



Foster
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Central
Bedfordshire

great
prospects

Annual report

Fostering Team, Central Bedfordshire Council

For the period: 2017 – 2018

Appendix 1

A great place to live and work.

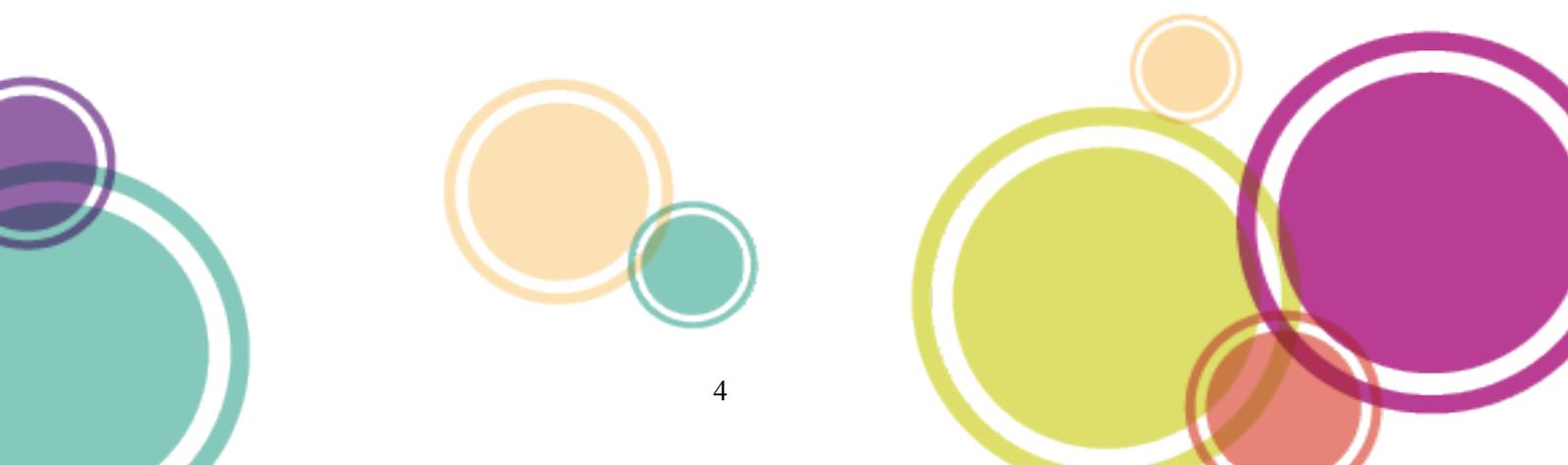


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Introduction

This Fostering Report provides information to Elected Members and decision makers about the progress and developments in the Fostering Service between 1 April 2017 -31 March 2018. The report may also be of interest to service users, staff and colleagues from partner agencies.

The Fostering Service is a service for children and young people in care. It has responsibility for ensuring that children in care receive good quality services which support their identified needs. The Fostering Service and dedicated team of foster carers work in partnership to ensure children live in safe, nurturing local family homes where they can achieve their potential and enjoy their childhood.

Section 1

The Fostering Service

1.1 Service Overview

- 1.1.1 The Fostering Service is co-located within the Corporate Parenting Service of Children's Services. This supports the close working relationship between the operational childcare teams and the Fostering Service.
- 1.1.2 The Fostering Service provides a range of services as required within the current legislation. The Statutory Guidance underpinning fostering legislation prescribes the services and processes to be followed by a Fostering Service and the qualifications required by Managers and Social Workers.
- 1.1.3 The Fostering Service has experienced a number of staff changes during this year mainly due to staff moving on to other teams or external posts for career development opportunities.
- 1.1.4 The Fostering Service staff team is made up of the Practice Manager, 2 team managers, 2 senior social workers, 10 social workers, a Family Support worker and 2 business support officers.
- 1.1.5 All employed staff are permanent apart from 1 agency social worker who is covering for a member of staff on maternity leave. Staff range in their experience, knowledge and skills with less experienced staff being supported by other social workers, seniors and managers who have many years post qualifying experience.

- 1.1.6 All fostering social workers are qualified and registered with the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC). They have access to the Council's extensive Learning and Development Programme and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. The Council's Learning and Development Programme also provides 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.
- 1.1.7 The teams carry out the full functions of the fostering service with social workers completing a range of fostering work, including foster carer assessment (family and friends and career carers), supervision/support, reviews etc. In addition, the fostering service is involved in the assessment of Supported Lodgings carers and the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers and Private Foster carers.
- 1.1.8 The Fostering Service is also supported by specialist staff across the Fostering and Adoption Service. These include a Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer, a Marketing, Recruitment and Training Support Officer, a Professional Panel Adviser and 2 Panel Secretaries who support and manage the Fostering and Permanence Panel. The Fostering Service has access to CAMHS (Children and Mental Health Service) clinicians who provide support to Social Workers, Children in Care and Foster Carers. The Fostering Service also works particularly closely with the Placement and Resource Team whose staff are responsible for making placements and foster carer payments.

1.2 The Fostering and Permanence Panel

- 1.2.1 The Fostering and Permanence Panel meets generally once or twice a month, depending on demand and considers a maximum of 6 cases per panel. During the period between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, the panel met on 17 occasions.
- 1.2.2 The Fostering and Permanence Panel considers applications from prospective foster carers and makes recommendations as to their approval. First annual reviews and those reviews where there has been a proposed change in carer's approval or where there has been an allegation made against the foster carer are presented to panel for consideration. Panel also make recommendations in relation to children being matched to their permanent foster carers.

1.3 Provision of information on fostering

- 1.3.1 Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) has a single point of contact to the service through a local rate telephone line. Enquiries can be made via the council website where information about fostering is readily available and are directed to a fostering email address. Enquirers are provided with information about fostering and the assessment process. Initial visits are offered where enquirers are provided with more information about fostering and an initial assessment of their home is undertaken to ensure it meets health and safety requirements to foster.

Section 2

Children and Fostering

2.1 Children accommodated

- 2.1.1 Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 there were 131 occasions on which a child was admitted into the care of the Local Authority concerning 123 children (compared to 132 in the previous year). Looking at the 131 LAC admissions during the year;

- 62 young people (47.3%) were in a placement with other foster carer (not long term)
- 23 young people (17.6%) were in independent living
- 17 (13.0%) were placed with parents
- 11 (8.4%) were in foster care with relative/friend (not long term)
- 4 (3.1%) were placed in 'other' placement types
- 2 (1.5%) were placed in 'Homes and Hostels'
- 2 (1.5%) were placed in NHS/Health Trust placements
- 2 (1.5%) were placed in a family centre or Parent and Child unit
- 2 (1.5%) were placed in a Young Offenders Institute or Prison
- 2 (1.5%) were placed in Residential Schools
- 2 (1.5%) were in temporary accommodation (for 7 days or less)
- 2 (1.5%) were in a placement with another foster carer who is also an approved adopter/FFA.

- 2.1.2 As at 31 March 2018, 131 children were placed with in house foster carers (61%) and 85 (39%) were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies compared to 134 (65%) in house and 75 (35%) IFA's last year.

- 2.1.3 The number of children placed in foster care increased this year from 209 as at the 31 March 2017 to 216 as at the 31 March 2018.
- 2.1.4 The referral for the child/young person which includes essential and preferable matching criteria is crucial to identifying which carers may be able to support a child. Where a placement does not meet the essential criteria or where any identified risk cannot be managed, an alternative placement is sought. 20 of the young people placed either with in-house foster carers, Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) or in semi-independent living were unaccompanied asylum seekers (compared to 44 in the previous year). The main countries of origin for these young people were Eritrea (9), Vietnam (5) and Afghanistan (3).
- 2.1.5 Regular respite placements were provided 102 occasions (which is 50 more than in the previous year). In addition, ad hoc respite was provided on 79 occasions (which is 7 more than in the previous year). Intensive Support carers were provided with 13 periods of respite as part of the Intensive Support Care agreement (this is 3 less than in the previous year).
- 2.1.6 24 referrals for foster placements were received from the Emergency Duty Team (EDT), (compared to 15 in the previous year), 11 of the children were Luton children, 1 was from Bedford Borough and the remaining 12 were from CBC. This is a shared EDT service that provide emergency services out of the office hours for CBC, Bedford Borough and Luton areas.

2.2 Age of Children Accommodated

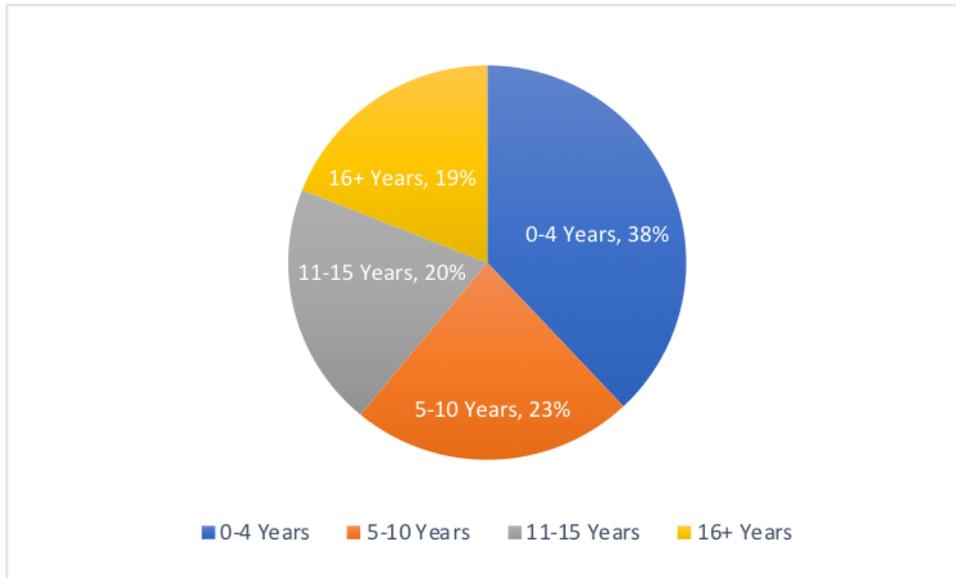
- 2.2.1 The highest percentage of the 123 individual children accommodated between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 were aged between 0 and 4 years of age (38%). In the previous financial year (2016/2017) the highest percentage of children accommodated were in the 16+ age category (affected by the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children entering care). Children aged between 0-10 years account for 61% of the total number accommodated.

The full age distribution was as follows:

- 0-4 years – 47 children (38% compared to 27% in the previous year)
- 5-10 years - 28 children (23% compared to 20% in the previous year)

- 11-15 years – 25 children (20% compared to 22% in the previous year)
- 16+ years – 23 young people (19% compared to 31% in the previous year)

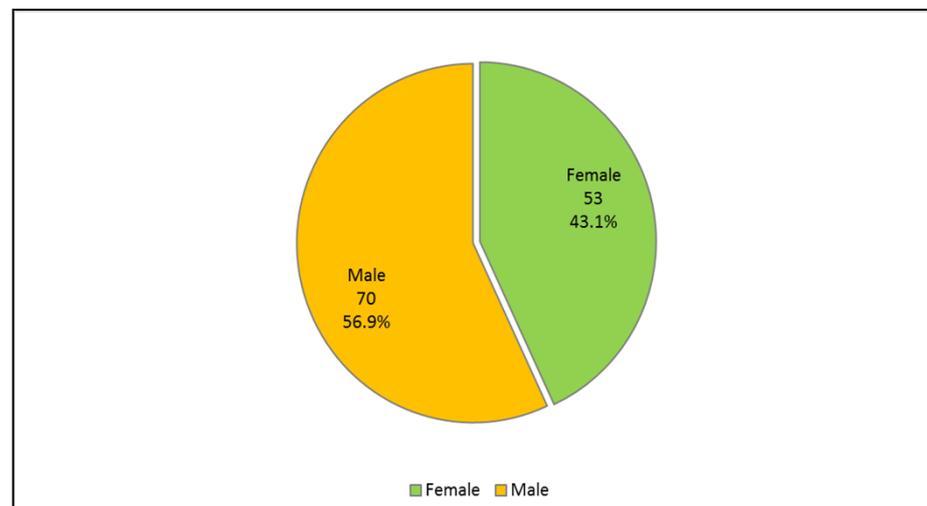
Age of Children Accommodated



2.3 Gender of children accommodated

2.3.1 Of the 123 children accommodated between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, 70 (57%) were male and 53 (43%) were female. This is evidence of a slight decrease in males and a slight increase in females accommodated during this period compared to last year, where there were 85 (64%) males accommodated compared to 47(36%) females.

Gender of children accommodated

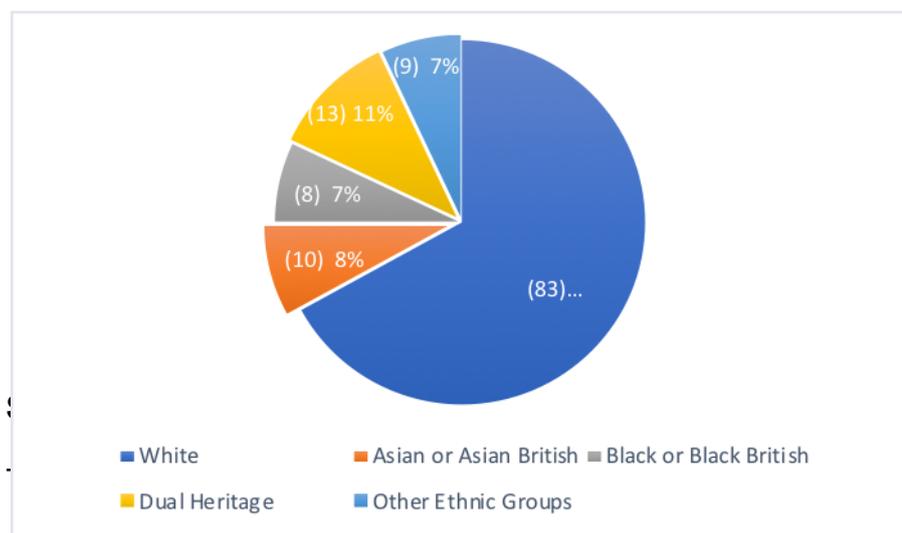


2.4 Ethnicity of children accommodated

2.4.1 In terms of ethnicity of the 123 children accommodated between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018:

- 83 (67%) were of White ethnicity;
- 10 (8%) were Asian/Asian British,
- 8 (7%) were Black/Black British,
- 13 (11%) were Dual Heritage and
- 9 (7%) were classed as Other Ethnic Groups (some may be Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People).

Ethnicity of children accommodated



2.5

2.5.1

2.5.2

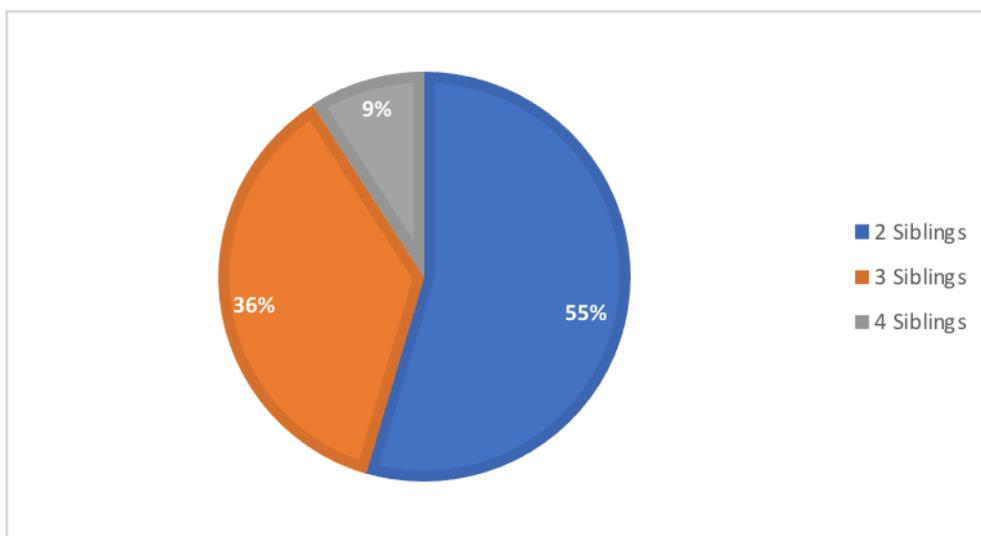
One of the significant criteria for matching children with carers is enabling

during the

year (comp

them to be

Sibling Groups of children accommodated



2.6 Placement Stability

- 2.6.1 Research indicates that placement stability for children and young people in care is an important factor for them having more positive outcomes during their lives. Changes of placements and primary carers causes instability in terms of attachment and sometimes disruption in education/friendships etc.
- 2.6.2 The Service has 2 targets in relation to placement stability; one for short term and one for long term stability.
- 2.6.3 The short-term indicator is in relation to the percentage of Looked After Children with 3 or more placement moves over the previous month. The target set for this financial year was stretched from last year's 11% to 8% (low is good) and at the end of March 2018 the Service had exceeded this target at 7.1% (22 out of 310 children).
- 2.6.4 The long-term indicator looks at the percentage of children under 16 who have been looked after continuously for 2.5 years and been in the same placement for at least 2 years or have been placed for adoption. The target set for this financial year was stretched from last year's 70% to 80% (high is good) and at the end of March 2018 the Service reported 75.6% (90 out of

119 children) - slightly below the set target. However, the figure achieved has significantly improved from the 2015/16 outturn of 63%.

- 2.6.5 Placement stability is also measured by the number of fragile placement and disruption meetings held during the year. The service only had 3 fragile placement meetings and 1 disruption meeting held between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, which is very low.

Section 3

Foster carers

3.1 Recruitment of foster carers – enquiries through to approval

- 3.1.1 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 mainly included on line marketing/recruitment but also includes some general advertising and radio/press coverage and awareness raising within the community.
- 3.1.2 Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 there were 107 enquiries (compared to 92 in the previous year) from people who were interested in becoming foster carers.
- 3.1.3 During 2017/18 the best months for enquiries were as follows: June (15), August (15) and April (11). On the other hand, the worst months for enquiries were: December (4) and July (5).
- 3.1.4 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and Statutory/Practice Guidance. All prospective foster carers are required to attend in-depth 'Skills to foster' training as part of the preparation and assessment process.
- 3.1.5 The Fostering Service's recruitment target for 2017/18 was to recruit 10 new career carers and this was achieved with 11 career carers being approved. This target is in addition to all the other assessments the Service is involved in which includes: Regulation 24, Family and Friends, SGO and Private Fostering assessments.

3.2 De-registrations/termination of approvals

- 3.2.1 Foster carers cease to foster either because their approval has been terminated by the Service or because they wish to resign. Termination of approvals occur usually because there has either been an allegation against a foster carer or concerns arisen regarding the standard of care provided.
- 3.2.2 Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, 2 fostering households had their approval terminated, both because the carers were not meeting the National Minimum Standards required of foster carers i.e. inability to work with the child's care plan/work with professionals.
- 3.2.3 During 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, there were 19 de-registrations, of which:
- 5 de-registered due to an SGO being granted
 - 4 de-registered due to a Child Arrangement Order being granted
 - 3 de-registered due to retiring/wanting to spend more time as a family
 - 2 de-registered as not available to offer placements
 - 2 de-registered due to the impact of fostering on their family
 - 2 de-registered due to disengaging with the service
 - 1 de-registered from an existing foster carer as they had separated

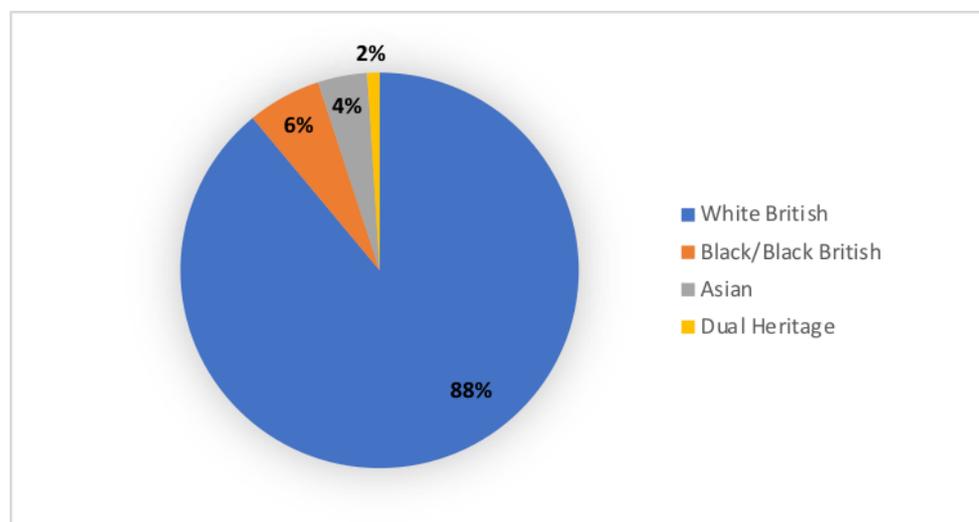
3.3 Ethnicity of foster carers

3.3.1 The majority of CBC foster carers:

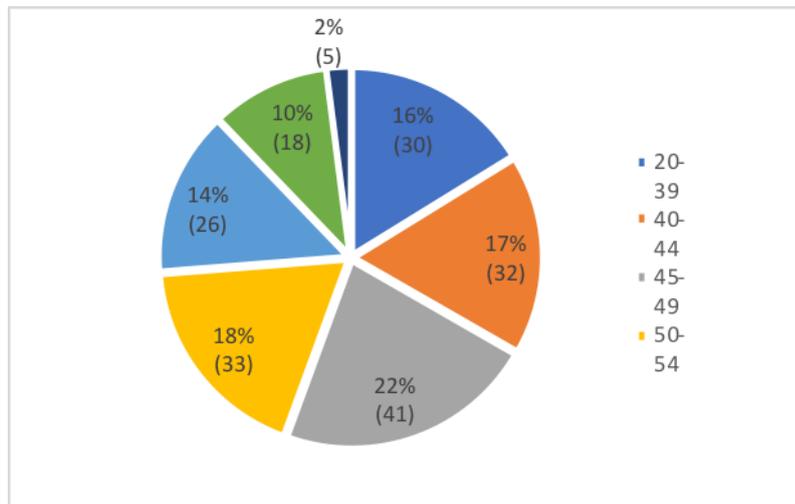
- (88%) of foster carers are from a White British ethnic background, however we also have foster carers who are Black or Black British (6%), Asian (4%), and of Dual Heritage (1%).

Whilst this generally reflects the ethnicity of our Looked After Children population there is still a need to recruit more foster carers from different ethnic minorities in order to refine the matching process further. This is, therefore, an ongoing focus of our marketing and recruitment strategy.

Ethnicity of foster carers



3.4 Carers



Age of in Fostering Household

3.4.1 The average age of CBC foster carers is 40-54 years with 22% aged 45-49 years, 18% aged 50-54 years and 17% aged between 40 and 44 years. Research showed that within CBC there was a vast age range of foster carers with the youngest being 23 years and the oldest being 76 years.

3.4.2 Nationally there is a concern that there is an aging population of foster carers with 10-15% of foster carers due to retire over the next 5 years. Research completed by CBC fostering service indicated that this is not currently an area for concern.

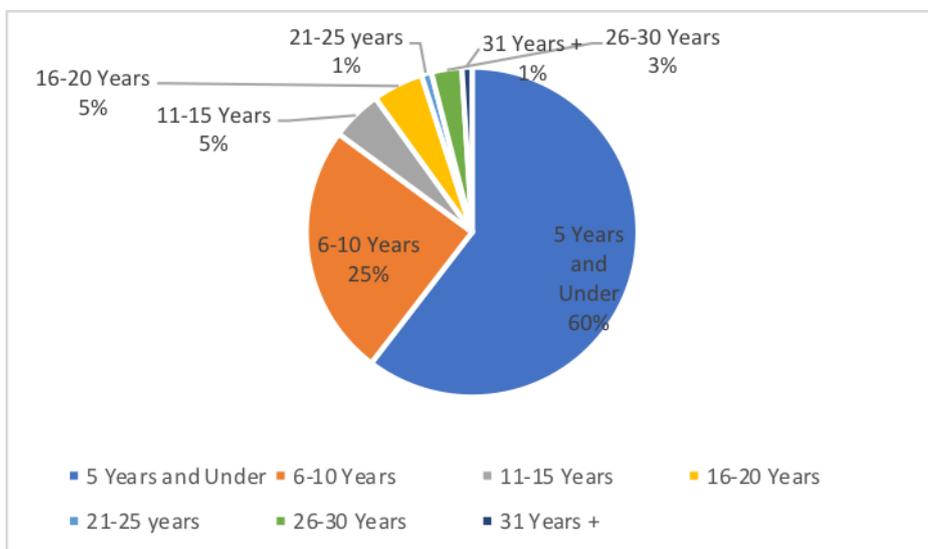
Age of Carer in Fostering Household

3.5 Length of service of foster carers

3.5.1 Within CBC we have a cohort of foster carers who range in experience and length of service; from those recently recruited, to others who have over 25/30 years' experience. Length of service of our current cohort of foster carers is as follows:

5 years and under:	61 (60%)
6-10 years:	25 (25%)
11-15 years:	5 (5%)
16-20 years:	5 (5%)
21-25 years:	1 (1%)
26-30 years:	3 (3%)
31 years plus:	1 (1%)

Length of service of foster carers



3.6 Intensive Support Fostering Scheme

- 3.6.1 This scheme provides specialist care from experienced foster carers to children and young people mainly over the age of 10 (although younger children can and are placed) who have particularly challenging behaviour/complex needs.
- 3.6.2 As of 31 March 2018, there were 8 approved Intensive Support Foster Carers (compared to 7 in the previous year) caring for 6 children (compared to 4 in the previous year).

3.7 Family Link Scheme

- 3.7.1 The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability. Foster carers can care for a child in their own home, the child's home or take the child out to an activity. Periods of short breaks are planned and can be for a few hours or weekends on a regular basis.
- 3.7.2 As of 31 March 2018, there were 3 Family Link Carers supporting 2 children by providing regular short breaks.
- 3.7.3 There is also 1 salaried Family Link foster carer who is linked to 2 children (1 of whom is a from a neighbouring authority).

3.8 PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) Scheme

- 3.8.1 The Local Authority has a duty to provide accommodation to children and young people under the age of 18 who have been arrested and charged in relation to a criminal offence. CBC want to limit the amount of time children and young people have to spend in police custody. The fostering service, therefore, set up a PACE fostering scheme in April 2017. The plan is for the

relevant child or young person to be transferred to a Local Authority PACE foster carer overnight before they are presented to court the following day, rather than remaining in police custody until the hearing. As at 31st March 2018 the fostering service had 3 prospective PACE foster carers in assessment with the first one due to be presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel for approval in June 2018.

3.9 Supported Lodgings Scheme

3.9.1 The Supported Lodgings Scheme was introduced in January 2017 to offer 16-17 year olds a secure place to live, whilst at the same time providing them with a supportive adult who can help them to develop vital life skills necessary to live independently such as budgeting, cooking, and emotional support. The Supportive Lodging Scheme offers young people the opportunity to move towards independence in a planned and secure way, whilst remaining close to their network of family and friends. As at 31 March 2018 there were 2 Supported Lodgings Carers caring for 1 young person.

3.10 Staying Put

3.10.1 Staying put arrangements give stability and support to young people as it enables them to remain living with their former foster carers beyond their 18th birthday. This can often support to young people to prepare them for adulthood, allow them to experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown.

3.10.2 According to Ofsted National Statistics 2016/2017, young people were less likely than in previous years to stay put with their foster carers when they turned 18. This is the case locally as at 31 March 2018 there were only 2 young people placed in in-house staying put arrangements.

Section 4

Special Guardianship Orders

4.1.1 The Fostering Service is involved in the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers. The number of SGO carers in Central Bedfordshire has been increasing steadily year on year. As at 31 March 2018 there were 140 SGO's in place, compared to 135 in the previous year.

- 4.1.2 Once assessed and the SGO is granted, the majority of SGO carers do not receive ongoing support (apart from a financial allowance) as they access universal services.
- 4.1.3 There are, however, a small cohort of families who contact the service for specific support when issues arise. Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, the Fostering Service supported 16 families (compared to 27 in the previous year). The areas of support requested from families were in the following areas:

SGO Support	Number of times support given
Contact	5
Play therapy	3
Financial support requested	2
Advise re applying for a passport	1
Advise re housing payments	1
Advise re revoking SGO	1
Mediation required re SGO carer and birth parents	1
Section 37 info requested from a neighbouring authority	1
Update to advise SGO carer had died	1

Section 5

Private Fostering

- 5.1.1 Family Support team have overall responsibility for monitoring Private Fostering arrangements in Central Bedfordshire and for providing a separate annual report in relation to Private Fostering. However, in July 2018 the fostering service took over responsibility for the assessment and support of private foster carers. As at the end of March 2018 the Fostering Service were supporting 2 Private Foster Carers who were caring for 2 children.

Section 6

Training and Development of Foster Carers

All foster carers are expected to attend mandatory training and other training that has been recommended as part of their PDP (personal development plan). The service has a full and comprehensive Training Programme for foster carers, from preparation training (Skills to Foster), through induction to more complex/specific post-approval training.

6.1 Skills to Foster

- 6.1.1 New Fostering applicants have many questions prior to and during the assessment process. As an essential part of the fostering assessment, preparation to become a foster carer the 'Skills to Foster' training examines issues that are relevant, such as what it will be like to have children placed with them or working in tandem with the Local Authority in order to reach positive outcomes for children.
- 6.1.1 Spread over several dates, this training provides an opportunity for prospective foster carers to reflect on their values and attitude to caring and learn more about the skills and attributes needed to become a foster carer.
- 6.1.2 During 2017/2018, the Fostering Service ran 3 'Skills to Foster' course with a total of 25 delegates attending.
- 6.1.3 As part of the application and assessment process, all applicants must complete Emergency First Aid training; 6 courses were held during 2017/2018 with a total of 85 delegates attending.

6.2 Induction

- 6.2.1 Following approval, foster carers enter their 12-month induction phase into the Service and are required to complete their mandatory Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards. As at 31 March 2018 88 fostering households had successfully completed the Standards, 7 were yet to complete, but still had time to address within the required timescale and 3 households were overdue in completing the Standards and were outside the required timescale. Supervising Social Workers and the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Support Officer were providing additional support to help these carers achieve the standards.
- 6.2.2 Foster Carers training is linked to the foster carers tier level/fee which means that foster carers have to complete relevant training to remain on their tier level or progress to a higher tier level. Attendance at training is good which

appears to be having a positive impact on raising standards in foster carers practice alongside their continued professional development.

6.3 The Fostering Training and Development Programme

- 6.3.1 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. During this financial year, a total of 49 specialist in-house training courses were provided (compared to 40 in the previous year) on 36 subjects (compared to 26 in the previous year). The training available was diverse to meet the differing needs of carers and included training such as: Self harm, first aid, radicalisation, tax talk, allegations, introduction to Theraplay, depression and Internet Safety.
- 6.3.2 Foster carers are able to access training on-line and between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, 212 carers accessed on line training on a wide variety of topics.
- 6.3.3 Foster carers were also able to access training from the LSCB (Local Safeguarding Children's Board), Social Care, Virtual Schools Domestic Violence and the Early Years Teams. 10 foster carers attended training on the following: crisis intervention, mentoring, supporting children through traumatic experiences, self-regulation, domestic abuse, self-harm, safeguarding children in a digital world, effective child protection conferences and county lines, and gangs and young people.
- 6.3.4 Having access to many specialist training courses in different formats enables foster carers to tailor their training to suit their specific requirements/style of learning based on the needs of the children they have in placement as well as ensuring they attend the core training required by the National Minimum Standards for the Fostering Service. If carers identify specific training support needs, these will be looked at on an individual basis and additional support provided, where required.

Section 7

Support for foster carers

7.1 The Fostering Social Worker

- 7.1.1 The fostering social worker is responsible for the foster carer's ongoing assessment and support and must provide regular supervision that

addresses their learning and development needs. It is the key role of the fostering social worker to support foster carers in meeting the National Minimum Standards required in the care they provide to children and young people.

- 7.1.2 A key strength of the fostering service is the ability of the staff group to remain child focused while providing a high level of support to foster carers.

7.2 Advise and Mediation Service

- 7.2.1 Independent advice and mediation is provided to foster carers via Fostering Network (a national organisation supporting foster carers). This service is primarily used by foster carers during an allegation as it helps to provide independent support and advice during these times. The Fostering Service spot purchases this service as and when it is required. During this financial year there was only 1 request for this service which the Fostering Service supported.

7.3 Foster carer support groups

- 7.3.1 Local monthly support groups are held for foster carers across the county. These are held in Dunstable, Millbrook and Cardington and have been well attended throughout the year.
- 7.3.2 Monthly support groups are also held for Intensive Support carers. As part of the support offered to Intensive Support carers a clinician from CAMHS attends these to provide group supervision and offer advice and support to help aid placement stability.
- 7.3.3 Two evening social events for foster carers took place over this financial year and included a Hawaiian night (23 adults and 26 children attended) and a Cinema night (13 adults and 20 children attended).

7.4 Celebration of Fostering event

- 7.4.1 A Celebration of Fostering event is held every year to recognise the commitment, loyalty, hard work and achievements of our foster carers and their families. This year the event was held at Woburn Safari Park and was extremely well received with 68 adults and 66 children attending. Staff from the Corporate Parenting Service attended as well as the Chief Executive, Deputy Director (Safeguarding & Early Help, Children's Services) and, Executive Member for Adults, Social Care and Housing Operations (HRA).

15 foster carers received long service awards this year;

9 for 5 years
4 for 10 years
1 for 15 years and
1 for 20 years.

Special awards were also presented for carers in the following categories:

- Outstanding contribution to caring for children with disabilities
- Brilliant family and friends foster carer
- Fabulous foster carer
- Outstanding contribution to fostering
- Special sons and daughters

7.5 Queens Garden Party

7.5.1 In recognition of foster carers' hard work and dedication to their role the Service recommended a number of foster carers for attendance at one of the Queen's Garden Parties. 5 foster carers were recommended, however 2 had previously attended, the 3 remaining applications were successful and 3 fostering households have been formally invited to attend one of the Queen's Garden Parties in 2018.

7.6 Foster Carers 'Talk Time'

7.6.1 This event is held quarterly and gives foster carers the opportunity to meet with Fostering Managers and other senior managers to discuss fostering issues. It also allows the Corporate Parenting Service to update foster carers on developments within the service. Four 'Talk Times' were held in this financial year with a total of 39 carers attending. Following the 'Talk Time' meeting a newsletter is sent out to all foster carers updating them of areas discussed at 'Talk Time' as well as providing information on a whole host of other topics relevant to fostering.

7.7 'Tea with Alex'

7.7.1 'Tea with Alex' was an initiative set up by the new Head of Service, Alex Coman, when he took over in November 2017. It gives foster carers an opportunity to meet with the Head of Corporate Parenting Service, on a

regular basis (quarterly) to help him shape the service and support foster carers to improve the lives of our children in care. There was 1 'Tea with Alex' arranged during the last financial year with 6 foster carers attending.

7.8 The Mentoring Scheme

7.8.1 The Mentoring Scheme currently has five foster carer mentors who specialise in specific areas such as care of teenagers, short term care for younger children, and long-term care. All newly approved foster carers are allocated a mentor at the time of approval and existing foster carers are able to access the scheme during challenging times or if they require additional support. During this financial year the service had 6 mentors who supported 11 mentees.

7.9 Out of hours service

7.9.1 Fostering managers and social workers from the Fostering Service provide an 'out of hours' telephone support service for foster carers. A mobile phone is dedicated to this service and all carers have access to the number. The service is available from 5.20pm (4.20 on a Friday) – 11pm weekdays and from 8.45am – 11pm during weekends and bank holidays. This service ensures that foster carers can readily access telephone support from an experienced fostering worker.

7.9.2 Feedback from foster carers indicates that this service is highly valued. Outside of these hours foster carers will contact the Emergency Duty Team.

7.10 The Foster Carers Association

7.10.1 The Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association is run by foster carers and provides local support and social activities for foster carers. The council actively encourages and supports the Association and provides financial support and services in kind to assist with producing and circulating a quarterly newsletter. During this financial year, events that the Foster Carers Association organised included an Easter egg trail, Hunt and Bonnet competition, Picnic in the Park, a Halloween Party, a Christmas Party and a trip to Wickstead Park.

7.11 Fostering Network and BAAF membership

7.11.1 The Fostering Service is a corporate member of Fostering Network that works to promote fostering in the UK. All approved foster carers are provided

with individual membership, funded by the Fostering Service. The Fostering Service also spot purchases Fostering Network's advice and mediation service for foster carers, as and when required.

7.12 Sons and daughters

- 7.12.1 The Fostering Service run holiday activities for sons and daughters of foster carers which are activity-based but also aimed to support them with the impact of fostering on their family. This year 3 events took place, these included a trip to Caldecot Xperience, an Adventure Centre (8 attendees), the Pantomime (8 attendees) and a backstage tour of Milton Keynes theatre (5 sons and daughters of foster carers and 4 looked after children).

Section 8

Notifications

- 8.1.1 The Fostering Service has to notify Ofsted (Schedule 7) of any significant events, accidents or incidents that occur for children whilst placed in foster care.
- 8.1.2 Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 there were 3 notifications sent to Ofsted (compared to 1 in the previous year). The first notification was referred by a foster carer who reported that a known sex offender had been giving a lift to a childminder assistant who supported a foster carer. The L.A.D.O (Local Authority Designated Officer) was contacted and Ofsted informed. The second notification was in relation to an allegation made against a male foster carer regarding their conduct. A J.E.M. (Joint Evaluation Meeting) was held and a Section 47 inquiry initiated. The allegation was withdrawn and so no further action was taken. The third notification was in relation to an anonymous referral received alleging a child was being physically abused by a CBC foster carer. They also stated that the child was having to attend the carer's workplace while they worked and that the child was petrified of the carer. A referral was made to the L.A.D.O. and a J.E.M. was held. The allegation was proved to be unfounded and no further action was taken.

Section 9

Allegations

- 9.1.1 Allegations against foster carers are dealt with in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), procedures for managing allegations/concerns about foster carers. All foster carers, subject to any allegation are offered independent support from the Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation Service.
- 9.1.2 Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, there were 2 allegations made against foster carers (compared to none in the previous year) both of which are mentioned in Section 8 above.

Section 10

Complaints

- 10.1.1 The Fostering Service uses the Children's Services Complaints Procedure for dealing with and monitoring complaints by foster carers, birth parents and relatives, staff and other partners with a relevant interest in the way CBC fostering services are provided.
- 10.1.2 Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 there were no complaints made (compared to 8 in the previous year). There was an unresolved complaint, however, from the previous year that escalated to a stage 2 complaint and was taken to the LGO (Local Government Ombudsman) in this financial year. The complaint (which was reported on in the previous year) was in relation to a foster carer who had wanted to adopt a child who had previously been in her care, however, the Local Authority's care plan was for the child to be placed with her siblings. The L.G.O. upheld the carers' complaint as they felt that the council had failed to provide an opportunity for the family to say goodbye to the child, also that the council failed to provide the carers with a written response to their intention to adopt. In order to remedy these failings, the council agreed to:
- Pay £500 for the distress, time and inconvenience expended to complain about the council's actions
 - Re-offer the carers the provision of counselling.
 - Invite the carers to consider mediation to see if there was a way forward for them to continue their career as foster carers.
- 10.1.3 Following a review of the LGO decision, managers from the Corporate Parenting Service met to review learning from the complaint. As a result, the Fostering and Adoption policies were amended to ensure a written response

would always be provided to foster carers who expressed an intention to adopt a child.

- 10.1.3 There have been no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) during this period. The IRM is a mechanism for appeal open to the foster carer when disagreeing with the fostering service provider which considers a prospective or existing foster carer not to be suitable to foster a child, or feels an alteration is needed to an existing foster carer's terms of approvals.

Section 11

Compliments

- 11.1.1 Compliments about service delivery from customers and for their representatives are recorded within the service as these, alongside complaints and comments, can be shared to promote learning and make improvements.
- 11.1.2 Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 the Fostering Service received 7 compliments (compared to 16 in the previous year). Compliments included:
- 2 foster carers provided positive feedback about their supervising social workers whose support they valued.
 - 1 childcare social worker complemented a foster carer on her 'excellent care' of 2 children she had looked after. The social worker acknowledged there had been some difficulties and upsetting times over the previous few months but that the foster carer's care of the children had never wavered from being excellent. The social worker made the carer aware that CBC valued her professionalism
 - 1 foster carer provided positive feedback about a social event the fostering service had facilitated during the Christmas period.
 - 1 foster carer complemented the fostering service on her 'excellent' presentation of a training course which focused on the child's journey through placement.
 - 1 foster carer provided positive feedback on a new 'Tea with Alex' initiative where foster carers had the opportunity to meet with the Head of Corporate Parenting Service to discuss fostering issues.
 - 1 independent foster panel member also wrote in to complement the panel secretary on the 'excellent' standard of her minutes.

In addition to these compliments the fostering service also received very positive feedback from Ofsted following the 'Children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers' Inspection. The following feedback about the fostering service was received:

- There are effective recruitment, training and support arrangements in place
- Foster carers valued the stability of their supervising social workers who 'do what they say they will do'
- Assessments of carers are timely and thorough
- Supervising social workers visit carers regularly and work closely with children's social workers to promote placement stability
- A dedicated group of foster carers provide other carers with respite care. This has been effective in promoting the stability of placements in very challenging situations.
- Foster carers receive good training to help them understand attachment theory and the impact of trauma
- The number of placement disruptions is low and learning is used to improve practice
- The independently chaired fostering panel is effective. It has a dedicated panel adviser who ensures all reports are of a suitable standard.
- The central list of panel members includes experienced individuals from a range of diverse backgrounds.
- The panel is consistently curious and use penetrating questions to assure members about the quality of work.

Section 12

Conclusion

- 12.1.1 The Fostering Service has had a tremendously positive and successful year. The Service has met its recruitment target for career foster carers for 4 consecutive years. Whilst the percentage of children placed in-house has dipped from an all-time high of 65% to 61%, this figure is still good. The main reason for this dip is because the number of children in care has increased during this financial year so maintaining 65% has been more difficult to

achieve. The service still aspires to place 70% of its looked after children in house and is confident that in time with its robust recruitment strategy in place and other work being undertaken, that this can be achieved.

- 12.1.2 Maintaining a high percentage of children placed in-house has enabled CBC to make significant savings on placement costs as IFA placements are significantly more expensive than in house foster placements. Having more in-house foster carers has supported greater placement choice which has enabled better matching of children and enabled significantly more children being placed in local placements that better meet their needs, where support is more readily available and where improved placement stability has been achieved.
- 12.1.3 In order to continue developing the service this year saw the introduction of the PACE fostering scheme which aims to support children and young people who have been arrested and charged in relation to a criminal offence. Recruiting foster carers to such a scheme is notoriously difficult, however, as at 31 March 2018 the fostering service had 3 PACE carers in assessment. It was planned that Luton, Bedford Borough and CBC would recruit a number of carers each which would then be pooled and used on a Rota basis in order to provide this specialist care to a small number of children/young people who require this type of placement. It is unclear, currently, whether Luton or Bedford Borough have managed to recruit any PACE carers themselves.
- 12.1.4 During this financial year the service has been developing a 'Parent and Child' scheme, to meet the increasing demand for such placements. This scheme is due to be launched at the start of the new financial year.
- 12.1.5 This year the service has also implemented a change of procedure in relation to children's savings. All foster carers are expected to routinely save for the children in their care. Prior to the change of procedure foster carers were expected to open bank/building society accounts for the children in their care and often experienced difficulties with this as they didn't always have the relevant documentation required to open such accounts. Monitoring to ensure all foster carers were routinely saving for children was also problematic. The new procedure, to be introduced at the start of the new financial year, will involve CBC taking the savings from source (taken out of the foster carers allowance before it was paid to them). This money will be kept in a virtual bank account so when the child reaches 18 a calculation will be made as to the number of weeks the child has been in care and a bank

account would then be set up for the person to be able to access as required.

- 12.1.6 During this year the fostering service has also taken on responsibility for assessing and supporting private foster carers. The Family Support Service retains overall responsibility for private fostering including responsibility for the privately fostered child.
- 12.1.7 In consultation with foster carers, the fostering service updated the Foster Carers Charter, which sets out the fostering services and foster carers roles and commitment to each other (see Appendix 3)
- 12.1.8 The service continues to offer a wide range of support to foster carers in order to ensure children are cared for in safe and stable placements that meet their specific needs. The high take up of training, the positive figures in relation to placement stability and the low number of allegations and complaints indicates that foster carers are well supported. Positive feedback from Ofsted also evidenced the fostering service has provided a high quality, safe and effective service to foster carers and looked after children.
- 12.1.9 In order to involve foster carers more in the development of services a new initiative was also introduced in this financial year where the Head of Corporate Parenting meets with foster carers on a regular basis to help shape the service and ensure foster carers are supported to improve the lives of children in care.
- 12.1.10 The fostering service has experienced a number of staff changes this year and although most posts have now been recruited to, the changes in staffing have had an impact on foster carers who rely on the close working relationship they have with their supervising social workers. Staff recruited recently are now working hard to develop good working relationships with their foster carers to ensure they feel valued and supported and can continue to foster for CBC for the foreseeable future.
- 12.1.11 In terms of the forthcoming year the service will continue to concentrate on increasing the number of in house foster carers so that more children can be placed with carers who can appropriately meet their needs locally. The recruitment target for 2018/19 is to recruit a further 10 career foster carers, however, targeted recruitment will concentrate on recruiting carers who can care for older children, those with challenging behaviour, respite carers, PACE carers and those who can provide parent and child placements.

12.1.12 New recruitment strategies based on successful recruitment strategies used in other Fostering Services will be implemented in the forthcoming year and will include recruiting Fostering Ambassadors from our existing foster carers who will help support the service in the implementation of its recruitment strategy. Another new recruitment initiative will be looked at in the form of Star Parties (Start Thinking About Recruitment parties) as these have been used as a successful recruitment tool within foster carer community groups within Rotherham.

12.1.13 During 2018/2019 the Fostering Service also plan to finalise a loans policy for foster carers wishing to extend their accommodation in order to be able to increase the number of placements they are able to offer or to provide permanency for those children who might otherwise not be able to be placed, or keep siblings together.

12.1.14 Another consideration for the Fostering Service will be the potential introduction of a 'Support Care' Fostering Scheme. Support care is a preventative support service which is designed to provide families who are experiences difficulties in caring for their children with some time out or respite. It is a time limited service which is provided as part of a plan to prevent family breakdown and avoid children becoming looked after on a long term basis. Work will be undertaken with the family support service to establish if this scheme would be a viable option and where it should sit within the organisation.

This Report has been composed and presented for members to consider and note by:

Annie Craig
Practice Manager Corporate Parenting Service - Fostering

Central Bedfordshire Council, First Central, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands,
Shefford, Bedfordshire SG175TQ Telephone: 0300 300 8090

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