

## Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday, 6 March 2017

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### Update of the Adoption Support Fund

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### Purpose of this report

1. To update the Corporate Parenting Panel on the Department for Education Adoption Support Fund.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Note the content of the report
2. Comment on the report

### Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

This item is not planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny as the report is for the Corporate Parenting Panel only.

### Issues

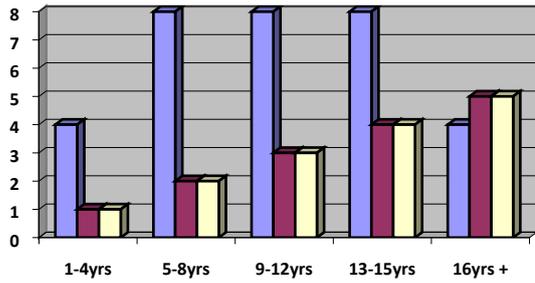
1. A Report about the use of Adoption Support Fund was presented to CSMT in January 2016. This report provides an update since then.
2. The Adoption Support Fund has remained available throughout this year to provide therapeutic support and intervention for adopted children and their family. From 1 April 2016 the Department for Education extended the criteria for applications to include Inter-country Adoptions (once the placement has been made and the child is in

England) and for Special Guardians who care for children who were previously looked after.

3. In October 2016, following a budget review of the fund the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families advised of changes to the funds available for families. The letter advised that in 2015/16 the £19 million pound fund was accessed by 3500 families. In 2016/17 the available funding was increased to £21 million and a further £2 million increase was introduced in October 2016. However demand for support was twice the level forecast and in October 2016 the fund had already been accessed by more families than the total in the previous year.
4. Following discussions with the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Adoption Leadership Board, an interim measure was introduced with immediate effect. This measure was the introduction of a £5000.00 'Fair Access Limit' which meant a maximum amount of funding was available per child for the remainder of the year.
5. The review did recognise that a small number of children may require an exemption to the Fair Access Limit and advised that funding will be available for such children in exceptional circumstances. In such cases funding would be available but only where the Local Authority agrees to 'match' funding. An example would be an application for £14,000.00 which would result in the Adoption Support Fund providing the 'Fair Access limit' funding of £5000.00, and if the Local Authority agree to match-fund, a further £4500.00 Adoption Support Fund 'top up' and £4500.00 from the Local Authority.
6. The scope for access to the fund has remained unchanged.

### **Central Bedfordshire Update**

7. In January 2016 the Council had received £29396.26 from the fund which provided access to therapeutic services for six families.
8. Since the fund was available the Council has completed 37 applications with a total sum funding requested of £186,866.30. All applications have been successful and lead to the commissioning of therapeutic providers for families.
9. The ages of children funding has been applied for is shown in the chart below.



10. Therapeutic support is more beneficial the earlier it is accessed, hence the Adoption Team aim to make applications to provide support for young children early in placement. For the younger children the primary purpose for applications made to the Adoption Support Fund is generally to access therapy to support the development of the attachment relationships in the new family.

11. For children aged 8yrs and older the typical primary application made to the Adoption Support Fund is to undertake therapeutic life story work to assist them to understand their adoption story and develop a secure sense of self and identity. If this work can be undertaken before adolescents it lowers the risk of conflict within the family which can lead to the breakdown of the adoption placement.

12. The Council has a small cohort of children accessing adoption support aged 12yrs + who have complex needs due to multiple diagnosis of autism and/or ADHD, foetal Alcohol syndrome, education needs requiring support from an Education Health Care Plan and anxiety. Children with such difficulties often face exclusion from school and parent to child violence can occur within the family home if the parent struggles to understand and respond to the child's needs resulting in a risk of family breakdown. Due to their multiple needs such children are unable to access universal services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or Children with Disability services as they often do not meet the eligibility criteria or the complexity of their needs means that the service is unable to be accessed. For the children identified, applications to the fund have assisted to commission a Child and Adolescent Family Psychiatrist who specialises in children with a wide range of mental health, social and educational difficulties to provide an assessment of need and recommend the best type of therapy to support the child and family. This is obtained on a spot purchase basis by accessing the fund. This input has significantly reduced the risk of a family breakdown and identified the 'best fit' therapeutic service and support to improve family life. However such children often require long term intervention to maintain family life.

13. The provision of regular ongoing respite often features within these cases and is either accessed through the adoptive parents support network or via local authority services such as fostering.

### **Council Priorities**

14. Making effective use of the Adoption Support Fund ensures that the Council is able to provide a responsive service that protects the vulnerable and improves the child's wellbeing and quality of family life.

### **Corporate Implications**

15. None

### **Legal Implications**

16. None

### **Financial and Risk Implications**

17. The Adoption Support Fund has assisted the local authority to provide therapeutic support to families and children in need where previously this provision was unavailable unless accessed via universal services. Access to such services was often limited as often the children did not meet the criteria or the services offered did not meet the specific needs of the children.
18. The local authority has continued to access the fund to purchase therapy for children and families following an adoption support assessment of need. The fund remains available for the remainder of 2016/17 and will have an annual increase in the total funding available for the remainder of this Parliament. However, as it has opened its criteria to intercountry adoption and special guardians, the funds available for adopted children and families will not be exhaustive and may require the continuation of a 'fair access limit' although this has yet to be confirmed. The financial risk of such a limit in 2016/17 will incur the requirement of 'match funding' for some applications incurring costs to the Local Authority.
19. At the time of writing this report, match funding has been provided for one case where funding was requested to continue a schedule of theraplay and therapeutic parenting sessions. The child is 4yrs old with a history of birth parent drug abuse and neglect resulting in delayed development and attachment difficulties. The total application was for £9923.48. The Adoption Support Fund agreed funding for £7461.74 (Fair Access Limit of £5000.00 plus £2461.74) and the Local Authority agreed to fund the remaining £2461.74 to enable match funding to be obtained.

20. An example of high cost applications prior to the introduction of the Fair Access Limit have included amounts of £14000.00, £8200.00 and £34650.00.
21. There is a small cohort of cases that have required 'top up' applications when therapy proposed and funded by the Adoption Support Fund is coming to an end but further therapy is recommended. There will be some financial risk resulting from these cases as a further application is likely to be beyond the Fair Access Limit for that child within the year. However at this stage this is relevant only to applications within the remainder of the financial year 2016/17 pending any further notifications from the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families regarding the fund in the budget year 2017/18.
22. The average funding requested at this time is £4917.53 which is within the current Fair Access Limit; however as reported earlier several applications completed before the limit was introduced have exceeded this which in future would incur costs to the Local Authority.
23. In addition the future availability of the fund after the current parliament is unknown.

### **Equalities Implications**

24. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Accessing the Adoption Support Fund enables Central Bedfordshire Council to achieve better outcomes for children and young people with complex needs due to multiple diagnosis of autism, ADHD, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, education needs requiring support from a EHCP and anxiety.

### **Conclusion and next Steps**

25. Access to the Adoption Support Fund has provided opportunity to provide families with a therapeutic service to improve family life. This has assisted to reduce the risk of family breakdown resulting in the child returning to care.
26. Information about the Adoption Support Fund is provided to all those who enquire or request an adoption support assessment. Information can also be accessed on the Local Authority website to ensure fair access for all and maximise the use of the fund to support families and improve family life.
27. At present the adoption service carefully considers families needs and how the fund can be accessed to achieve maximum efficiency of fund

and therapy to improve family life. The majority of enquiries for support can be dealt with by providing information and advice including signposting to universal services and accessing advice from the virtual school service. However for those who require a higher level of input the service completes an assessment to identify the need. If therapeutic intervention is recommended an appropriate provider is identified and an application to the fund is completed.

28. Sustainability of the current level of service is of concern as the future availability of the fund is unknown. The Regional Adoption Agency remains in the development stage and the partnership is aiming to develop an adoption support service able to offer a high level of adoption support to all and is sustainable beyond the fund to reduce the financial risk to the local authority.

29. In the meantime development is being undertaken to consider how to use the consultation service available from the Looked After Children Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to assist with adoption support referrals, plans and allocated cases. The aim of this is to provide early intervention to assist the development of positive relationships and attachments to provide positive family experiences and healthy relationships via a positive sense of self and identity.

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background Papers**

None