurred;**
- 2 that the CiCC forward plan be included with the Panel's work programme on future agendas;**
- 3 that a calendar of forthcoming events be presented to all Looked After Children so that they can make their preferences known to their carers;**
- 4 that a video of the CiCC's work be presented to a future meeting of the Panel;**
- 5 that a selection of foster care leavers be asked to attend a meeting of the Panel to describe their experiences in care and raise any issues they have;**
- 6 that the CiCC representation on the Panel be refreshed and a working group be formed for this purpose;**
- 7 that an update report regarding resolution 6 above be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel.**

CPP/15/13. **Central Bedfordshire Council Looked After Children Annual Report - 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015**

The Panel considered a report from the Director of Nursing and Quality NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG) which described 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 2014 to 31 March 2015.

The Designated Nurse for Looked After Children first referred to the high standard of work undertaken by her predecessor, the Council's Head of Corporate Parenting and the Children in Care Council (CiCC) all of which had contributed to the outcomes recorded. She then introduced the Annual Report which covered the following areas:

- National policy and legislation
- Local context
- Profile of Bedford LAC population
- Partnership working
- Health service structure for LAC and care leavers
- Child and adolescent mental health services
- Public/health/teenage pregnancy
- Central Bedfordshire Council joint strategic needs assessment teenage pregnancy report 2015
- Performance
- Quality and audits
- Bedfordshire clinical commissioning group
- Conclusion

The Designated Nurse worked through the report highlighting particular items of interest and responded to comments, queries and requests for clarification from Members.

With particular regard to 'Table 1: Profile of Central Bedfordshire Council's Looked After Children' the Designated Nurse undertook to examine a Member's comment that the figures provided appeared to be inaccurate.

Another Member expressed some concern at the quality and clarity of the data provided in the report and asked that a greater level of information be provided on what had actually been achieved. She also requested that, in future, Annual Reports be submitted to the within three months from the end of the period that was covered and then sought reassurance that health assessments were being provided for those Looked After Children with more complicated health needs. Another Member, whilst acknowledging the overall progress made, also commented that the report lacked the information which would have allowed the Panel to undertake a fuller evaluation of the health provision during the period covered by the report. He also commented that the report failed to recognise children's mental health as a priority. In response the Designated Nurse explained the process with regard to health assessment provision and

emphasised that the service was provided by a range of professionals not just by the NHS. Further, the data relating to this was sent to the Council which could organise additional or remedial action as it felt necessary. She also reassured the meeting that mental health was a priority and outlined current developments regarding provision in this area.

The Head of Corporate Parenting advised the meeting that all Looked After Children received two health assessments during a twelve month period and this figure was above the national average. Further, the emotional well being of the children was closely monitored.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations suggested that a 'deep dive' report on Looked After Children health care provision be produced with input from the Designated Nurse, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the CiCC to allow consideration of the varied underlying issues, including financial, to be carried out by the Panel.

The meeting discussed the need to ensure that Members were briefed on all issues relating to Looked After Children to ensure that they were able to fully respond if interviewed during Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspections. The meeting also acknowledged the need for all groups and individuals working with Looked After Children to recognise and take seriously mental and emotional health issues as was the need to ensure access by young people to mental health care. The Designated Nurse stated that there were already services in schools that might be able to provide assistance and that designated teachers were being trained to recognise those children experiencing mental and emotional problems.

The Designated Nurse acknowledged that the report focused on numerical information rather than the underlying 'story' but emphasised that the report content depended on data supplied by the Council.

NOTED

the Looked After Children Annual Health Report for 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

RESOLVED

that a 'deep dive' report on Looked After Children health care provision be submitted to a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel by no later than March 2016.

CPP/15/14. Quarter One Report on the Fostering Service

The Panel received a report by the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter One (April to June 2015).

The report contained updates on various issues including the following:

- Recruitment of Foster Carers
- Assessments
- Referrals/Placements
- Training
- Ofsted Notifications
- Allegations
- Complaints
- Compliments
- Annual Budget
- Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements
- Risk Management
- Staffing
- Conclusion and Next Steps

The Head of Corporate Parenting stated that the report before Members was quantitative in its approach but that the Quarter Two report would be qualitative in its content. He then introduced the Quarter One report, drawing Members' attention to items of note. With regard to training, the Head of Corporate Parenting stated that action would be taken to ensure a greater awareness of mental and emotional health issues.

In response to Members' queries the Head of Corporate Parenting stated that funding for asylum seekers under the age of 18 was provided almost in full by the Home Office and he was confident this arrangement would continue. With regard to the increasing grant of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that the increase was nationwide across all local authorities and brought with it associated budget pressures. The grant of SGOs by Central Bedfordshire was forecast to increase by 12 a year though he expected changes relating to the grant of SGOs to be introduced soon.

The Head of Corporate Parenting turned next to foster carers. He stated that many were mature and the Council therefore found it necessary to both replace those who retired and increase the number of in-house foster carers. He added that the next quarterly report would include a table which would provide a detailed breakdown of foster carer data.

The Head of Corporate Parenting explained that placement matching was based on the specific needs of the child and this would be made clear in future reports.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations provided additional information. He stated that the Government had recognised the challenges faced by local authorities regarding the increasing award of, and associated cost of, SGOs. In addition, whilst the London local authorities had prepared a framework for action regarding SGO use, they had not attempted to deal with the issue of payments to those granted SGOs to care for the children concerned.

With regard to young, unaccompanied asylum seekers the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations confirmed that there had been significant growth in the numbers. There were currently 18 under the age of 18 compared to nine last year and six the year before. The Council did recover its costs for those under 18 but the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers, many of whom were 15-16 and over, still placed a pressure on the fostering system itself. In addition the age assessment process required by the Government was costly.

Last, the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stressed that action was being taken to maximise the use of foster carers.

In conclusion the Chairman stated that whilst the Panel acknowledged the positive direction of travel for the Fostering Service there were areas where Members would wish to receive additional information.

NOTED

the content of the Quarter One report on the Fostering Service for the period April to June 2015.

CPP/15/15. **Work Programme**

Members considered a report which set out the Panel's work programme for the remainder of the 2015/16 municipal year.

The meeting was aware that additional items had already been added to the work programme.

RESOLVED

that the proposed Corporate Parenting Panel work programme for the remainder of the municipal year 2015/16, as attached at Appendix A of the report of the Committee Services Manager and Committee Services Officer be approved subject to the following amendments:

- a that the reference to the Adoption Reform Grant 2015/16 for submission to the meeting on 18 January 2016 be deleted (LM);**
- b that a video presentation on the work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) be made to the Panel (GJ);**
- c that foster care leavers be invited to attend a meeting of the Panel to describe their experiences in care and raise any issues (GJ);**
- d that an update on the refreshment of the CiCC representation on the Panel be submitted to the Panel on 9 November 2015 (GJ);**

- e that a 'deep dive' report on Looked After Children's health care provision be submitted to the Panel no later than March 2016 (GJ);**
- f that future Work Programmes include the CiCC Forward Plan (LM).**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.58 a.m.)