

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Council Chamber, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 9 November 2015

### PRESENT

#### Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs C Hegley (Chairman)  
Mrs A L Dodwell (Vice-Chairman)  
Mrs A Barker  
N B Costin  
Mrs S A Goodchild  
T Stock  
M A G Versallion

#### Officers (voting)

Mr T Keaveney, Assistant Director Housing Services

#### Carers (non-voting)

Mrs H Philips  
Mr D Thorne

Apologies for Absence: Mrs J Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing  
Cllr B Wells

Officers in Attendance:	Mr N Costin	– Head of Housing Solutions
	Ms J Edwards	– Head of Service Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils
	Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
	Mr T Keaveney	– Assistant Director Housing Services
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Miss N Phillips	– Practice Manager Adoption
	Ms M Short	– Participation Officer
	Mr E Wong	– Head of Corporate Parenting

Others in Attendance: Children in Care Council Representative

### CPP/15/16. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 21 September 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**CPP/15/17. Members' Interests**

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

Councillor A L Dodwell declared an interest as a member of the Council's Fostering Panel.

**CPP/15/18. Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman reported that she had attended a Local Government Association sponsored development event for lead members, called Children's Services Leadership Essentials, at the weekend.

The Chairman thanked the Participation Officer for arranging for her to meet the Looked After Young Person of the Year prior to the Panel's meeting.

**CPP/15/19. Interim Report - Virtual School for Looked After Children**

The Panel considered a report from the Director of Children's Services which explained the role of the Central Bedfordshire Virtual School and provided the unvalidated educational outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2014/15. The report also identified the measures taken by the Virtual School in the current academic year 2015/16, in partnership with other agencies, to raise the achievement and progress of all Looked After Children.

The Head of Service Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils provided a brief introduction to the report before seeking queries and comments from Members on its content.

Members welcomed the substantial progress made in Looked After Children's educational attainment and expressed their warm appreciation of the contribution made by the Head of Service Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils. In reply the Head of Service thanked the Panel for its comments though she stressed that these also applied to her co-workers who had contributed to what was a team effort.

The Head of Service Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils then responded to a number of comments and queries raised by Members. Such issues included the sourcing of suitable schools for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), national changes to the measurement of pupil outcomes, the challenges arising from unaccompanied asylum seekers and the use of the pupil premium and Personal Education Plans (PEPs) to raise levels of attainment and progress during care.

Discussion also took place with regard to the difficulties which sometimes arose for young people with SEN during their transition into adult social care. A foster carer provided the Panel with an example of such shortcomings and the

negative impact on educational opportunities for the young person concerned. In response the Head of Service Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils suggested a possible way of overcoming the obstacles which had arisen. She emphasised, however, that such situations should no longer arise due to the introduction of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans which applied to children and young people up to the age of 25 and which should ensure a seamless transition.

Nonetheless, the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations acknowledged that difficulties could still arise and suggested that a 'spotlight' report be submitted on this issue. The Panel welcomed the Assistant Director's suggestion.

#### **NOTED**

**the progress made to date in improving outcomes for Looked After Children and young people in Central Bedfordshire during the academic year 2016/17 and the impact of the measures taken in the current academic year 2015/16 to do so.**

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1 that a 'spotlight report' on the current process which applies to young people as they move into adult social care and what, if any, action can be taken to improve support for them during this phase of their lives, be submitted to the Panel;**
- 2 that young people be invited to the above meeting of the Panel to talk to Members about their personal experiences in this area.**

#### **CPP/15/20. Agency Report Quarter 2 - Fostering 1 July - 30 September 2015**

The Panel received a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter 2 (1 July - 30 September 2015).

The report contained updates on various issues including the following:

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

- Conclusion and Next Steps

In addition a copy of the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose dated 1 April 2015 was attached for approval at Appendix A of the report.

The Head of Corporate Parenting introduced the report and highlighted particular items of interest.

Whilst welcoming the way in which the report had been written a Member asked that future reports include information on the number of Looked After Children in the foster care system on a given date within each quarter, whether the children were in short or long term foster care, the proportion of children moving between carers over a particular period and the frequency that this occurred, the number of Special Guardianships and the possibility that children involved could re-enter the care system due to, for example, carer vulnerability such as the age of the family members who had the responsibility for them. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations undertook to review the content of future quarterly foster care reports to the Panel and the submission of fostering information to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee having regard to these comments. The Chairman welcomed this development.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations then updated Members on the introduction of more rigorous assessments for Special Guardianships and the tension between the government's wish to encourage adoption and the Children's Court viewpoint that adoption should take place only if no other option was left. The Assistant Director added that the Council's current safeguarding policy was to be reviewed to ensure that children were being protected effectively.

Members then made further comment on the report. The Vice-Chairman sought clarification on the geographical spread of foster carers within Central Bedfordshire and whether carers were coming forward to care for those children with more challenging behaviour. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that he was unsure as to the detailed location of foster carers but he could investigate further. He also stated that foster carers were being encouraged to expand the range of children they were willing to foster in response to the shortage of carers for certain groups such as teenagers.

In conclusion the Chairman referred to the proposed revision to the style and content of future reports and suggested that the reports produced by other local authorities on this subject area could be considered for guidance. She then thanked the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations and his team for their positive achievements in this area.

## **NOTED**

**the content of the Quarter Two report on the Fostering Service for the period July to September June 2015.**

## **RESOLVED**

**that the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose dated 1 April 2015, as attached at Appendix A to the report of the Director of Children's Services, be approved and signed by the Executive Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services.**

### **CPP/15/21. Six Monthly Report in Respect of the Adoption Service - 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015**

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 2015.

The six month update included the following areas:

- Background
- Recruitment of Adopters
- Adoption Planning and Placements for Children
- Adoption Scorecard
- Adoption Support
- Adult Adoption Work
- Key Events

In addition a copy of the Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose dated 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016 was attached for approval at Appendix A of the report.

The Practice Manager Adoption introduced the report following which a Member, whilst welcoming the overall content, raised a number of queries regarding aspects of the adoption process including the status of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), whether the process was improving to the benefit of the children concerned and what action was being taken to solve any associated problems. A second Member sought clarification on how unsuccessful applicants to become adopters were notified and whether potential adopters met the culturally diverse needs of the children found within Central Bedfordshire.

The Practice Manager Adoption responded to Members' queries. She stressed that the recruitment process examined the suitability of prospective adopters. In addition advice and guidance was provided by the Adoption Service though she acknowledged that this could be improved.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the use of 'adoption parties' in the United States which had also been used by some local authorities in the United Kingdom and asked if their use for matching hard to place children with adopters had been considered in Central Bedfordshire. In response the Practice Manager Adoption explained that an 'adoption day' had been held and had been successful in placing one child. It had been intended to hold a further 'adoption

day' but it had not proved possible to proceed. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stated that there was a cohort of 10 children who had proved hard to place and that placement was more difficult for older children. However, he assured the Panel that placements were made. He raised the possibility of submitting the Adoption Service's activity grid which illustrated the Service's efforts to secure placements.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations then advised that BAAF, together with some similar organisations, had failed for financial reasons. However, BAAF's work continued under CoramBAAF, part of the Coram Group of charities. The Assistant Director stressed the complicated nature of the adoption process and suggested that a 'spotlight report' on how it worked and how people became adopters be submitted to the Panel. He then advised the meeting of the government's proposal to form regional adoption agencies to overcome what it saw as inefficiencies within the current adoption system due to the current small size of some existing agencies and a failure by them to share resources with neighbouring authorities. He also stressed that discussions on the proposals were at a very early stage, the outcome was uncertain and that the existing service needed to be kept stable for the benefit of the children. The Head of Corporate Parenting stated that the Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose, which the Panel was being asked to approve, would remain in place until the end of March 2016 or until a Regional Agency assumed operations within that period and introduced its own.

Further, brief, discussion followed.

#### **NOTED**

**the content of the six monthly report on the Adoption Service for the period April to September 2015.**

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1 that the Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose dated 1 April 2015 - 31 March 2016, as attached at Appendix A to the report of the Director of Children's Services, be approved and signed by the Executive Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services;**
- 2 that a 'spotlight report' on how the adoption process works and how people become adopters be submitted to the Panel.**

#### **CPP/15/22. 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 (minutes CPP/15/19 and CPP/15/21 above refer).

## **RESOLVED**

- 1 that 'spotlight reports' be submitted to the Panel on Looked After Children with disabilities, unaccompanied asylum seekers as Looked After Children, the Virtual School, and the reason and impact of the movement of Looked After Children between different foster carers;**
- 2 that a report be submitted by the foster carer representatives setting out feedback on various issues of their choice from the Central Bedfordshire branch of the Foster Carers Association;**
- 3 that the Adoption Agency statement of Purpose and the Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose scheduled to be submitted to the meeting of the Panel on 18 January 2016 be deleted following their approval at today's meeting;**
- 4 that the Corporate Parenting Operations Group – Improvement Plan Update scheduled to be submitted to the meeting of the Panel on 18 January 2016 be deleted and the Update on Accommodation Provision for Young Persons, which will include information from the deleted Improvement Plan Update report, be submitted to the Panel on that day instead;**
- 5 that an informal meeting session with Looked After Children and young people be arranged to which all Members of the Council are invited;**
- 6 that the Children in Care Council representative be thanked for the newsletter circulated at the meeting which focused on the recent awards ceremony;**
- 7 that Members of the Panel be invited to attend and observe the Children in Care Council (CiCC) monthly meetings once the CiCC membership has stabilised;**
- 8 that details of, and an invitation to, a forthcoming event entitled Corporate Parenting – Taking it to the Next Level, jointly hosted by the National Children's Bureau and A National Voice to be held in London on 21 November 2015, be sent to the Chairman.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.54 a.m.)