

## CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL** held at Room 15, Priory House, Chicksands, Shefford on Monday, 4 July 2016

### **PRESENT**

#### **Elected Members (voting)**

Cllrs Mrs 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)**

Mr T Keaveney, Assistant Director Housing Services

#### **Carers (non-voting)**

Mr P Albon  
Mr D Thorne

Apologies for Absence: Mrs S Harrison, Director of Children's Services  
Mrs J Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Officers in Attendance:	Ms R Coals	– Principal Social Worker and Head of Professional Standards
	Ms A Craig	– Practice Manager, Fostering
	Mr G Jones	– Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
	Ms S Keenan	– Practice Manager, Conference and Review Service
	Mr L Manning	– Committee Services Officer
	Miss N Phillips	– Practice Manager Adoption
	Ms M Short	– Participation Officer, Professional Standards
	Mr E Wong	– Head of Corporate Parenting
Others in Attendance:	Ambassadors	– for Children and Care Council

### CPP/16/1. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

### **Present – Elected Members (voting)**

Add Councillors N B Costin and B Wells to the list of those Members present at the meeting.

#### **CPP/16/2. Members Interests**

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

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

#### **CPP/16/3. Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

Further to her announcement to the last Corporate Parenting Panel (minute CPP/15/41 refers) regarding the new activities or experiences for Looked After Children and young people the Chairman updated Members on some of the activities which had taken place.

The Chairman next referred to one of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) Ambassadors present and the Ambassador's contribution to the recent 'Cheering Volunteering' event when she sang. Members were then advised of the Ambassador's other accomplishments and the Panel expressed its congratulations on her achievements.

Last, and in connection with the 'Cheering Volunteering' event, the Chairman expressed her thanks to the staff for their work and encouragement and asked that this be passed on to them.

#### **CPP/16/4. Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report 2015/16**

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services on the Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report for the period April 2015 to March 2016. Members noted that the Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO's) Manager had a statutory responsibility for the production of an Annual Report for consideration by members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. To this end a copy of the Annual Report was attached at Appendix A to the Director of Children's Services report.

The Practice Manager Conference and Review Service introduced the Annual Report and highlighted matters of particular interest. In response Members raised a number of wide ranging questions and comments with regard to the report and the quality of service provided to Looked After Children and young people.

In reply to various queries on accommodation provision the Head of Corporate Parenting stated that no Looked After Children were housed in temporary accommodation and only some 16-17 year olds were placed in supported

accommodation. The Assistant Director Housing Services explained that, further to a previous discussion on the introduction of 'foyer' style accommodation (minute CPP/15/27 refers), this type of housing was, currently, a Council goal. Although agreement had been reached to acquire properties to form local, sustainable, hubs for supported housing the staffing arrangements for these hubs had yet to be approved.

A Member asked that his appreciation of the work undertaken by the Practice Manager, Conference and Review Service, the Head of Corporate Parenting, the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations and other officers be recorded. He reminded the Panel of the achievements made with regard to Looked After Children and young people when compared to the situation five years ago and, specifically, the challenges in this area which had been inherited from the former County Council. The Member went on to refer to the current case loads undertaken by social workers coupled with an increasing level of demand. He believed that, as a result, some of the more discrete aspects of social work with regard to Looked After Children and young people were not being undertaken. In response the Practice Manager, Conference and Review Service assured the meeting that regular meetings were held to monitor developments and efforts made to ensure that statutory requirements and the needs of the most vulnerable were met. However, she acknowledged that the undertaking of some less urgent work had been delayed because of work pressures.

In connection with the increasing demand on social workers the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations referred to the significant rise in the Children in Care population, largely arising from a substantial growth in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers within Central Bedfordshire, and the requirement to provide them all with an initial review. This additional level of demand had impacted substantially on service provision.

In response to a Member's query on the future of the service given increasing economic constraint the Assistant Director, Children's Services Operations stated that all councils were now required to find more efficient ways of working and this could, possibly, lead to reduced level of service. However, he was confident that Central Bedfordshire was well sited to continue providing a good quality Corporate Parenting service.

#### **NOTED**

- 1 the activity of the Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2015-16 as set out within the Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report;**
- 2 the Panel's concerns with regard to emerging pressures on the Corporate Parenting service.**

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1 that the officers be thanked and commended for their efforts in improving the delivery of good outcomes for Looked After Children and young people;**

**2 that updates be submitted to the Panel with regard to the emerging pressures on the Corporate Parenting service.**

CPP/16/5. **Agency Report Quarter 4 - Fostering 1 January-31 March 2016**

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Member for Social Care and Housing which introduced the Quarter 4 Performance Report for the Fostering Agency. In view of the presence of a further report of the Executive Member for Social Care and Housing on the Fostering Agency Annual Report for 2015/16 on the agenda (agenda item 6 refers), it was agreed that both reports should be considered concurrently (minute CPP/16/6 below also refers).

Following introductions to the reports by the Practice Manager, Fostering the meeting turned to consider various issues contained within them. The Panel noted that both reports had been highly positive in their conclusions on the quality of service provided to Looked After Children and young people.

Full discussion took then place with regard to the content of the reports. Amongst the many issues raised was the £414k overspend arising mainly from inter agency costs and the rise in child arrangements/special guardianship orders and adoption allowances. In response The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations set out the cost pressures in this area and explained that the increase had largely arisen due to the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers reaching Central Bedfordshire. He explained that if it was necessary to make use of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) or that some unaccompanied asylum seekers had special requirements then there was a cost impact. He added that the Head of Corporate Parenting was scheduled to report to the Director of Children's Services on this matter and the information would be made available to Members in due course. The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations added that the unaccompanied asylum seekers wanted to attend college and do well and they had not usually suffered from the abuse sometimes found in British born children. Nonetheless, they did have different needs and this added to the costs.

The Assistant Director Children's Services Operations explained that Central Bedfordshire was experiencing the second highest number of unaccompanied asylum seekers in the Eastern Region but that the Council had been successful in dealing with this pressure. He then briefed Members on the Council's responsibilities towards unaccompanied asylum seekers. In response to a Member's question regarding the possible dispersal of unaccompanied asylum seekers to other local authorities the Assistant Director explained that a national disposal scheme existed but that currently, because its own numbers were so high, Central Bedfordshire was not expected to take anymore. However, should that number fall then the situation would change although he did not envisage this happening in the foreseeable future.

A foster carer representative raised a number of queries regarding the age range of those children that carers would be expected to foster. In response the Practice Manager, Fostering explained that neither existing nor new carers

would be expected to foster any child or young person of any age between 0-18. She stated that when a person applied to become a foster carer their suitability to foster particular age groups was considered. Further, any decision would take full account of the carer's own wishes and whether or not he or she felt confident and comfortable with fostering certain age groups. However, the Council was always actively seeking those willing to foster older children simply because it was difficult to secure carers for that group.

Another foster carer representative commented that the report failed to mention the loss of foster carers over the previous twelve months and the reasons for the retention problem. In response the Practice Manager, Fostering stated that this issue would be included in next year's report.

Arising from comments by the Chairman discussion took place on foster care and the various schemes related to accommodation for young persons. In response to a query by a Children in Care Council (CiCC) Ambassador the Practice Manager, Fostering stated that the supported lodging scheme was still active though only used for the Council's external placements at present. The CiCC Ambassador advised the meeting that she had previously lived in supported lodging and she had found it to have been a positive experience in teaching the skills required to live an independent life. She was aware that other young people also wanted to experience living in this type of accommodation. The Practice Manager, Fostering advised that the scheme was to be promoted and enlarged and staff recruiting would take place in September.

A Member raised a number of questions including whether respite foster carers were recruited so that they could be used to provide foster carers with a break from their responsibilities. She also sought clarification as to how those Looked After Children with special needs were supported. In response the Practice Manager, Fostering referred to the Family Link Scheme which offered short breaks to children of all ages who had a physical or functional disability. In addition support for foster carers could be provided through various means.

In response to various queries by the Vice-Chairman on the availability of accommodation for young people the Assistant Director Housing Services stated that there was insufficient suitable housing of all types for young persons though the move was towards shared accommodation partly through a reduction in the under occupation of properties by older people. The Practice Manager, Fostering added that the statutory responsibility for the care of a young person ended at 21 or, if the young person was in further education, 25. The Head of Corporate Parenting added that it was possible for the young person to stay beyond 25 with the mutual agreement of both the former carer and the young person.

In conclusion the Chairman recognised the excellent work and progress undertaken by the Fostering Agency whilst acknowledging the pressures on the service arising from the arrival of an increased number of unaccompanied asylum seekers.

**NOTED**

- 1 the Fostering Agency Quarter 4 Performance Report for 1 January – 31 March 2016;**
- 2 the Annual Report of the Fostering Agency for the period 2015 – 2016.**

**CPP/16/6. Corporate Parenting Service-Fostering Team Annual Report 2015/16**

In view of the related content in agenda items 6 (Agency Report Quarter 4 – Fostering 1 January – 31 March 2016) and 7 (Corporate Parenting Service - Fostering Team Annual Report 2015/16) these items were considered in conjunction with each other (minute CPP/16/5 above also refers).

**CPP/16/7. Adoption Agency Annual Report 2015/16**

The Panel received a report of the Executive Member for Social Care and Housing on the Adoption Agency Annual Report for 2015/16. A copy of the Annual Report was attached at Appendix A to the Executive Member's report. The meeting noted that the Annual Report described the activities of the Council's Adoption Agency during the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, including achievements and the remit and focus of the Agency's work. The report also identified recommendations for the development of the service.

Following an introduction to the Annual Report by the Practice Manager, Adoption various issues were raised for debate. A Member drew the meeting's attention to the absence of the usual reports by the Chairmen of both the Fostering and Adoption Panels as appendices to the respective Annual Reports and asked that they be submitted to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel in September with covering reports.

A Member then referred to that section of the Adoption Agency Annual Report which dealt with the local adoption consortium. Central Bedfordshire had been a member of the consortium until its replacement by a proposed regional adoption agency known as the Central East Partnership, operating under the lead of the Corum children's charity. The Member commented on the differences in membership between the two bodies. In response the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations updated Members on the current membership of the proposed Partnership. He also explained the current relationship with Corum and advised that the Chairman of that organisation had visited recently and had been made aware of the Council's concerns regarding the creation of the Partnership and the possible impact on service provision. The Assistant Director briefly outlined the possible interim arrangements which could be introduced. He also stressed that Central Bedfordshire was a partner in the development of the Partnership and was not in control of the process. The Council did, however, retain the option of leaving the Partnership if it was unhappy. A Member expressed her concerns at the lack of localism and, given the almost certain requirement for travel over greater distances, the strong, negative impact on Adoption Panel members, social workers and carers.

Whilst acknowledging these concerns the Assistant Director Children's Services Operations stressed that adoption rates were dropping, some voluntary adoption agencies were struggling financially and that the government favoured the regional approach.

**NOTED**

**the Adoption Agency Annual Report for 2014/15.**

**RESOLVED**

**that the reports by the Chairmen of the Adoption and Fostering Panels, usually attached to the annual reports of the Adoption and Fostering Agencies, be submitted together with covering reports to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 5 September 2016.**

CPP/16/8. **Work Programme**

Members considered a report which provided, as context, the final part of the Panel's work programme for the municipal year 2015/16. The report also set out the proposed work programme for the whole of the municipal year for 2016/17.

The meeting was aware that an additional item had been added to the work programme during the meeting (minute CPP/16/7 above refers).

In addition a Member requested that a spotlight session be held to which other Members of the Council should be invited to attend together with officers from other Council directorates. She also suggested that the Looked After Children and young people present at the session should represent the diversity of the cultures found within Central Bedfordshire. The Chairman asked the meeting to consider what issues it would wish to consider at the spotlight session and advise the Member of their thoughts.

**RESOLVED**

**that the proposed Corporate Parenting Panel work programme for the municipal year 2016/17, as attached at Appendix A of the report of the Committee Services Manager and Committee Services Officer, be approved subject to the addition of the Chairmen's report for the Fostering and Adoption Panels at the Panel's September meeting.**

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 12.13 p.m.)