

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Monday, 14 March 2016

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

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

Officers (voting)

Mrs J Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Carers (non-voting)

Mr P Albon
Mr D Thorne

Apologies for Absence: Mrs S Harrison, Director of Children's Services

Officers in Attendance:	Ms A Craig	– Practice Manager, Fostering
	Mrs J Edwards	– Head of Service, Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils
	Mr S Lagan	– Independent Review Officer
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Ms M Short	– Participation Officer, Professional Standards
	Mr E Wong	– Head of Corporate Parenting
Others in Attendance:	Ambassadors	– For Children in Care Council
	Mrs T McDonald	– Designated Nurse for Looked After Children (NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group)

CPP/15/30. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 18 January 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:

Minute CPP/15/25

- Paragraph 3 – delete the letter ‘e’ from the end of the foster carer representative’s surname so that it reads “Albon”
- Paragraph 4, second sentence – insert “, the Chairman,” after “insufficient time for her” and “to arrange to attend in his place”.

CPP/15/31. Members' Interests

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

CPP/15/32. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The Chairman thanked the Participation Officer and any others involved in the organisation of the workshop at the Leighton Buzzard Youth Centre on 17 February 2016. She expressed her pleasure at seeing so many Central Bedfordshire councillors present and on how the event had provided the opportunity to talk to the new Children in Care Council (CiCC) members in a lively and informal environment. The Participation Officer thanked the Chairman for her comments and explained that former CiCC members, in their new role as Ambassadors, had also helped organise the event.

The Chairman also thanked the Vice-Chairman for undertaking a survey amongst Central Bedfordshire councillors on corporate parenting issues (minute CPP/15/33 below refers).

CPP/15/33. Corporate Parenting Survey

The Vice-Chairman introduced her report which set out the results of a survey undertaken amongst all Central Bedfordshire councillors on corporate parenting.

The survey had asked Members the following questions:

- Did you know that as a CBC councillor you are a corporate parent?
- What does this mean to you?
- What would help you to understand your role as a corporate parent?
- Are you a school governor?
- If ‘yes’, do you have any looked after children (i.e. foster children in the care of CBC, either with foster families or in residential settings) in your school?
- We are hoping to hold a Member briefing on corporate parenting, for you to meet some looked after children, foster carers and social workers – would this be helpful; to meet people involved in the services to make it more real?

The Vice-Chairman first thanked those who had participated in the survey. She stated that the responses received had included many good suggestions on how to improve Members' role as corporate parents. The Vice-Chairman also stated that many respondents were school governors and Looked After Children attended their schools. She therefore encouraged members of the Panel who weren't already school governors to take on this role. The Vice-Chairman then asked the Panel to consider her report and suggest ways of advancing Members' development and role as corporate parents.

A Member expressed concern regarding the number of Members who had not completed the survey and on those Members who had completed the survey but who were not aware of their role as corporate parents. She asked what action was to be taken with regard to these points. Discussion followed on communication, education and understanding during which the Chairman commented that more effective use could be made of the Members' Information Bulletin and direct emails. The Vice-Chairman stated that individual Members could also be identified for training purposes. She suggested that the survey be conducted on a periodic basis to monitor the situation and maintain Member awareness.

A Member, whilst congratulating the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the efforts made, expressed disappointment at the response rate and queried whether more could be done through the encouragement of the Group Leaders. He then welcomed the proposed Member briefing on corporate parenting with Looked After Children, foster carers and social workers and suggested that holding it pre-Council could be the most favourable time as all Members would be present. He also suggested that a briefing on corporate parenting should be made mandatory in Members' post election training. The Member then referred to previous efforts to improve the Panel's role, including visits to other local authorities to study their arrangements, and queried what had happened to the work which had already been undertaken. He concluded by stressing that the Panel should seek out best practice and implement it locally.

The Chairman fully acknowledged that, whilst members of the Panel had a high degree of awareness through their attendance at the Panel's meetings, the real test of awareness was the degree of understanding and commitment displayed by other Members.

A Member reminded the meeting that other people were also corporate parents and suggested that the survey should also be carried out amongst the Council's staff and its foster carers in order to achieve a complete assessment. She felt this inclusive approach would be beneficial should there be a query on this issue during an inspection by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). In response the Director of Social Care, Health and Housing confirmed that staff and foster carers were corporate parents and that, based on this factor alone, the survey should be carried out amongst them.

The Vice-Chairman suggested that the notes for the proposed Member briefing should be placed online for easy access by those who couldn't attend and for reference purposes .

RESOLVED

- 1 that the suggestions arising from the survey undertaken by the Vice-Chairman amongst Central Bedfordshire Councillors on corporate parenting with regard to improving Members' understanding of their role as corporate parents through written briefings, case studies and presentations by social workers be implemented;**
- 2 that the above survey be suitably reconfigured and undertaken amongst the Council's staff and foster carers;**
- 3 that the Head of Corporate Parenting examine the possibility of placing the notes for the Member briefing on corporate parenting online for easy access and reference.**

CPP/15/34. The Children in Care Council and Participation Annual Report 2015-2016

The Panel considered the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Participation Annual Report for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. The aim of the report was to update Members on the activities of the CiCC Participation during this period.

Following an introduction by the Participation Worker, Professional Standards the Ambassadors, representing the CiCC, worked through aspects of the report, drawing Members' attention to points of particular interest. At the conclusion a Member commented on the high level of engagement, commitment and hard work displayed by the CiCC and asked that this be recognised by the Panel.

The Chairman referred to the decision made at the last meeting of the Panel to examine the feasibility of starting the Panel's meetings at 4.00 p.m. (minute CPP/15/26 refers) and sought clarification on what progress, if any, had been made. In response the Participation Worker, Professional Standards stated that she was aware that the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations had discussed this matter and the Chairman undertook to raise this matter with him to establish the outcome.

A Member drew the Panel's attention to the reference in the report to the development of a 'mentoring' relationship between senior managers, acting as corporate parents, and members of the CiCC. The Participation Worker, Professional Standards explained that this had developed informally out of the meeting with the Children's Commissioner where the role of officers as mentors had been considered. Discussion followed during which the Participation Worker, Professional Standards stated that it was now necessary to identify additional Council officers who wished to support and mentor young people. This task was on the Participation Forward Plan for 2016/17.

Following a Member's query the Participation Worker, Professional Standards informed the meeting that a special consultation day had taken place on

leaving care. In view of Members' positive comments on the value of the event discussion took place on how the event could be replicated.

The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing thanked the Ambassadors for the work the CiCC undertook on behalf of the Council.

The Participation Worker, Professional Standards advised the meeting that the CiCC would be represented at a further Children's Commissioner event in April 2016.

NOTED

the Children in Care Council and Participation Annual Report 2015-2016;

RESOLVED

- 1 that the efforts of the Children in Care Council be recognised and its members be thanked for their contribution;**
- 2 that the Participation Worker, Professional Standards consider replicating the leaving care consultation event, possibly annually.**

CPP/15/35. Future Developments from the Annual Report 2014/15

The Panel considered a report from the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG), which provided an update to the Looked After Children's Annual Report 2014/15 which was presented to the Panel on 21 September 2015 (minute CPP/15/13 refers). The update focused on the commitments made within the Annual Report and provided a summary of the developments to date.

Following an introduction by the Designated Nurse discussion took place regarding the health needs for children and young people and the quality of service available to them. Particular attention was paid to the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) during which a Member expressed concerns on this issue and sought the perspective of the Designated Nurse. In response the Designated Nurse explained that all referrals were made through a single point of access and this should enable any referral to be directed to the correct service in CAMHS.

Following further comment the Head of Corporate Parenting indicated that he also shared Members' concerns. He stated that concerns had been raised at other meetings given that it had been twelve months since the appointment of a new provider for CAMHS and there had been only limited changes in service provision. A Member commented on the need for challenge given the lack of progress. The Director of Social Care, Health and Housing advised the meeting that there would be a focus on mental health and young people at a future meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Head of Corporate Parenting stated that social workers and managers were challenging the accuracy of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

(SDQ) scores given the important role they played in the assessment of children. He indicated that there would be report on this subject to a future meeting of the Panel.

A Member referred to the medicals undertaken by Looked After Children and queried what impact these had with regard to their relationship with their peers. She stressed the need to ensure that the Looked After Children were not made to feel different from other children and suggested a 'bespoke' approach to achieve this.

The Head of Corporate Parenting assured the meeting that there were no Looked After Children at risk of harm because of any delay in the provision of mental health services through CAMHS. He stated that, if necessary, the service would be purchased separately to ensure it was available.

Arising from a query by the Chairman the Designated Nurse stated that she would report the Panel's concerns to her Director and the BCCG. She also explained that all assessments were carried out at school and Looked After Children were not taken out and made to feel or appear different.

Members expressed some concern that the BCCG had failed to understand the Panel's frustration and that the report before them lacked information. In reply the Designated Nurse explained that the data they requested was not yet available in a refined form.

The question arose of how to gather the views of the foster carers and young persons. The Designated Nurse stated that she would like to engage with foster carers and it was suggested that the Head of Corporate Parenting facilitate attendance at monthly foster carer meetings. However, a foster carer referred to the issue of confidentiality.

NOTED

- 1 the update on the Looked After Children Annual Health Report for 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015;**
- 2 that the Designated Nurse will set out her perspective on the progress made in the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) since the appointment of a new provider in the report of the Head of Corporate Parenting.**

RESOLVED

that the Head of Corporate Parenting submit a report on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to the Panel.

CPP/15/36. Fostering Agency Report Quarter 3 - 1 October - 31 December 2015

The Panel received a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined activity in the Fostering Service during Quarter 3 (1 October - 31 December 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 Practice Manager, Fostering introduced the report and highlighted particular items of interest.

A Member referred to a recent presentation by the Community Safety Partnership on the growing number of asylum seekers decanting from vehicles at Toddington Services. The Practice Manager, Fostering confirmed that the number was increasing, with Toddington Services being the first stop by some lorry drivers after they had crossed the Channel from France. Whilst the Police had increased their presence at Toddington in response to this situation it was now known that some drivers had chosen to stop elsewhere. The Head of Corporate Parenting informed the meeting that since 1 January 2016 Central Bedfordshire had received no new unaccompanied asylum seekers. He added that the reason for the decrease was unknown.

The Vice-Chairman raised a query regarding the number of fostering training courses that foster carers were expected to attend each year. In response the Practice Manager, Fostering stated that carers were expected to attend training courses throughout their careers and attend at least three courses every year. In addition, training had been linked to the level of fees paid and carers could receive an increase or decrease in the level of their fees due to the tier structure adopted. A Member referred to the three fostering households who were overdue in completing their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDs). In response the Practice Manager, Fostering stated that there were always a small number of foster carers who were outside the training timescale. However, their skill requirements had been identified and one-to-one support would be provided to assist them.

With reference to the staffing changes taking place within the Fostering Agency a Member referred to the length of time that a child, on average, spent in the foster care system and how important a change in their social worker was. She emphasised the need to ensure that a replacement social worker was fully aware of the child's background as this would help facilitate bonding. In response the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that the staffing situation within the Fostering Agency had been very stable but the changes represented

an implementation of the Council's adopted policy of moving towards employing permanent staff. The Practice Manager, Fostering acknowledged that a change in social worker could give rise to difficulties but the Fostering Agency staff worked as a team and were able to provide support when required.

In reply to a Member's comment on the increase from 129 to 131 Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) since the last quarterly report, the Head of Corporate Parenting explained that this situation was driven by Family Court decisions. He added that the Council was working to reduce the number of SGOs whenever possible.

Following further discussion the Chairman asked the Practice Manager, Fostering to inform her staff of the Panel's thanks for their efforts.

NOTED

the content of the Quarter Three report on the Fostering Service for the period 1 October to 31 December 2015.

CPP/15/37. Virtual School Report

The Panel considered a report from the Director of Children's Services which explained the role of the Central Bedfordshire Virtual School, the validated educational outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2014/15 and the measures taken 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 Children stated that an interim report on the unvalidated educational outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2015/16 would be presented to a future meeting.

The Head of Service, Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils then introduced the report before Members which covered the following matters:

- Background
- Exclusions
- Attendance
- Pupils' Achievement
- Validated Key Stage 1 results
- Validated Key Stage 2 results
- Validated Key Stage 4 Results 2014/15
- Year 12 and 13
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UASC)
- Summary of Strengths
- Key Areas for Development

The Head of Service, Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils stated that the educational attainment gap between all Looked After Children and non Looked After Children was closing. Whilst welcoming this development a Member felt

that it would be helpful to be able to examine the progress made by children since becoming Looked After.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the link between attendance and attainment and queried if any incentives were offered to encourage attendance. In response the Head of Service, Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils stated that the majority of the Council's Looked After Children had a good attendance record. However, there was a small but significant number of older pupils who were challenging in their attitudes on a wide range of issues, including school attendance. She added that, normally, one of the key measures that could be taken with respect to poor attendance was some form of legal intervention against the parent. However, it was not possible for the Council to take action against itself. The Head of Service, Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils stated that a gift card attendance incentive was offered and other means of encouraging attendance were being considered.

A Member commended the officers for the action taken to reduce absences and exclusions. The Head of Service, Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils explained that the positive advances arose through collaborative action between teams and the development of the understanding of the needs of those particular Looked After Children and how to meet them. This had resulted in fewer reasons to impose permanent exclusions.

The Chairman suggested that the report should be drawn to the attention of those Members who were also school governors. She also suggested that the report be drawn to the attention of the Council's Group Leaders.

In response to a query by the Chairman on whether the level of careers advice offered to Looked After Children and young people was sufficient the Head of Service, Virtual School and Vulnerable Pupils stated that Looked After Children's academic and vocational aspirations were being raised. Following discussion she suggested that Michelle Wilson, Personnel Advisor, whose role was to raise the aspirations of Looked After Children, be invited to attend a Panel meeting to brief Members on the measures being taken.

NOTED

the outcomes for Looked After Children in the academic year 2014/15 and the impact of the measures taken since September 2015 to develop the role of the Virtual School in order to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and young people.

RESOLVED

- 1 that a report setting out the academic progress made by Looked After Children since becoming Looked After be submitted to the Panel;**
- 2 that the Interim Report Virtual School for Looked After Children from the Director of Children's Services be drawn to the attention of those Members who are also school governors;**

- 3 that the Interim Report referred to in resolution 2 above also be drawn to the attention of the Council's group leaders;
- 4 that the Personal Advisor attend a future meeting of the Panel to explain the measures being taken to raise Looked After Children's aspirations.

CPP/15/38. **Work Programme**

Members considered a report which set out the Panel's work programme for the remainder of the 2015/16 municipal year and the municipal year for 2016/17.

The meeting was aware that additional items had already been added to the work programme (minutes CPP/15/35 and CPP/15/37 above refer).

The Head of Corporate Parenting suggested that the unscheduled 'Spotlight Report' on placement stability for Looked After Children be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel.

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 including a 'Spotlight Report' on placement stability for Looked After Children for consideration at the next meeting of the Panel on 9 May 2016 in place of the scheduled report on the Corporate Parenting Action Plan – Annual Review.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.04 p.m.)