

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

9 November 2015

SIX MONTHLY REPORT IN RESPECT OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE - 1 APRIL 2015 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

Report of Sue Harrison, Director, Children's Services
(sue.harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Advising Officers:

Gerard Jones, Assistant Director, Children's Services Operations
(Gerard.Jones@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk) and

Edward Wong, Head of Corporate Parenting Service
(Edward.Wong@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

The report outlines the activity that the Adoption Service undertaken throughout April to September 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel is asked to:

1. Comment on the content of the report
2. Agree Statement of Purpose

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The Annual Report of the Adoption Service is considered in the Autumn of each year by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Issues

Background

2. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Adoption Agencies to report to Members at six monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of a six monthly update to the Corporate Parenting Panel and a full year Annual Report to this Panel and the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee each year.

3. The Adoption Service has been a single agency service since 1 January 2014 following the disaggregation from Bedford Borough Council. The Adoption Panel remains a shared service between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough, hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council. The annual and six monthly reports contain information activity in respect of Central Bedfordshire only.
4. This report covers activity in the period 1 April to 1 September 2015. A copy of Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose is attached at Appendix A.

Recruitment of Adopters

5. The national Adoption Reform agenda has led to significant changes in process which have continued to be implemented this period. Information Evenings continue to be held on a monthly basis. We have introduced an online enquiry form on the Central Bedfordshire website and maintain a presence on a social media site.
6. Enquiries can be received via telephone, email or online enquiry.
7. We have had 37 enquiries in this period and 9 households attended adoption information evenings. 7 of those households attended a subsequent in-depth interview to explore adoption further with an adoption Social Worker and returned a Registration of Interest form. As of 30 September 2015, 10 households were in stage one of the process and 20 in stage two.
8. 5 new adoptive households completed their assessment and were approved to adopt. We expect to see an increase in rate of assessments being approved to adopt in the next period due to the number of assessments currently taking place. The target for this year is 20 households approved to adopt so given the numbers of applicants in Stage One and Two we envisage exceeding this target.

Adoption Planning and Placements for Children

9. The total number of family finding cases referred in this period was 24. This is a similar number to last year which suggests that more detailed scrutiny of Care Plans for children continues to take place within the Corporate Parenting Service to ensure that all other permanence options are fully considered before a plan for adoption is presented.
10. Since an earlier change to Adoption Regulations in 2011, most cases where adoption is the plan for a child are no longer presented to the Adoption Panel. (There are a few exceptions such as relinquished children). There were no cases of 'adoption as the plan' presented to the Adoption Panel in this period. The Agency Decision Maker (the Assistant Director, Operations, Gerard Jones) considered 24 cases of which 'adoption was proposed as the plan for a child in care. Of these cases 4 plans were subsequently rescinded and in a further 8 cases additional information was sought before a decision was made.

11. 6 children were placed with adopters during the period. This took the total number of children placed with adopters and awaiting adoption order to 18 children. (This comprises 13 adoption households, given that some are siblings in same placement). We also support 3 households of approved Central Bedfordshire adopters who have 6 children from other Local Authorities in placement. We have 1 child placed in a Foster for Adoption placement. As at 30 September 2015 there had been 7 adoption orders granted.
12. The cohort of 6 children placed in this period included 1 male and 5 female. All were single placements and aged under 3 years old.

Adoption Scorecard

13. There are a small cohort of children who we have been family finding for an extended period of time which will mean that the presented match will be outside of National Minimum Standards. This will have an impact on the Adoption scorecard for this Agency.
14. The delay in family finding is due to these children having specific health needs and identifying a match that can meet these needs and the uncertainty in regard to future development.
15. We are also seeing an increase in birth parents responding to adoption applications which results in some delay of the granting of the Adoption Order. This means that children remain being looked after for a longer period of time.

Adoption Support

16. The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was introduced in May 2015. This provides funding for some adoption support services. Six applications to the ASF have been completed and agreed. A further 4 applications have been identified and will be completed. In addition, the team currently provides direct adoption support to 14 children.
17. Those families where Adoption Support Funding has been agreed are currently receiving Therapeutic services commissioned by the Agency.
18. Of the 6 children placed in this period no specific adoption support was highlighted as being required beyond universal health services. None met the criteria for an adoption allowance.
19. In this period the Agency is family finding for 10 children who are likely to require Adoption Support including an adoption allowance where placements for adoption are likely to be completed in the next period.
20. This cohort of 10 children includes 3 sibling groups and 4 single children with additional health needs or disability.

21. Support has also been offered by the service through 'Letterbox' arrangements (sometimes referred to as indirect contact) which is identified as part of the permanence planning arrangements for each individual child. This arrangement seeks to ensure a secure and consistent record of contact between birth family and adoptive family. This often includes letters, occasional photographs and other information that is often of high significance to the adoptee later in life.
22. The Agency continues to manage annual post adoption contact arrangements for over 100 children.

Adult Adoption Work

23. At the end of September we were supporting 20 adult adoptees to trace records or for intermediary services to facilitate contact with birth family members

Key Events

24. This period has continued to implement the changes in Adoption Legislation, Regulations and Guidance. The Adoption Reform agenda is continuing to support Adoption activity and supporting adoption families. We have seen the introduction of the Adoption Leadership Board and Regional Adoption Boards. The emergence of new delivery models for adoption, the growth consortia and regional collaboration and, nationally, a large increase in the number of adopters approved.
25. The slowdown in children coming into care identifies that children who are 'harder to place' are still waiting longer.
26. In July 2015, the Department for Education launched the initiative known as the Regionalisation of Adoption Agency. Central Bedfordshire Council responded to this initiative by joining the partnership that Coram was leading. Details about the development of this initiative will be provided in the next 6-monthly report.
27. The Adoption Panel has continued to remain a shared service hosted by Central Bedfordshire.

Council Priorities

- Central Bedfordshire Council's Medium Term Plan Priority C - Promote Health and Well-being and Protect the Vulnerable
- Value – results focussed – we will focus on the outcomes that make a difference to people's lives.
- Adoption is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

Corporate Implications

Risk Management

28. Regulatory Risks: Failure to report to Members would be a breach of National Minimum Standard.

Legal Implications

29. Adoption Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the requirement to report to Members on the management and outcomes of the Adoption Agency, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the services are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Financial Implications

30. Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services has an annual budget of £3,670,855 including costs of other Adoption Agency placements and provision on behalf of Bedford Borough Council under the Shared Adoption Panel.

31. In this period the Government has provided additional funds under the adoption reform for Adoption Support and interagency costs. These are applied for on a case by case basis.

Equalities Implications

32. Adoption services provided to Looked after Children affects all sectors of communities.

Appendices

Appendix A – Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose 1 April 2015

Background Papers

None