

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Monday, 3 July 2017

**Corporate Parenting Panel - Fostering Team Annual Report
2016-17**

Report of: Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing

Advising Officers: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services

This report relates to a Non-Key Decision – Annie Craig, Practice Manager,
Fostering – annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Purpose of this report

1. This report introduces the Fostering Agency Annual Report for Members to consider and note.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive or Committee are asked to:

1. That Corporate Parenting Panel considers and notes the Fostering Agency Annual Report and Appendices.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The annual report for fostering will need to be presented to Overview and Scrutiny to note the contents and provide feedback.

Background

2. The Council has a duty to provide a range of types of placements for looked after children which meet their needs. In most cases a child needs should be met by living in a family setting, either with someone known to

them (known as a friends and family or connected person foster placement) or with foster carers.

3. The Council recruits its own foster carers, known as 'in-house' foster carers and also has the legal responsibility for assessing and approving friends and family foster carers. In order to meet the demand for placements for children in care, foster placements are also bought from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). Central Bedfordshire council, in conjunction with Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council has a Framework Agreement with 18 such agencies to offer suitable and sufficient IFA placements within a tight cost and quality framework.

Council Priorities

- Improved educational attainment and progress
- Protecting vulnerable children and young people
- Early help and improving life chances
- Being healthy and positive

Corporate Implications

Risk Management:

4. Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable foster placement is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked after Children.
5. Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.
6. Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.
7. Financial Risk: Looked after Children placements is a demand led activity. Independent Agency Placements are high cost, and variations in the proportion of independent versus in-house placements can have significant and immediate impact on forecast spend

Legal Implications

8. This report provides updating information to allow consideration of the performance of the Fostering Agency in the previous year as required by legislation. As the report is provided in accordance with timescales and does not highlight any issues, there are no further legal implications.

Financial and Risk Implications

9. This report provides updating information and does not include any financial decision / implications.

Equalities Implications

10. 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

The following equality issues have been reported:

- All staff have access to the Council's extensive Learning and Development Programme and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. This includes diversity training for staff in order to ensure they understand and address issues of diversity when working with foster carers and children in care. Staff are encouraged to embrace and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.
- In order to ensure a range of foster carers are recruited for Central Bedfordshire children a range of marketing and recruitment activities have taken place during the year. These have included outreach work; advertising; press coverage; online posts/websites/Facebook and twitter pages.
- Each year the Fostering Service produces a comprehensive training programme covering a wide range of topics to help foster carers develop their skills and knowledge
- The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability.
- The Youth Care Scheme provides specialist care to young people over the age of 10 years who have needs which are particularly challenging or complex.
- This year has seen a significant increase from the previous year in terms of the number of males being accommodated compared to females. It would be advisable to give further consideration to the causes of this trend.
- 35% children fostered are from BME communities. This indicates a possible over representation of BME children in the LAC population which should be given further consideration.

- 91% of foster carers are White. This indicates that further initiatives may be required to encourage and support more foster carers to come forward from different BME communities

Conclusion and next Steps

12. The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note progress on the Development and agree the implementation of the revisions proposed to the fostering fees scheme.

Appendices

Appendix A – Fostering Agency Annual Report 2016/17

Appendix B – Chair of the Fostering and Permanence Panel Annual Report
2016-17

Background Papers

None