Corporate Parenting Panel

Schedule
Thursday 24 October 2019, 10:00 AM — 1:00 PM BST

Venue
Room 15, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, SG17 5TQ

Description
To Chair and Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel:

Elected Members (voting)
Cllr S Clark (Chair)
Cllr A Dodwell (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs S Collins, S Goodchild, C Hegley, G Mackey, G Sanders and T Stock

Substitutes: Cllrs R Berry, D Bowater, Y Farrell, M Versallion and T Wye

Officers (voting)
Director of Children's Services
Director of Social Care, Health and Housing (or the Assistant Director Housing Services or their representative if the Director is unable to attend)
Assistant Director Leisure, Libraries and Countryside (or their representative if the Assistant Director is unable to attend)

Carers (Non-voting)
Only four of the foster carers’ co-opted representatives will be expected to attend at any one meeting.

Children in Care Council representative (Co-Chairman) (non-voting)

Notes for Participants
Please note that phones or other equipment may be used to film, audio record, tweet or blog from this meeting. No part of the meeting room is exempt from public filming.

The use of arising images or recordings is not under the Council's control.

For further information on this meeting contact: committeemeetings@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
Hard copies of the papers for this meeting are not routinely made available to those in attendance. Should you require a copy of please download this from the Council website beforehand.

## Agenda

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<td>To receive apologies for absence</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Minutes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To approve as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 23 July 2019.</td>
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<td>Members' Interests</td>
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<td>To receive from Members any declarations of interest.</td>
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<td>Chair's Announcements</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Understanding our Looked After Children Population</td>
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<td>To consider a report on the population of Looked After Children/Young People and Care Leavers in Central Bedfordshire.</td>
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<td>05. Understanding our LAC Population .docx</td>
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<td>05. APPENDIX A Understanding Our LAC Population.pdf</td>
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<td><strong>6. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>To receive the Independent Reviewing Officer’s (IRO) Annual Report.</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td><a href="#">06. IRO Annual Report 2018-19.docx</a></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Looked After Children and Care Leavers Annual report</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>To consider a report on the achievements, outcomes and challenges for Central Bedfordshire's Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young People during the period from 1 April 2018 to 21 March 2019.</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="#">07. Looked After Children and Leaving Care Annual report.docx</a></td>
<td>56</td>
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<td><strong>8. Agency Report - Quarter 1 Fostering, 1 April to 30 June 2019</strong></td>
<td>68</td>
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<td><strong>9. Six Month Adoption Agency Report - 1 April to 30 September 2019</strong></td>
<td>82</td>
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<td>To receive the Six Month Adoption Agency report.</td>
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<td>83</td>
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<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To receive a report on the contents of the Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan.</td>
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<td><a href="#">10. Ofsted and Eastern Regional Peer Review Work Plan 2019-20.docx</a></td>
<td>95</td>
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<td><strong>11. Verbal update from the Director of Children's Service on matters of interest to the Panel</strong></td>
<td>110</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
12. Work Programme

To consider the Panel's work programme.

- 12. CPP work programme covering report.docx
- 12. CPP work plan 2019 .docx

13. Exclusion of Press and Public

To consider whether to pass a resolution under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the Press and Public from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that the consideration of the item it likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 A of the Act.

Exempt Items

14. Children in Care Council update

To receive the Children in Care Council update.

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To receive a report on the role of the Virtual School and the unvalidated outcomes at Key Stages 1, 2, and 4 for Looked After Children (LAC) in Central Bedfordshire for the Academic Year 2018/19.

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1. Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies for absence
2. Minutes

To approve as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 23 July 2019.
At a meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held at The Rufus Centre, Steppingley Road, Flitwick, Bedford, MK45 1TH on 23 July 2019 from 2pm – 4.40pm

Present:

**Elected Members (voting)**
- Cllrs A Dodwell (Chair)
- S Clark (Vice-Chair)
- S Collins
- S Goodchild
- C Hegley
- G Mackey
- G Sanders
- T Stock

**Officers (voting)**
- Mr T Hoyle, Assistant Director of Strategic Commissioning
  Social Care, Health and Housing

**Carers (non voting)**
- Mr P Albon
- Mr L Youngman

**Children in Care Council Representatives (Co-Chair) (non-voting)**

**Officers in Attendance**
- Mrs J Bunker-Dare, Head of Virtual School
- Mrs R Coals, Principle Social Worker & Head of Professional Svcs
- Ms K Crawford, Senior Performance Analyst
- Mrs J Edwards, Head of Service (Inclusion)
- Ms S Griffin, Committee Services Officer
- Mrs S Keenan, Practice Manager, Conferencing and Review Professional Standards
- Mrs K Mathu, Participation Officer – Voice, Involvement & Participation Team
- Mrs S Rymell, Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Early Help
- Mrs G Wall, Voice, Involvement & Participation Strategic Manager

**Others in Attendance**
- Children in Care Council Representatives

**Apologies**
- Mrs S Harrison, Director of Children’s Services
- Mrs J Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing
1. Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on the 30 May 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2. Members’ Interests

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

It was noted that a number of Corporate Parenting Panel Members were School Governors.

3. Chair’s Announcements

The following announcements and communications were made:

- The average attainment 8 score for a cohort of 19 young people in Year 11 had increased by 7.3 points compared to 2017. This has brought the average to 23.2 which was higher than the national average of 18.9 or statutory neighbor of 20. Central Bedfordshire Council is first in comparison with its statutory neighbours and 16th nationally, putting the local authority in the upper quartile.
- The Director of Children’s Services attended the launch of the Lifelong Links project by the Children’s Minister at the House of Commons. The project helps to identify a network of family and friends who have played important part in young person’s life. The Voice, Involvement & Participation Strategic Manager explained that the project was in its early stage, but six young people had already volunteered to take part. Work currently taking place included mobile mapping of young people and obtaining information from parents.
- The Central Bedfordshire Looked After Children and Care Leavers Achievement Awards were taking place on the 20 September 2019. The theme for this year’s awards is Film. An email would be sent to all Councillors asking for contributions towards the event such as red carpet, camera booths etc.

4. Understanding our Looked After Children Population

The Panel considered a report on the population of Looked After Children/Young People and Care Leavers in Central Bedfordshire.

Points and comments included:

- As of the 30 June 2019 there were 310 Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire.
- This figure had fluctuated over the last 9 months but continued to remain around the same level.
• The data showed that Central Bedfordshire was broadly in line with its statistical neighbours and the National Average which was provided a good benchmark for how the local authority is performing.
• The data shown in the report is taken at a certain point in time rather than reflecting academic year groups.
• The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Early Help advised that work was taking place to ensure that young people leaving care have the right support and packages in place. This included working with the housing team to provide suitable semi-independent living where necessary.
• The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Early Help explained that supported living accommodation for 16-18 year olds was not currently regulated nationally. In Central Bedfordshire children were placed with a list of preferred accommodation. Children’s Services would receive notification from Commissioning if any children were placed in unapproved accommodation and the appropriate steps would be taken to move the child to an alternative placement.
• The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Early Help advised that thought could be given to the provision of in-house independent living similar to the in-house foster care offer.

NOTED

the report on the Looked After Children and Young People populations in Central Bedfordshire.

5. Children in Care Council and Participation 2018/19 Annual Report

The Panel received the Children in Care Council and Participation 2018/19 Annual Report in conjunction with exempt Minute Item 10.

Points and comments included:

• The Aspirations List had given members of the CiCC the opportunity to explore a range of hobbies, valuable work experiences, and aspirations.
• The Children and Young People’s Pledge is a set of promises that CBC makes to all children in care and care leavers. The Pledge was ever evolving with the aim of ensuring every young person has an input.
• The information presented by the CiCC at the Eastern Peer Review was being shared by Peer Reviewers within their own local authorities.
• Following the Looked After Children’s Review, a prototype model to make young people’s reviews more friendly and to encourage more young people to co-chair their review was being co-produced with children and young people. This would be piloted during the summer.
• The film made by all Children in Care Councils which was premiered on the 17 April 2019 in Greenwich would be shared with colleagues and Corporate Parenting Panel members.
• Joint working was taking place with the Children’s Commissioning team to help ensure that care providers are providing the highest quality 16+ supported living accommodation services to care leavers.
• The CiCC had been approached for the fifth year running to deliver presentations and workshops to 500+ Frontline students at Warwick University. Frontline is a national programme that recruits and trains social workers to provide a one-year employment-based qualification.
• A new care leaver group had been set up last year to ensure all young people are supported as they transition into adulthood. The group also contributed to CBC’s Financial Policy which has helped give young people an understanding of financial needs when living independently and the confidence of what they can spend money on without worrying.
• Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel were encouraged to familiarise themselves with Inspire Me, the app designed for care leavers by care leavers that enables former care leavers who are now living independently and learning or working, to share their positive stories and reflect on their experiences.
• The challenge remained to reach out to those children and young people whose voices are less easily heard such as those placed out of county or who find it difficult to speak up and to endeavor to give young people the opportunity to join the CiCC.
• There is more work to be done around increasing the profile and knowledge of the Children in Care Council and making sure young people have the opportunity to attend and be an active part of meetings and events.

NOTED

the Children in Care Council and Participation 2018/19 Annual Report.

6. Ofsted and Eastern Region Peer Review Work Plan 2019/20

The Panel received a report on the contents of the Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan.

Points and comments included:

• The Principle Social Worker and Head of Professional Services explained that the Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan 2019-20 had been created in response to the recommendations from the Focused Visit and Eastern Region Peer Review.
• The 17 recommendations were of equal importance but recommendations 1-3 were a priority for the Service area as they had been developed as a result of feedback from the Ofsted focused visit.
• A full year of the audit arrangements had now been completed. Evidence was seen of improvements in practice which had resulted from the learning from the audits.
• The additional measure of social workers self-evaluating their own practice as part of audit activity had been added since the Ofsted inspection. 30 case files are selected on a monthly basis and a manager allocated as auditor. Parents and carers are contacted for their views on what is/isn’t working well in order to triangulate a view of the quality of the service provided. Ongoing work included the addition of the voice of the child as part of the audit process.
• Five of the recommendations are defined as process changes such as earlier involvement in journey of the child and the remaining nine are development issues.
The completion dates for recommendations 1-3 were set within short timescales as they were developed as a result of feedback from the Ofsted focused visit and were on track for delivery. The timescales for the other 14 recommendations had been paced in response to the learning from the 2017 Ofsted inspection and the subsequent action plan.

The Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Early Help explained that a full Ofsted inspection had taken place in 2017 followed by a focused visit in November 2018. Joint targeted area inspections could also take place with partners such as the Police and Care Quality Commission as well as the annual Ofsted conversation to check and balance the current situation in the Service area, work that had taken place and the next area of development. A SEND Inspection is due imminently.

The Principle Social Worker and Head of Professional Services advised that the next Ofsted inspection should be 2020.

**NOTED**

the report on the contents of the Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan.

7. **Verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services on matters of interest to the Panel**

The Panel received a verbal update from the Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Early Help on behalf of the Director of Children’s Services.

Points and comments included:

- Nadhim Zahawi, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families had recently visited Central Bedfordshire Council to discuss the lobbying taking place about unregulated supported accommodation for 16-18 year olds. Visits had taken place to various accommodation in conjunction with Bedford and Luton Borough Councils.
- A round table event had subsequently taken place in Central London in order to try and determine ways forward for the 16-18 provision. The direction of travel appeared to be towards a system of licensing for supported accommodation.
- A recruitment process had taken place for the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) programme that gives newly qualified social workers extra support during their first year of employment. 9 new social workers had subsequently been made 18 appointed. The Children in Care Council were commended for their outstanding support for during the recruitment process.
- The Eastern Region self-assessments for Children’s Services had been submitted. The next step was moderation between directors. The self-assessment gave a baseline for Ofsted visits in terms of areas of good practice, where improvements had been made and the focus for future areas of work.
- Work was currently taking place with Public Health on the Youth Offer in Central Bedfordshire. Safeguarding is a complex issue which was becoming more complicated due to the increased risks and dangers of exploitation.
- In response to concerns raised about the recent permission given for semi-independent accommodation for young people in Chalk Hill, Houghton Regis despite objections from Children’s Services and Houghton Regis Town Council, the Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Early Help gave assurance that the Local Authority had not
subsequently placed any children in this accommodation due to concerns about the provider. There was the duty by law for other local authorities to notify Central Bedfordshire Council about any children they place in accommodation within the local authority. The Police would also be notified of any placements.

NOTED

the verbal update from the Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Early Help on behalf of the Director of Children’s Services.

8. Work Programme

Members considered the report of the Committee Services Officer which set out the Panel’s proposed work programme for 219/20

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Parenting Panel work programme, as attached at Appendix A to the report of the Committee Services Officer, be approved subject to the following amendments:

24 October
• Item 6 - Transitions report on Adult’s Social Care/Children with disabilities be deferred to the December meeting.
• Item 10 - Supported Accommodation for 16-17 year olds be deferred to the February meeting.
• Ofsted and Regional Peer Review Action Plan be added.

19 December
• Item 4 – Looked After Children SW Stability report be deleted as this was on the work programme for the October meeting.
• Update from a representative from the Youth Offending Service YOS be added.

17 February
• TACT dictionary be added.
• Update from a Personal Advisor on the support given to a Looked After Child be added.

6 April
• Review of The Pledge and a social activity with the CiCC to be added

that the Adoption and Fostering annual reports be tabled into the work programme.

9. Exclusion of the Press and Public
10. Children in Care Council update

The Panel received a presentation on work being undertaken by the Children in Care Council in conjunction with Minute Item 5.

NOTED

the exempt presentation from the Children in Care Council.

12. Virtual School – final reports for Looked After Children 2017/18

The Panel received a report on the role of the Virtual School and the outcomes at Key Stages 1 and 2, and 4 for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire for the Academic Year 2017/18.

The Head of Service (Inclusion) explained that this was her last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel as her role had now changed and she was no longer Head of Virtual School. Members of the Panel were thanked for their continued commitment to the Virtual School during its exceptional journey.

NOTED

the report on the role of the Virtual School and the outcomes at Key Stages 1 and 2, and 4 for Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire for the Academic Year 2017/18 and the progress made.

the steps identified to improve outcomes for Looked After Children in the Academic Year 2018/19.

Chair ..............................................

Dated ..............................................
3. Members' Interests

To receive from Members any declarations of interest.
4. Chair's Announcements

To receive any matters of communication from the Chair.
Reports
5. Understanding our Looked After Children Population

To consider a report on the population of Looked After Children/Young People and Care Leavers in Central Bedfordshire.
Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel 24 October 2019

Understanding our LAC Population

Report of: Cllr Sue Clark Executive Member Children’s Services (sue.clark@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Responsible Director(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children’s Services (sue.harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report

At the request of panel members a regular data summary for our population of Looked after Children/Young People and Care Leavers is provided to each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

This is the report for the meeting of 24 October 2019

It is based on data produced on the Wednesday before the deadline for documentation to be submitted to Panel and therefore is based on information current on 30 September 2019

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the report and comment on any issues arising

Appendices

Appendix A

Understanding our LAC Population Data – Children and Young Person’s Performance Team
Report author(s):

Branwen Lommelen (Harris)
Branwen.harris@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>30/09/18 (1 year ago)</th>
<th>31/12/18 (9 months ago)</th>
<th>31/03/19 (6 months ago)</th>
<th>30/06/2019 (3 months ago)</th>
<th>30/09/2019</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total LAC</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>30/09/18 (1 year ago)</td>
<td>31/12/18 (9 months ago)</td>
<td>31/03/19 (6 months ago)</td>
<td>30/06/2019 (3 months ago)</td>
<td>30/09/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC Rate per 10,000</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN Average Rate March 2018 per 10,000</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Average March 2018 Rate per 10,000</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>63.6</td>
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<td>63.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total UASC</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LAC (excluding UASC)</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC (excluding UASC) Rate per 10,000</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC (excluding UASC) March 2018 SN Average Rate per 10,000</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC (excluding UASC) March 2018 National Average Rate per 10,000</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>59.8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1) Understanding our population of Looked After Children and Young People: SUMMARY
2) Understanding our population of Looked After Children and Young People: **AGE AND GENDER, UASC, m & f**
3) Understanding our population of Looked After Children and Young People: a) TURNING 18; b) FOSTER PLACEMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total LAC</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Of which are UASC</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total LAC Turning 18 in Next 6 Months</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b) Foster Placements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total LAC in Foster Placements</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total IFA Foster Placements</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total In House Foster Placements</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total In House that are Friends or Family placements</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Foster Placements Chart](image)
4) Understanding our population of Looked After Children and Young People: **PLACEMENT TYPE SUMMARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Type</th>
<th>% of CBC Placements</th>
<th>SN</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent/Semi Independent Living</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed with Parents</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed for Adoption</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Residential</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LAC</td>
<td>310</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Placement Type**

- Foster Care: 240
- Independent/Semi Independent Living: 27
- Placed with Parents: 16
- Residential: 17
- Placed for Adoption: 9
- Other Residential: 1

**Placement Type**

- Foster Care: 77.4%
- Independent/Semi Independent Living: 8.7%
- Placed with Parents: 5.2%
- Residential: 5.5%
- Placed for Adoption: 2.9%
- Other Residential: 0.3%
5) Understanding our population of Looked After Children and Young People: YOS and Remand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Children</th>
<th>of which: Total UASC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Young Offender Institution or prison</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total LAC Open to YOS:</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
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6. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report

To receive the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) Annual Report.
Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel 24 October 2019


Report of: Sharon Keenan, (sharon.keenan@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Responsible Director(s): Sue Harrison, (Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report

To ensure that members of the Corporate Parenting Panel have the opportunity to review and scrutinise the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report and fulfil their statutory responsibility in accordance with the ‘IRO Handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked After Children’.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. note the content of the report.

Issues

Background

1. ‘The IRO Handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked After Children’ states that ‘the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an Annual Report for the scrutiny of members of the Corporate Parenting Panel’.

2. This report provides details on the activity of Children’s Services in relation to Looked After Children, highlight areas of good practice and identify areas which require improvement. In addition, the report describes the range of work the service has engaged in during the year and areas for development, which will be prioritised in the coming year.
Qualitative Information about the Service

3. The report sets out data in relation to the Looked After Children population in Central Bedfordshire, including the timeliness of reviews and participation of children and young people in their reviews.

4. There were 828 reviews held in respect of 310 children during the year from April 2018 to March 2019. The number of reviews held in respect of any individual child or young person is determined by when they become looked after, in accordance with statutory timescales and changes of circumstances which might require an additional review to be held.

Conduct of the Service

5. The Service has focused on the quality of care planning and achieving permanence for all Looked After Children and provided challenge and scrutiny to operational practitioners and managers when gaps in relation to timely and appropriate plans for children have been identified.

Conclusions and Next Steps

6. The Conference and Review Service will continue to focus on delivering good outcomes for Central Bedfordshire’s Looked After Children and young people in accordance with the priorities of the Council and our aspirations for our Looked After Children. The work will continue to be rooted in the wider Quality Assurance Framework for Children’s Services and the continuous development of good practice and high professional standards across the service in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for those children for whom the Council are the corporate parent.

Options for consideration

7. None required

Reason/s for decision

8. Not applicable

Council Priorities

- Protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing
- A more efficient and responsive Council.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

Financial and Risk Implications
10. The Conference and Review Service is part of the wider Professional Standards Service within Children’s Services Operations. The service is responsible for the coordination and chairing of reviews for Looked After Children and Child Protection Conferences. The Quality Assurance Service has an annual budget of £1M.

11. The financial implications noted in this report relate to the need to review the staffing complement in order to ensure compliance with the recommended caseloads specified in the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Handbook.

12. Breach of Regulatory and statutory guidance by non-provision of a service by which the care plans of Looked After Children are reviewed and reputational risks by virtue of non-production of an Annual Report in line with statutory guidance.

Equalities Implications
13. Adherence to Human Rights and Equality issues are maintained.

Conclusion and next Steps
14. The Conference and Review Service will continue to focus on delivering good outcomes for Central Bedfordshire’s Looked After children and young people in accordance with the priorities of the Council and our aspirations for our Looked After Children. The work will continue to be rooted in the wider Quality Assurance Framework for Children’s Services and the continuous development of good practice and high professional standards across the service in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for those children for whom the Council are the corporate parent.

Appendices

Appendix A: Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2018/19

Background Papers
None

Report author(s): Sharon Keenan
Practice Manager, Children’s Services
sharon.keenan@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
Independent Reviewing Officers’ Annual Report April 2018 – March 2019

The contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care
1.0 Purpose of Service

1.1 The Independent Review Officers’ (IRO) role is set out in statutory guidance ‘The IRO Handbook, 2011’. The IROs primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. The responsibility of the IRO has widened from just the review process to an overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews, challenging drift and delay.

1.2 In the National Children’s Bureau, research entitled ‘The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England’ (March 2014), the foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson makes the following comment:

‘The independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO Service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment or whether we are failing.’

1.3 The Department of Education ‘Fostering Better Outcomes: The Government response to the Education Select Committee report into fostering and Foster Care in England’ (July 2018), proposed:

There is potential for IROs to bring about significant practice improvements, alongside their role in ensuring that young people experience the best care from their fostering service. Where IROs are valued and listened to, they provide a legitimate and respected challenge function for individual children’s care plans and the wider service delivery (p. 32).

This Annual IRO Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Service in Central Bedfordshire.

1.4 Summary of Key Points:

- A total of 828 reviews were held this year a decrease of 47 from 875 last year.
- Timeliness and participation continue to be good.
- A permanent IRO and administrative staff group will ensure excellent continuity to our children.
- IRO caseloads comply with statutory guidance.
- The quality assurance system, including the dispute resolution process is fully embedded and evidences an improvement in the provision of services to children and young people.
- Impact of the IRO service is illustrated through case examples.
- IROs have responded to the views of young people, captured in the work with the Children in Care Council.

2.0 Professional Profile of the IRO Service

2.1 In Central Bedfordshire the Independent Reviewing Officers’ function is undertaken by IROs in the Conference and Review Service (CRS) within the Professional Standards function of Children’s Services. IROs undertake two main areas of work: chairing of Child Protection Conferences and Looked after Children’s Reviews. In addition, a small number of short break reviews when provided under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 are chaired by an IRO. One worker
undertakes the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role in combination with the Review Officer role. The Fostering Review Officer is a member of this Service and has responsibility to conduct annual and additional reviews of Central Bedfordshire Council foster carers, as required in accordance with statutory requirements.

2.2 In March 2018, the Service had an establishment of 7.1 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) permanent IROs, excluding the LADO function. To ensure sufficient capacity to meet statutory requirements, an additional 1.0 FTE has been in place since July 2018. During the year, several changes to the team occurred as three members of the team sadly passed away whilst in service during May, June 2018 and April 2019. As a consequence of these changes the Local Authority responded swiftly to ensure service continuity and agency workers were appointed in September 2018 until the permanent posts were secured. Experienced team managers now occupy these vacancies.

2.3 In terms of diversity, the team has a good gender balance reflecting the Looked After children population and their views are listened and responded too.

2.4 Workers come from a range of backgrounds but do not fully reflect the ethnic mix of the population. Ideally the workforce would reflect the diversity of the Looked After Children population it is serving, but within a small group, a wide representation has not been achievable. Within the social work teams there is a wider range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented.

2.5 All IROs have, as required in statutory guidance, a considerable number of years’ experience. IROs previous roles include front line social work with Children with Disabilities, Looked After Children, Child Protection, Leaving and After Care and supervisory and managerial experience, residential experience, fostering experience and previous work as Children’s Guardians. The majority of the team live locally, or in neighbouring authorities and there is a good knowledge of the local area within the team.

2.6 All of the IROs undertake additional roles and duties, either as representatives of the IRO Service or as part of their wider role. These include:

- Bi/monthly Quality Assurance (QA) Liaison meetings with social work teams as part of the QA strategy.
- Attendance at Multi Agency Public Protection meetings as the Children’s Services representative.
- Supervision of the Parent Partnership Service which sits within CRS as an off-line management role.
- Participation in the monthly audit programme.
- Attendance at quarterly liaison meetings with CAFCASS.
- Supervision of the Foster Care Review Officer.
- Strong links with the Children in Care Council (CiCC).
- Representative at various LSCB subgroups, including the Voice of the Child.
- Representative on the LAC Health Strategic Board.

2.7 Ongoing professional development of IROs is important and all IROs have monthly supervision providing support, challenge and reflection. IROs continue to undertake additional learning and development. One member of the team is completing a Post Qualifying course at the University
of Bedfordshire and all IROs regularly access and attend formal and informal opportunities for learning to address and anticipate the changing profile of our Looked After Children population and their needs.

2.8 IROs access and participate in learning from practice observation, case audit and staff appraisal. Increased capacity has enabled a peer observation process to be reintroduced, which has led to greater peer support and practice improvement.

3.0 **Arrangement for Reviews**

3.1 The Social Worker and IRO share responsibility for the review.

3.2 The IRO Handbook sets the expectation that children and young people are included in an age appropriate way in deciding on the arrangement for their review.

3.3 The CRS is responsible for the following elements of the LAC Review:

- Deciding who needs to attend the LAC review.
- Where the review should be held.
- Arranging the invitations and consultations.
- Providing reports.
- Recording the discussion.
- Ensuring timely distribution of the review record.
- Involving co-ordination between Social Worker, and administrative staff.

Business processes are set within the work-flow and formatting of Mosaic, the children’s case management and recording system.

4.0 **Qualitative Information about the IRO Service**

4.1 **The Timeliness of Reviews**

4.2 This figure relates to the rolling year with definition from Department for Education, Children looked after return, ‘of those children who had been looked after for at least 20 working days, the percentage whose Reviews had all been on time over the past year’. This indicator excludes children placed for adoption.

97.4% of LAC reviews due were completed on time which is 302 reviews out of a total of 310 (number of LAC, as at 31st March 2019, for whom 1 or more reviews were due during the year and where a review had been completed). This percentage is very similar to our outturn for the performance for the previous three years (97.0% in 2017/18).

4.3 The eight were overdue by a few days for a variety of reasons which have been explored and addressed to reduce the risk of any reoccurrence.

4.4 The timing of reviews is specified in regulation. The first review has to be held within 20 working days of the child/young person becoming looked after and the second within 3 months of the first. Subsequent reviews are at intervals of no more than 6 months. In addition, reviews will be held if there is a significant change of circumstances or change of care plan.
Headlines

what is going well?

- Timeliness and participation continues to be good.
- IRO caseloads comply with the national guidance.
- Establishment of 8.1 FTE.
- Strong links with the Children in Care Council.
- The majority of LAC reviews due were completed on time.
- IROs are allocated as soon as a child becomes Looked After and remains throughout their journey.

how can we improve?

- Newly appointed IROs has resulted in some Looked After Children having a change of IRO.
- Eight of the 310 LAC Reviews were not completed on time.
- Looked After Children currently do not have a choice of IRO.

what needs to happen?

- Embed the processes to ensure all LAC Reviews are held within timescale.
- Develop a profile for each IRO to share with all Looked After Children.
- Prior to allocation enable children to have a choice of IRO.

IRO impact

- The additional IRO appointment has enabled IROs to dedicate more time to children.
- The majority of care plans are subject to independant scrutiny within 20 days of children entering care.
- IROs develop a long term relationship with their Looked After Children.
- IROs know their children well and represent their needs.

5.0 Children’s Participation

5.1 The IRO Handbook states that it is expected that the child, if s/he is of sufficient age and understanding, will be present for the whole of the Review but this will depend on the circumstances of each individual case. The IRO may decide, in consultation with the Social Worker that attendance of the child is not in the child’s best interests. If the child does not
attend, other arrangements should be made for their involvement. It is one of the specific responsibilities of the IRO to promote the voice of the child and to ensure their wishes and feelings are represented. It may be appropriate for a younger child to be observed, or for the IRO to interact with that child through play or reading in a placement setting. If the child’s first language is not English, as for example with the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, an interpreter will be provided. A child with disabilities may be observed in school, or placement and their needs and feelings discussed with their carers if a direct conversation is not possible.

5.2 The Review Record will include information on how the child participates and how their wishes and feelings were included. Participation is monitored by recording a participation code. Children aged under 4 are exempt from this count but IROs ensure that they seek their views in a variety of ways, such as direct observation and obtaining views from professionals that work with the children. For all other children, it is expected that they should attend, or that their views should be represented.

5.3 Participation is considered an important performance indicator. This year, 95.2% of young people participated in their most recent review, an increase of 0.2% from the previous year (95.0% in 2017/18). Children and young people are also actively supported and encouraged to ‘chair’ their reviews and this is an identified area of development.

5.4 Of the 828 LAC reviews that were held in the 2018/19 year:
- 136 children (16.4%) were aged under 4 at the time of their review;
- 362 children (43.7%) physically attended and spoke for him or herself;
- 3 children (0.4%) physically attended, and an advocate spoke on his or her behalf;
- 2 children (0.2%) attended and conveyed his or her view symbolically (non-verbally);
- 1 child (0.1%) physically attended but did not speak for him or herself, did not convey his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) and did not ask an advocate to speak for him or her;
- 31 children (3.7%) did not attend physically but briefed an advocate to speak for him or her;
- 261 children (31.5%) did not attend but conveyed his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium;
- and 32 children (3.9%) did not attend nor were his/her views conveyed to the review.

5.5 Work with the Child in Care Council (CiCC)

5.6 IROs value and promote the work of the CiCC and refer young people to become members of the CiCC.

The IROs attended the arranged CiCC summer activity events, including visits to the cinema, sports centre, ‘Gulliver’s Land’, ‘Bounce’ and horse riding and celebrated the achievements of the Looked After Children by attending the Children in Care Awards evening. The children and young people said they really valued the opportunity to interact and build meaningful relationships with their IROs and felt that the IROs invested in them by spending this time outside of their statutory duties.

To create a bespoke Central Bedfordshire Looked After Children model for Reviews the IROs have been working with the CiCC. A consultation event was held in April 2019 and CiCC were asked;

- What do you think the purpose of a Looked After Children’s Review?
- What works well?
- What don’t you like?
• The young people were then asked to give their views on different ways of how a review could be organised.

The young people gave positive feedback about their individual IROs and said, ‘we have a good relationship with them’. Young people also said, ‘we would like to see them more than twice per year.’

The IRO service then presented ideas gathered from other local authorities. The feedback was collated, and a prototype is being co-produced with children and young people and due to be piloted during the summer of 2019.

5.7 Advocacy Service

5.8 The IRO Handbook states that before every review the IRO is responsible for making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one. Since April 2017, the Advocacy Service became part of Central Bedfordshire and is delivered by professionals who are independent of the organisation to provide a service that ‘reaches out’ to all children and young people and ensure that they are appointed an advocate as identified and when they need.

5.9 Advocacy is about supporting children and young people to make sure their rights are respected, and their views and wishes are heard. Advocacy provides an opportunity for views to be listened to and properly considered. The advocate works directly for the young person, not the carers or their Social Worker.

5.10 Children and young people with child protection and looked after status are able to request the use of an advocate. Any child or young person requesting an advocate who are known to the children with disabilities team can also use an advocate although many of these children and young people will not have child protection or looked after status.

5.11 Between April 2018 – March 2019, there were 102 referrals into the Advocacy Service by children subject to a plan or Looked After. A total of 63 new requests for children and young people and 39 re-referrals from those who wanted to use the Advocacy Service again.

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<td>Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complaint</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement issues</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Access to services</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Contact</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of child/young person</th>
<th>How many referrals received for each age</th>
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<tbody>
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5.12 The three complaints during this period, made by the young people via the advocacy service were:

😊 The young person said that they were unhappy with their Social Worker and how they made them feel.

😊 A new Social Worker was allocated, and young person was happy with the way the complaint was handled.

😊 The young person raised concerns about issues that affected them as they were leaving care.

😊 These were resolved and the young person was happy that all of his issues were addressed.

😊 The young person was unhappy with their age assessment.

😊 The age assessment was reviewed, and the issue was resolved.

All resolved complaints were resolved at the first stage of the process.

5.13 Independent advocates are uniquely positioned to provide an independent overview of the review process and the work of the IRO as they frequently attend these meetings. An experienced advocate sent this email:

RH is a 12 year old young person who has been in care since 2017 and subject to a Care Order. She resides in a foster placement.

An advocate attended a review in January 2019 and provide this feedback ‘I have just been to RH LAC review and it was handled brilliantly.

The IRO had arranged for the young person to run the meeting. The IRO met with RH and got her to set the agenda on things she wanted to know, they then worked out who each agenda item was aimed at and what the question/s would be. These were then put on to small star cards with a different colour for each agenda item. This enabled RH to use them at the meeting and have the questions easily to hand.

The meeting went very smoothly and in fact RH was so comfortable doing it she changed the order of the agenda from horses being the next agenda item to contact, because the meeting had not discussed changes to contact and these would impact on her horse riding, so she switched them.

I was very impressed that such a simple process fully empowered RH to take control over her own meeting. When talking to RH after the meeting she was clearly very excited and happy about having run the meeting and she would do it again’.

| 15 | 9 |
| 14 | 11 |
| 13 | 10 |
| 12 | 15 |
| 11 | 19 |
| 10 | 4 |
| 9  | 1 |
| 8  | 7 |
| 7  | 1 |
| 6  | 4 |
| 5  | 1 |
5.14 The Voice of the Child

5.15 Children and young people use a number of different ways to tell us what they think and how they feel. Some of this is captured digitally through the Mind of My Own App. This Mind of My Own App helps the young person to communicate and to get problems sorted out. It helps prepare a young person for a meeting, express their views, and communicate their wishes and feelings which helps the workers to support them in a way which is right for the young person.

5.16 From April 2018 to March 2019, 244 Mind of My Own statements were received sharing feedback, good stories, and asking for help to solve problems to move forward.

5.17 IROs are currently working with colleagues including the CCMS Business Manager and the Voice, Involvement and Participation Team to create and develop a Central Bedfordshire’s communication tools via the use of the Audio and Visual recording tools on the MacBook’s to capture the voice of the child and young people. This work will underpin the development of a bespoke Central Bedfordshire Looked After Children model of Reviews.

5.18 Central Bedfordshire are currently expanding the use of mobile technology as it offers a more accessible, alternative form of communication for young people with the use of Skype and Facetime and provides a different medium to obtain their wishes and views via the different applications that are available.

5.19 Feedback from Young People about their IRO

5.20 Young people said they have a good relationship with their IRO and that their IRO knows them well and made comments, such as:

PCW, aged 18 has been Looked After since aged 11 and had the same IRO for over 8 years.

The IRO took the young person to lunch to say goodbye on his 18th birthday.

PCW asked the IRO why he was in care as he had received different answers. The IRO explained that her version of events may differ from his parents and discussed at length what happened. He thanked the IRO for ‘talking sense, making it all make sense’.

They shared many laughs over things in his life that had been funny. The IRO described it as cathartic to laugh at things from his childhood they both shared.

The IRO described it as ‘one of the best pieces of SW I feel I have done in years. I feel proud that I have been on his journey with him’.
6.0 Parental Participation

6.1 The IRO Handbook advises that the IRO should seek the views of birth parents and any other adults with parental responsibility and other significant persons in the child’s life, for example extended family members.

6.2 Parent’s active participation is achieved through attendance, completion of a consultation booklet, representation via an advocate or Social Worker, in writing or consultation by phone or in person with the IRO separately from the review meeting. Consultation booklets are sent out by CRS to all parents whose whereabouts are known unless the IRO advises there are inappropriate circumstances.

6.3 A total of 96% (798/828) of reviews recorded parental participation as being sought. Of this 38% (312/828) of parents (either both or one) attended or contributed to the review process. There remains a far greater participation by mothers than fathers. Of those parents who are unable to directly participate or contribute to the review have an opportunity to share their views, and mothers’ were obtained for 62% (515/828) of reviews, fathers for 44% (364/828).

6.4 For those cases where parental views are not obtained the reason is recorded; in a small amount of cases (9 children) both parents were deceased. There are some parents whose whereabouts are unknown 10% (187/828) of mothers, and 23% (85/828) of fathers. In some cases, parents are invited but do not attend 16% (131/828) mothers, 11% fathers (89/828). If they do not choose to attend, or to complete the consultation leaflet they can still contribute their views if they wish to do so, but a proportion do not choose to take up the opportunity.

Contributing their views via a Social Worker/Advocate remains an equally popular choice at (177/828) 21% for mothers and (179/828) 22% for fathers.

7.0 Feedback

7.1 Central Bedfordshire Council Children’s Services, Ofsted focused visit (February 2019). ‘independent reviewing officers (IROs) routinely challenge when work is not followed through and children are not making progress. Many children have had the same social worker and IRO for over two years and have been able to get to know, trust and build good relationships with them’.

7.2 IROs will respond promptly and informally to questions and queries arising from young people, their parents and carers. This process of engagement results in every concern raised being resolved through informal discussion and exploration of the matter. During this period one formal complaint was received from a foster carer on behalf of the young person due to the timeliness of the distribution of their Review minutes and steps have been taken to reduce this re-occurring.

Positive feedback is often verbal and not routinely captured, however examples include:
‘I was part of a meeting in January.

I wanted to inform you that I found the chairperson to be professional, understanding and felt she represented Central Bedfordshire to a high standard. Please inform her and thank her as the work delivered was outstanding’. Email sent by a school Family Support Worker.

‘FB, aged 9, become Looked After in 2014. FB and his two siblings have the same IRO for 4 years.

FB’s mother said that the IRO has been a consistent factor in her children’s lives. The mother trusts the IRO and if she has any worries about her children, she will contact the IRO, whom is always available to provide reassurance.

FB’s mother was very complimentary about the role that the IRO has played in the family’s life’. Feedback from a parent provided as part of Children’s Services monthly audit programme.
**Headlines**

**what is going well?**
- Participation continues to be good.
- The use of mobile technology is being enhanced in partnership with children and young people.
- A child focussed review process is co-produced with children.
- IROs work in partnership with parents to ensure that they continue to sustain a role in their children's life's.
- IROs and the CiCC participated in a very positive workshop and enjoyed the day.
- IROs consult with children before their Review to ensure their voice is heard.

**how can we improve?**
- Ensure ALL children have a voice which is heard and is responded too.
- Increase the engagement and participation of ALL parents, especially fathers.
- Create a model for Reviews that enables ALL children to be engaged in the process.
- Focus on building a relationship with children who live a distance from Bedfordshire.

**what needs to happen?**
- Complete the trial of the new Review process and finalise a bespoke CBC model.
- Develop a new format of reports for Reviews to complement the life story process for all children.
- Implement the creative use of technology to support regular 'face to face' communication with children and young people.
- Arrange regular workshops with the CiCC.

**IRO impact**
- Children said their IRO knows them well and they have a good relationship.
- IROs complete the journey of care alongside the children and help them understand their experiences.
- IROs listened to children and are creating a service to respond to their needs.
- Parents trust the IRO and have a positive relationship.
8.0 The Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Review and IRO impact

8.1 Conference and Review Service (CRS) sit within Professional Standards and the quality assurance role is central to the IROs responsibilities. The IRO is responsible for monitoring the performance of the Local Authority, including effective challenge of poor practice, and has a crucial role in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as a corporate parent for all the children it looks after.

‘AJ is a 17 year old who has been in care since he was 11 years of age.

An Ofsted inspector audited the practice of the local authority in February 2019. The inspector said he was impressed that there is good evidence of support by the IRO. He was pleased that the IRO and Social Worker worked closely together to achieve good outcomes for the young person. He said he was impressed with the quality of work and the IRO paperwork was clear, comprehensive and reflected on what needs to be done’.

Feedback from an Ofsted inspector

8.2 Central Bedfordshire Council Children’s Services, Ofsted focused visit (February 2019).

‘IROs provide effective reflective challenge and robust monitoring of children’s plans, in a manner that social workers regard as strong and supportive’.

8.3 As part of this challenge and monitoring process the IRO completes two monitoring forms after each LAC Review. One records information about the arrangements; who has been consulted, participation by parents and children, completion of required documentation, Health Assessment, Personal Education Plan and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. An additional form provides qualitative feedback in respect of care planning, children’s participation, and appropriate involvement with family and partnership working with other agencies.

8.4 The relevant Team Manager receives both feedback forms. Feedback on practice includes good practice as well as any areas of concern. This qualitative feedback is rated focusing on the care the child has received and challenging any concerns in respect of the Social Work practice or wider service provision. The Team Manager will share with the Social Worker in supervision and if any identified actions are needed and ensure these are completed.

8.5 In 2018-2019 a total of 765 (of the 828 reviews) Qualitative Feedback Forms were completed for 353 individual children.
8.6 These forms are RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rated and good practice is identified and shared. If concerns are identified regarding practice or actions are needed, then an amber or red alert is made depending on degree or urgency of the issue. Of the 765 forms completed:

- 23 were rated Gold - Outstanding (3.0%)
- 468 were rated Green - Good (61.2%)
- 157 were rated Amber - Needs Improvement (20.5%)
- 102 were rated Red - Inadequate (13.3%)
- 15 did not have a RAG rating recorded (2.0%).

8.7 Conference and Review hold bi/monthly Quality Assurance Meetings with each of the fieldwork teams and during this period a total of 19 meetings were held in which the Qualitative Feedback Forms are reviewed and the action to improve practice is discussed. A Fostering Manager and Audit Manager also attend which helps to pick up any concerns within placement and identify areas of learning and development for Children’s Services.

8.8 A summary report is provided by the Conference and Review Service which is circulated to the relevant Heads of Service. This process ensures that feedback on practice is shared with the individual Social Worker, Team Manager and an overview is provided to Heads of Service.

8.9 This information is collated into a monthly report to monitor the quality of practice for Children’s Services and individual service areas, including whether a child’s RAG rating has improved over a period of time.

8.10 There are many examples of outstanding or good practice including:

- positive placements and stability which are meeting the needs of Looked After Children,
- the Social Work reports and care plans are updated and meeting the children’s needs,
- the permanence plan has been addressed and permanency has been achieved.
8.11 The identified themes in relation to areas of improvement have been addressed in a variety of ways both operationally (see example: EB), and strategically as required. As an example of a strategic approach, an IRO and Audit Manager led workshops focussing on care plans and assessments in July, August, September and October 2018. A mock care plan (with added guidance) has also been developed collaboratively with social workers during the care plan, assessment workshops and distributed to provide a good example of a care plan. These workshops led service improvements, which was recognised in the Ofsted inspection completed in February 2019 (8.12).

EB - a young person aged 14, has been in care since 2013 and subject to a Care Order. The foster carers are very fond and committed to EB and said that they want what is best for her and would like to care for her until she reaches adulthood but appreciated that EB wished to return to her parents care, if it was assessed as safe and in her best interests to return home the carers would support her with this process.

At the Review the IRO assessed the practice as a ‘red’ and raised concerns that the EB was not clear as to why she could not be rehabilitated home and the care plan had not been updated to reflect this.

At the subsequent review the IRO took time to explain to the young person as to why she could not return home building on the work of EB’s Social Worker. The foster carers reported that they ‘valued the IROs consistency and insight and greatly valued the long term perspective’. The carer felt that ‘the points the IRO raised in his report particularly in relation to EB’s desire to return home and not understanding her care plan are an accurate reflection’.

The subsequent review was rated as ‘green’.

8.12 Central Bedfordshire Council Children’s Services, Ofsted focused visit (February 2019). ‘Social Workers routinely update children’s assessment reports, ensuring their reviews are informed by a full and up-to-date picture of children’s needs. These reports are informative and evaluative, drawing from the views of the child and their wider network to present a clear picture of the child in their placement’.

8.13 Taking into account the Ofsted inspection (2017) and the comments specifically referring to the IRO role and oversight the service. The IRO Service has advanced the practice of completing midway reviews to ensure robust monitoring and tracking between reviews to assist in case progression, increase consistent IRO challenge and prevent drift and delay. Thus, achieving greater IRO impact on children’s outcomes. All IRO activity in respect of the child is recorded on the child’s record.
8.14 The Learning and Development lead, regularly attends CRS team meetings and identified areas of practice development and service improvements are shared. This process creates a feedback loop to ensure that Children’s Services continually review the knowledge and experiences of young people within care and service delivery. It is concluded that the holistic approaches utilising both quantitative and qualitative feedback mechanisms achieve a positive impact on both the children and Children’s Services staff and other professionals. The relationship with the Learning and Development team and the integrated feedback processes and regular case monitoring ensures robust, ongoing and timely oversight and scrutiny which strives to ensure a positive impact on children’s outcomes. In addition, this system creates an opportunity to identify areas of practice development to be addressed to support the learning and improved practice of staff.

9.0 Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Case Procedures for Resolution of Concerns

9.1 CRS focuses on immediate problem solving with Social Workers and Team Managers whenever possible and will always begin to address issues in a constructive, co-operative and child-centred manner. CRS has a Quality Assurance Process in place as described above through which most concerns will continue to be raised and resolved.

9.2 However the IRO Handbook strengthens the role of the IRO and requires the Authority to have a formal Disputes Resolution Policy.

9.3 In the Guidance, the IRO has a duty to monitor the Local Authority’s performance overall, not just in respect of the review of the child/young person’s case. So, the IRO should identify poor practice and must negotiate with the Local Authority’s managers up to the highest level, that is a referral to CAFCASS which will usually occur when a dispute raised through this process has not been resolved in a timely way. The IRO Service has implemented the CAFCASS and Independent Reviewing Officer Good Practice Protocol for Public Law Work. This has helped to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about matters of critical importance to the child’s safety, wellbeing and permanency needs. An IRO comment on final care plans is fully embedded and IROs have contributed to timely care planning and case progression by appropriate challenge to any identified delay.

9.4 If an IRO considers that a matter involves a breach of a child’s human rights, the matter should immediately be raised as a formal dispute.

9.5 Most concerns will be raised with the Team Manager through the existing Quality Assurance Process. The rating system in place ensures that more urgent or serious matters are highlighted. Cases rated amber or red are tracked through the Quality Assurance Meetings until resolved or escalated into formal dispute, if appropriate, again until resolved.

9.6 A failure to respond or resolve a concern through the Quality Assurance Process will lead to a formal dispute being raised in accordance with the Dispute Resolution Procedure.

9.7 As part of the ongoing development of improved IRO oversight and challenge, implemented since 2017 (Ofsted inspection, 2017) the application of the Dispute Resolution Procedure and robust threshold of application has resulted in the number of escalations being consistent at 19 for 2018 – 2019, an increase of 1 from the previous year.
9.8 Areas of concern that have been identified via the Dispute Resolution process have included the following issues:

- Delay in achieving permanency for the child.
- LAC planning not completed in timescale.
- Delay in completion of specialist assessment by relevant agency.
- Allocation of Independent Visitor.
- Plans to secure independent living arrangements.

9.9 Most escalations have been resolved by the Team Manager, however if a resolution is not achieved at this stage it is escalated to the Head of Service who has chaired complex case discussions enabling a thorough exploration of the concerns and options and contributing positively to an agreed resolution.

KM – aged 17, has resided in a foster placement since 2016 which is some distance away from her school. KM wished to remain in education and complete further education in Year 13.

Unfortunately, the transport arrangements in place were unable to continue which would have meant that an alternative provision was needed. This caused KM some anxiety as she wished to remain in her current school, albeit some distance away, as she was making positive progress and had a supportive social and emotional network at school.

The IRO escalated this delay and impending gap in provision.

As a result of this a meeting was convened with the IRO, Team Manager and Social Worker and it was agreed that an alternative transport provision would be funded. The Team Manager liaised with school transport and the appropriate arrangements were made ensuring that KM could continue to attend her chosen school.

9.10 An example of this challenge is:

OM – aged 2, was in an adoptive placement. As OM was under 5, she required a LAC medical every six months, however this was overdue despite the Social Workers requests. The IRO escalated the concerns to the relevant agency.

The medical took place within 2 weeks and assessed that OM was making very positive progress and achieving her developmental milestones.

9.11 A small number of disputes have been escalated to Head of Service, however escalation to the Assistant Director, independent Legal Advice, or a referral to CAFCASS has not been required.
10.0 Any resource issues that are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service for Looked after Children

10.1 IROs undertake two main areas of work; the chairing of Child Protection Conferences and Looked after Children’s Reviews. Throughout the year the number of children subject of a Child Protection Plan and those who are Looked After Children has fluctuated, however this is closely monitored and throughout this period IRO caseloads have remained within the numbers recommended in the national guidance. This achievement was supported by the additional funding granted which enabled the recruitment of an additional IRO post. Proactive plans are in place and action will be taken to address a potential change to the staffing complement to ensure that IROs prioritise and deliver the statutory requirements of their role.

10.2 There have been a number of changes within the Children’s Services, however plans have been implemented to address these changes and a full complement of permanent employees are in post to ensure continuity of care for children and young people.

10.3 A key focus of issues that affect young people is placement choice and achieving permanence for all Looked After Children. Plans are progressing to ensure that these actions continue to be met and exceeded.
Headsline

- Quality of work is clear, comprehensive and reflects what needs to be done.
- IROs routinely challenge when children are not making progress.
- Improved focus and positive progress to achieve permanence for all children.
- IRO Midway Reviews are embedded.
- The quality of care plans and assessments has improved.
- IROs provide Qualitative Feedback Forms for children.

- The Dispute Resolution process has identified areas of improvement.
- Achieving permanency for all children continues to progress.
- Some delays in LAC planning being completed on time.
- Delay of completing specialist assessment by the relevant agency.

- Work closely with Children's Services to embed the permanence action plan.
- Present further workshops focusing on care plans and assessments.
- Utilise the Dispute Resolution process to ensure excellent outcomes for children.
- IROs to contribute to the strategic action plans to address practice improvements.

- Midway reviews has increased consistent IRO challenge and prevent drift and delay.
- IROs and Social Workers work closely together to achieve good outcomes for children.
- IROs routinely challenge practice when children are not making good progress.
- Assessment are updated, informative and evaluative, based on the needs of the child.
- Qualitative Feedback processes contribute to a positive impact on children's outcomes.
11.0 Updates regarding the progress of the action plan 2017/2018

11.1 Respond to recent and any emerging National Guidance

IROs continue to undertake additional learning and development. One member of the team is completing a Post Qualifying course at the University of Bedfordshire and all IROs regularly access and attend formal and informal opportunities for learning to address and anticipate the changing profile of our Looked After Children population and their needs.

11.2 Achieve ‘permanence for all’ Looked After Children

Achieving permanence for all children remains a priority for Children’s Services and is closely monitored to ensure the positive progress continues via the qualitative and quantitative monitoring processes.

The IRO Service has worked closely with Children’s Services in respect of achieving permanence for all children and young people. Various strategies have been implemented to address this, and the most recent Ofsted focused visit to Central Bedfordshire Council children’s services in February 2019, concluded ‘children whose cases were reviewed at this visit had a permanence plan in place and these were being monitored and progressed’.

11.3 Strengthen the Voice of the Child within the Looked After Children process.

The use of mobile technology has been promoted to provide an accessible, alternative form of communication for young people with the use of the Mind of My Own app, Skype and Facetime and provides a different medium to obtain their wishes and views via the different applications that are available.

IROs are currently working with colleagues to develop the creation and use of the Central Bedfordshire bespoke Audio and Visual recording tools to capture the Voice of the Child and young people. This will underpin the development of a bespoke Central Bedfordshire Looked After Children model for reviews.

11.4 Review the Looked After Child Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engage with young people in a meaningful way.

The IROs chair Child Protection Conferences and Looked after Children’s Reviews. Since September 2017, the format of the Child Protection Conferences changed to a strength based model. This model builds on the strengths of the family whilst considering the risks; is visible to everyone in the meeting as the information shared is recorded on a white boards for everyone to see; engages professionals, parents and children and young people as part of the solution and encourages children to attend and provides mechanism for explicitly seeking, representing and considering their views, wishes and feelings.
The revised format has received very positive feedback:

Designated Safeguarding Lead feedback at training lead by an IRO/LADO:
‘Since the introduction of the Strengthening Families model, the conferences feel much more productive and focus on the strengths rather than everything that is going wrong. It doesn’t feel critical anymore, it feels supportive.

The set-up of the new conferences is clearer, and the whiteboard helps everyone to consider and remember the wider context, including the strengths, throughout the meeting.

Strengthening Families mean that conferences are much less intimidating environments, everyone feels more comfortable and able to participate and own the plan’.

In order to progress this development, the IROs are trialling alternative approaches (see 5.6) to engage with children and young people and ensure that the reviews are child focussed and the format is unique to accommodate their individual needs.

11.5 Continue to develop the work with the CiCC.

The Participation Officer is part of the Professional Standards Service and has attended IRO team meetings to ensure that we continually review the knowledge and experiences of young people within care. IROs are represented on the Corporate Parenting Board to offer an independent overview of the needs of young people whom are looked after.

As outlined in 5.6, IROs are working closely with the CiCC to create a bespoke Central Bedfordshire Looked After Children model for reviews.

11.6 IROs to provide a robust and effective case review.

The IRO Service has developed practice in respect of monitoring and tracking between reviews in the form of midway reviews. This has created a positive impact on case progression, increasing IRO oversight, challenge and preventing potential drift and delay. The Ofsted focussed visit of February 2019, reported, ‘Managers and IROs provide effective reflective challenge and robust monitoring of children’s plans, in a manner that social workers regard as strong and supportive’.

Central Bedfordshire have a dedicated service to young people who have left care; however, without their ‘looked after status’ they lose the oversight of an IRO. It is recognised that some young people who leave care have ongoing complex and challenging needs and therefore Children’s Services have acknowledged that this cohort of young people may benefit from the continued monitoring and review of an IRO and this has been made available on a need led basis.

This service is to be further enhanced in 2019-2020 and all of these young people will be given the opportunity to remain with their current IRO, as and if required (subject to capacity).
11.7 Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs to include external agencies provision of service.

The IRO Service has maintained, strengthened and developed partnership working with colleagues in CBC and in partner organisations. Managers in other service areas have been invited to the CRS team meetings to inform and develop practice and improvements. CRS works closely with the Virtual School and IROs ensure oversight of Personal Education Plans and the use of the Pupil Premium and escalate any concerns. A representative from CRS attends the monthly legal issues meeting.

The IRO Service is represented at a weekly multi-agency meeting that reviews all children and young people requiring additional services and resources. This meeting provides senior management oversight in relation to practice, decision making and consistency that resources are evenly and fairly provided. The IRO representation provides independent input and robust challenge.

CRS are embedding the use of disruption meetings chaired by an IRO, for occasions when long term placements breakdown to now include young people whom are in a placement for 12 months or more.

Continued improvements have been made to the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Feedback loop with the Commissioning Team.

The revised monitoring form includes feedback on commissioned services, including placements, The Children’s Society, CAMHS provision and other specialist services.

The Commissioning Quality Assurance Manager regularly attends CRS Team Meetings to ensure ongoing communication to improve services and outcomes for children. IROs provide the Commissioning Team a copy of the monitoring form, including comment on the services provided and the Quality Assurance Officer provides a quality assurance report to the IRO for each placement caring for a young person. The QA manager always seeks feedback from the IRO on placements which are included in the Commissioning QA report and any concerns raised are followed up.

A close working relationship between the IROs and the QA manager has assisted in ‘closing the loop’ on issues in residential and 16+ placements thus enabling the QA Manager to challenge and monitor providers to achieve a high standard.

The CRS leads a bi/monthly Quality Assurance Meeting across Children’s Services. The practice, progress and outcomes of individual and all children and young people is reviewed and identified areas of development, learning and improvement are identified for the organisation and actioned as required and reported to Senior Managers.

11.8 Implement and appropriate and proportionate case overview and effective challenge to improve practice of Fostering Reviews.

A permanent Foster Care Review Officer has been in post since early 2016 and this has proved to be an asset within the organisation. The Review Officer periodically attends CRS team meetings, and this has supported a closer working relationship with all IROs and the joint views regarding
quality of placements. IROs routinely provide the Review Officer a copy of the monitoring form, which includes their views on the quality of care provided by the CBC foster carer for the child and young person reviewed. The QA role of the Foster Care Review Officer has been enhanced to create a strengthened quality assurance monitoring role based upon the model used for Looked After Children reviews.

12.0 Priorities for Next Year – detailed action plan in appendix

12.1 Respond to recent and any emerging National Guidance.
12.2 Achieve ‘permanence for all’ Looked After Children
12.3 Strengthen the Voice of the Child within the Looked After Children process.
12.4 Review the Looked After Child Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engage with young people in a meaningful way.
12.5 Continue to develop the work with the CiCC.
12.6 IROs to provide a robust and effective case review.
12.7 IROs to actively contribute to the staff development and the organisational programme.
12.8 Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs to include external agencies provision of service.

Sharon Keenan
Practice Manager
Conference and Review Service
Children’s Services
Appendix A

Quantitative Information about the IRO Service

A total of 400 children have been through the review system in the 12 months ending 31/03/2019, an increase of 14 children (from 386 last year 2017/18). As previously mentioned, a total of 828 reviews were held in the 2018/19 year.

The Looked After Children population for the past eight years is shown above. This is shown as a ‘Rate per 10,000’ to enable comparison with other areas. 2018 is the latest available published information when comparing regional, statistical neighbour and national performance.

The year-end figure (March 2019) for Central Bedfordshire is reported as 320 children. In comparison to this time last year (March 2018), there has been a 2.6% increase in the number of LAC from 312 to 320 children. The rate per 10,000 population stands at 52.1 compared to 50.8 recorded at this time last year (March 2019), which is higher than the 2017/18 SN average of 44.2.

Of this total number of Children Looked After of 320, 36 were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) which represents 11.3% of all looked after children. The number of LAC excluding UASC stands at 285 children at the end of March 2019, which is an increase compared to last year (March 2018) where 275 non-UASC children were looked after.
### Composition of the Looked After Children Population (as at: 31/03/2019). Total 320 children

#### Ethnicity at 31st March 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity Group</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Refused or not obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBC Local School Population</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Funded School Population 31/01/2012</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBC Children Looked After 31/03/2019</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Children Looked After 31/03/2018</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Age at 31st March 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>BOYS</th>
<th>GIRLS</th>
<th>Total CBC</th>
<th>% CBC</th>
<th>National 31/03/2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 &amp; over and placed in a Community Home</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>189</strong></td>
<td><strong>131</strong></td>
<td><strong>320</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CBC %</th>
<th>National 31/03/2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBC</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National 31/03/2018</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Legal Status at 31st March 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Status</th>
<th>CBC</th>
<th>% CBC</th>
<th>National 31/03/2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care Orders Interim</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care Orders Full</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Agreements under S20 (Single Period of Accommodation)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement Order</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On remand, committed for trial, or detained</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>320</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Placement at 31 March 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Type</th>
<th>Placement codes</th>
<th>CBC</th>
<th>% CBC</th>
<th>National 31/03/2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster Placement with Relative or Friend</td>
<td>U1, U2, U3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement with other Foster Carer</td>
<td>U4, U5, U6</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure Unit</td>
<td>K1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homes and Hostels</td>
<td>K2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostels and Other Supportive Residential Placements</td>
<td>H5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Schools</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Residential Settings</td>
<td>R1, R2, R3, R5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed for Adoption (Including placed with Former Foster Carer)</td>
<td>A3, A4, A5, A6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed with Own Parents</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Lodgings, Residential Employment or Living Independently</td>
<td>P2, P3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Placement in the community</td>
<td>Z1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>320</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Action Plan 2019-2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Timescale</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Respond to recent and any emerging National Guidance** | 1. Brief IROs through circulation, discussion at team meeting highlighting of key changes and IRO responsibilities.  
2. Team Development days to take place quarterly.  
4. IROs attend annual Eastern Region IRO conference.  
5. Create ‘specialist’ roles for each IRO to lead and develop knowledge and practice across the organisation based on research and good practice. | **Monthly**  
September/January/March 2019-20  
July 2019 and March 2020  
**November 2019**  
**December 2019** | 1-4 All children care plans will comply with legislation and statutory guidance.  
5 IROs will provide consultation and lead regular workshops as required, to all members of Children’s Services on their specialist subject.  
IROs to lead development groups and oversee subsequent action plan to improve service delivery. |
| **2. Achieve ‘permanence for all’ Looked After Children** | 1. Work closely with the relevant teams to achieve permanence for all children and young people. | **Ongoing** | 1 All relevant children will have a clear permanence plan secured by their 2nd LAC Review. |
| **3. Strengthen the Voice of the Child within the Looked After Children process** | 1. Ensure that all Looked After Children’s views are represented in the LAC review in the most appropriate way for the individual young person and develop, trail and implement the use of the CBC app. | **December 2019** | 1 The Voice of the Child is evidenced in all meetings and contributes to the recommendations regarding future care planning. IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people. |
| 4. Review the LAC Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engaging with young people in a meaningful way | 1. Finalise the CBC bespoke Looked After review model.  
2. Formulate and implement an action plan to introduce the new LAC review model, incorporating changes to professional reports. | September 2019  
March 2020 | 2. The relevant LAC records will include an electronic copy of their wishes and feelings for each Review.  
1-2 Feedback will be analysed and identified themes and issues will be actioned to improve practice and outcomes for all children that will include their voice before and after attendance at a meeting. |
| 5. Continue the development work with the CiCC | 1. Timetable annual consultation events. | Twice Yearly | 1-2 The LAC review is child centred and their voice and participation underpin the review and contributes to their life story.  
1-2 IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people. |
| 6. IROs to provide a robust and effective case review. | 1. IROs to have an increased level of overview and more regular contact with the Social Worker and young person for identified high risk cases, for example children at risk of exploitation. | Ongoing | 1-2 IROs offer a proportionate level of scrutiny and support dependent on the individual child’s circumstances.  
2 Develop and implement a policy to formalise the current
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Develop the post Looked After Review process for the children and young people whom are no longer LAC but require IRO oversight.</th>
<th>September 2019</th>
<th>trial; implement an assessment of need and intervention.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. A quarterly report reporting quality of practice and identifying themes from Quality Assurance Meeting to be presented to Senior Management Team.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>3 Themes and issue will be analysed and actioned agreed to improve practice and outcomes for all children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. IROs to actively contribute to the staff development and the organisational programme.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>1. Identified learning and development needs to be incorporated into the organisational staff development programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. IRO’s to continue to regularly meet with the Learning and Development lead to provide qualititative information regarding organisational practice development needs.</td>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>2. Improve individual staff, service and organisational practice to underpin staff development and service delivery of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Information gathered in the bi/monthly Qualitative Assurance meeting will be analysed and identified practice themes of individual, service and organisational learning and development will be addressed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs to include external agencies provision of service.</td>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td>1-2 Themes and issue will be analysed and actioned agreed to improve practice and outcomes for all children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Refresh to Dispute Resolution Framework including, threshold, timescales, flow chart and recording processes.</td>
<td>January 2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explore the application of the Dispute Resolution Framework to include the practice of external agencies.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
7. Looked After Children and Care Leavers Annual report

To consider a report on the achievements, outcomes and challenges for Central Bedfordshire's Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young People during the period from 1 April 2018 to 21 March 2019.
Purpose of this report

The report provides the Central Bedfordshire Council Corporate Parenting Panel with an overview of the achievements, outcomes and challenges for Central Bedfordshire’s Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young People during the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. The report will outline impact of services provided to our Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young People during this period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Note the contents of the report

Executive summary

1. The term Looked After Children refers to any child or young person for the Local Authority has acquired or shares parental responsibility as well as for those whom care and accommodation is provided on behalf of their parent/s. The term child can refer to any child or young person aged 0 to 18 years.

2. During the reporting period the Council also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave care from the age of 18 years. On 1 April 2018, new legislation came into operation, requiring Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Advisor to Care Experienced Young People (also known as Care Leavers) who wish to have this service, up until the age of 25. This is an extension to the previous statutory service offer. Four additional Personal Advisor posts have been funded to meet this new statutory requirement.
3. It should be noted that Children’s Services has restructured to a locality based operational model from 1 April 2019. From 1 April 2019 the social work teams, and related support functions for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, became structurally positioned within the new North and South localities. As part of this restructure, the Fostering is now part of the Professional Standards Service.

4. The Central Bedfordshire Adoption Agency was until 1 April 2019 part of the Corporate Parenting Service. From the 1 April 2019 Central Bedfordshire has partnered with Milton Keynes to form a Regional Adoption Agency so that the recruitment, matching and support to adoptive families can be additionally efficient and effective through pooled resources.

5. The Adoption service continues to be share the same office space as Social Workers and Personal Advisors for Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young People. Continued co-location has sustained the established close working relationships. It means that the Adoption service continues to work effectively with the Court and Permanence Teams to achieve early permanence for children for whom the plan is adoption.

6. This report is in respect of service delivery prior to this restructure.

7. Over the 12 month reporting period, the performance of the Corporate Parenting Service has remained strong. Performance has been high across a range of external and internal indicators. All figures stated in this report are as of 31 March 2019.

8. External evaluation of practice quality and service provision has concluded that a sound service is provided to our children. Our July 2017 Ofsted inspection told that whilst we are rated a Good service overall, our services in respect of looked after children and permanence were graded as Requires Improvement. As a result, extensive work was undertaken to address the identified improvement opportunities.

9. To test our progress, in November 2018, we asked senior leaders from the Eastern Region to provide a three day on site Peer Review of services for Looked After Children and Permanence. In February 2019 Ofsted undertook a Focused Visit to assess the Local Authority arrangements for children in care, assessing the quality of practice and children’s experience and progress.

10. The Eastern Region Peer Review (November 2018) concluded there was strong governance, strong management and a strong frontline in Central Bedfordshire. The Ofsted Focused Visit (February 2019) concluded looked after children in Central Bedfordshire are provided with a responsive and effective service. They noted that Children’s Services had effectively used the Ofsted 2017 inspection findings to effect change and improvement in service quality.

11. We continue to put children at the centre of all we do. We make sure that our children and young people actively participate and that their voices are heard by influencing change in their own life and the way we do things.
12. Our Children in Care Council continues to be influential and well regarded. They have been involved in policy and practice development decisions, learning and development nationally and locally, as well as recruitment.

13. Children in Care Council members co-chair the Corporate Parenting Panel and contribute actively to the well established Children and Young People’s Board, a subgroup of the Children’s Leadership Board.

14. Children and young people are provided with independent advocacy. 39 new advocacy referrals and 57 re-referrals were received in the reporting period.

Introduction

15. The Corporate Parenting Service was composed of specialist social work teams:
   - The Court and Permanence Teams
   - Long Term Looked after Team
   - Fostering Team
   - Adoption Team
   - Leaving Care and Asylum Teams

16. The social work teams are composed of qualified social workers and otherwise qualified colleagues including Personal Advisors for Care Experienced Young People aged 18 to 25 years.

17. Some children’s first experience of getting a social work service is when they first become Looked After. This is the experience of the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children aged up to 17 years who are Looked After by Children’s Services in Central Bedfordshire. Most Looked After Children have previously had a social work service before they become Looked After. This social worker service is provided by the Assessment Teams or by the Family Support Teams.

18. Children who become Looked After transition from Assessment or Family Support Teams to a Corporate Parenting Team. As children’s circumstances change during their time being Looked After, they transition to specialist teams within the Corporate Parenting Service. Transitions are conducted in a well managed and timely way. This typically involves a period of joint working between Social Workers so that a new relationship is successfully formed and the needs and circumstances of the child are well understood by the new Social Worker.

19. The Fostering Service and Adoption Agency work closely with the social teams to ensure that we achieve great stability for our children. 84.8% of our looked after children have had no change of placement in the previous two years.

20. All Looked After Children always have a named social Worker allocated to them. All Care Experienced Young People up to the age of 25 who wish to have a Personal Advisor have one.

21. Looked After children are visited regularly and within statutory timescales by their Social Workers, on 31 March 2018 being 97.8% of visits in timescale. This key performance measure has been sustained over recent years.
22. Social Work activity for court proceedings has been completed within statutory time scales. As a result of thorough assessment and careful planning, most Care Proceedings instigated by Central Bedfordshire Council Children’s Services have been completed within the 26 week time scale. This means that children do not experience delay in decision making and are provided with permanent long term arrangements in a timely way.

23. The physical and emotional health of our Looked After Children and Young People is regularly monitored and their outcomes are good. This means that we are achieving our aspiration that our children are healthy and happy:
   - 85.5% of eligible Looked After with up to date immunisations
   - 95.3% of eligible LAC had an up to date dental check
   - 93.2% of eligible LAC had their annual health check
   - 99.5% of SDQ completed

24. Outcomes for Care Experienced Young People continues to be good. A cross council approach has been sustained. Our young people receive priority housing and are living in suitable accommodation (85.4%). Partnership working with schools, the Virtual School and Youth Support services has resulted in 64% of our Care Experienced Young People aged 17-21 years being engaged in employment, education and training. Six care experienced young people are in either full or part time higher education.

25. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and young people under the age of 18 years continue to receive a prompt and expert reception from the Corporate Parenting Service. This includes a cohort of age-assessment trained practitioners. They receive a service as Looked After Children and Care Experienced Young People that addresses the unique features of their circumstances. This includes English language teaching and support to access therapeutic and legal support.

26. The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people who are looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council has continued to be stable as a result of the national and regional arrangements whereby local authorities with high levels of UASC transfer new UASC to regional partners who have numbers of children below an agreed numerical threshold.

27. Looked After Children and Young People who are reported missing are offered a Return Home Interview within 72 hours of their return home. The Return Home Interview details are provided to the child’s Social Worker so that they can understand the reasons why the child went missing and act to prevent a reoccurrence. 11.3% of looked after children had a missing episode 2018-19. When a Looked After Child or Young Person is reported missing a multi-agency Child Protection Strategy Meeting is held within 24 hours to ensure that children and young people are proactively safeguarded.

28. Formal assessment is undertaken by Social Workers for children and young people for whom there are concerns about their safety because of criminal exploitation. This helps practitioners secure a thorough understanding of the push and pull
factors for children and young people so that multi-agency safeguarding and prevention activity is undertaken in a targeted and effective way.

**Court work and work with long term looked after children**

29. The Court and Permanence Social Work Teams have responsibility for working with all children and young people referred to the service in a well managed and timely way. All children have allocated Social Workers from the point of transfer, in most cases following a period of joint work with the transferring in Social Worker. Children remain with their Court and Permanence Team Social Worker until the conclusion of their Care Proceedings and the determination of their long term permanence. This may be adoption, long term foster care, residential care, reunification to their family of origin or being cared for by relatives or family friends.

30. The transfer between Court and Permanence Teams to the Long Term Looked After Team and Leaving Care and Asylum Teams has been similarly well managed.

**Court Work**

31. Avoidance of delay is a key principle of children and family legislation. The Public Law Outline and recommendations from the Family Justice Review are well embedded in practice and most care proceedings are completed within 26 weeks to ensure outcomes for children are secured without delay. The small number of care proceedings that exceed the statutory target of 26 weeks are monitored to ensure that in all cases there is a child centered rationale for proceedings exceed 26 weeks.

32. The legal work in the service is regularly reviewed by senior leaders and managers and specific legal issues are considered in the following forums:

- Monthly Legal Issues Meetings attended by Heads of Service and Legal Advisers
- Family Justice Board Meeting attended by the Judiciary, a lead Head of Service and Legal Advisers
- Regular meeting between CAFCASS and Central Bedfordshire senior managers

33. Children whose care plan is adoption are being placed in a timely way with their adoptive parents. Foster to Adopt placements means that a small number of children have been placed with their prospective adoptive parents at the earliest opportunity to ensure that optimum opportunities for attachment are achieved for children.

34. Parallel planning through regular Permanency Planning Meetings means that all Care Proceedings are completed with detailed permanence plans in place and activity well advanced.

**Long Term Looked After Children**

35. The Long Term Looked After Children Team supports children and young people from the point at which Care Proceedings have concluded. The overarching purpose of the team is to secure permanency for Looked After Children and Young
People, achieving the security of long term placements that meet their needs as identified in their Care Plans.

36. Social Workers in the Long Term Looked After Team support the child or young person up to or near their 16th birthday. At this point, children and Young people transfer to leaving and after care services. This ensures that they are provided with specialist support with the Pathway Plan to independence and transition to adulthood.

37. Children aged five years and above are supported by the Long Term Looked After Children Team. This means that the Team can work with children for up to 11 years so that our children are provided with consistency, something we know that they value highly. National comparator data shows that social worker stability for looked after children in Central Bedfordshire matches the national average, with 22% of our children having a change of social worker in the previous 12 months.

38. To make sure that the needs of children and young people supported by the Long Term Looked After Children Team are well met, the Social Workers work closely with multi-agency partners. Purposeful and effective working relationships with schools, the virtual school, health, the Police, housing and Youth Offending services have been sustained. Fine tuning the focus of our partnership with Child and Adolescent Mental Health services is currently underway, to be reassured that all our children receive the right service at the right time.

Leaving Care and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People

Leaving Care

39. When Looked After Young People become 18 they receive, as prescribed by legislation, specialist services as Care Leavers. Whilst some young people remain with their foster carers over the age of 18 under Staying Put arrangements, many move to independent living. Young people are supported by their carers to develop knowledge and skills in anticipation of independence. The Team works with Housing to secure suitable and permanent accommodation for young people. Care Experienced Young People bid on the Local Authority Housing cycle and are prioritised if they have not been offered a property after two attempts. Pathway Plans are routinely shared with the Housing Team to ensure that identified accommodation is suitable, safe and meets the young person’s needs.

40. Some key metrics for our 178 care experienced young people aged 17-21 years:

- 85.4% are in suitable accommodation
- 64% are in education
- 3.3% (or 6 young people) are in higher education
- 5.6% (or 10 young people) have or had taken up an apprenticeship

41. The voice of our care experienced young people is heard through their membership of the Children in Care Council as well as through the direct work undertaken by their Personal Advisors. We also value the expertise of our young people and are
pleased that they are now assisting us as trained Quality Assurance partners for residential and unregulated 16+ provision.

42. Our Care Experienced Young People attend the Children in Care Awards and the Christmas party. The Christmas is also attended by practitioners, senior leaders and elected members.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people

43. The Leaving Care and Asylum Teams continue to be the front door service for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and young people. Typically, children and young people come to the attention of the Police and request asylum. If visual screening confirms that they are under the age of 18 years old, they are accepted as Looked After Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children or Young People. If there is any uncertainty or a dispute about their age, a full Age Assessment is conducted.

44. Most of our UASC present initially at Toddington Services on the M1 in Central Bedfordshire. The regional relocation scheme means that Central Bedfordshire supports an agreed maximum number UASC (41 individuals or 0.07 of the child population) although our geography means that our numbers are higher than a number of Eastern Region partners and many other local authorities across the country. This has resulted in the development of expertise in supporting children and young people who have made treacherous journeys from dangerous countries. The threshold agreement and our experiences to date mean that we can forecast need in this area of work.

45. Details of our looked after UASC population

Country of origin:

- Afghanistan 5.6% (2 / 36)
- Chad 2.8% (1 / 36)
- Eritrea 25.0% (9 / 36)
- Ethiopia 5.6% (2 / 36)
- Iran 5.6% (2 / 36)
- Iraq 13.9% (5 / 36)
- Libya 2.8% (1 / 36)
- Sudan 16.7% (6 / 36)
- Turkey 2.8% (1 / 36)
- Vietnam 19.4% (7 / 36)

Ages of our looked UASC population:

- 12 2.8% (1 / 36)
- 14 2.8% (1 / 36)
- 15 11.1% (4 / 36)
- 16 25.0% (9 / 36)
- 17 55.6% (20 / 36)
- 18 2.8% (1 / 36)
Gender of our looked UASC population:

- Male 94.4% (34/36)
- Female 5.6% (2/36)

46. A close working relationship with specialist agencies to safeguard unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people has been sustained. These agencies include the UK Boarder Agency, Police, the Child Trafficking Centre, the National Referral Mechanism and health. The service works with the British Red Cross to help unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people to safely re-establish contact with their birth families and home countries.

47. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children under the age of 15 are placed with foster carers. Where possible 16 and 17 year old unaccompanied asylum seeking young people are placed in shared housing and semi-independent accommodation with other young people with the same culture and language. This reduces feelings of isolation and anxiety for the young people, making it easier for them to have confidence to integrate into their new surroundings.

48. Of the 29 UASC young people aged 16 and 17, 21 are in education or training. Of the eight young people not in education or training three are missing. Dedicated support is provided to those not in education or employment. Their education needs are reviewed through the support of the Virtual School and Youth Services. Accredited tuition centers offer one to one and group session to help children and young people improve their language skills and access mainstream college or school. Pupil Premium funding is accessed to help the children and young people improve their English and Math's skills.

49. A Service Level Agreement with Central Bedfordshire Council Housing has been accommodated in Central Bedfordshire houses resulted in seven young people aged 16 or 17 years and 15 young people aged 18 to 21 years.

50. All young people supported by the Leaving and After Care and Asylum Team to have access to the Advocacy Service.

**Fostering Service**

51. Recruitment and retention of skilled and well supported foster carers is the priority of the Fostering Service. This is so that our children can be provided with high quality care local to their schools and families. A stretching recruitment target of 15 new fostering households was set for this reporting year. The Service was able to recruit 10 fostering households, sustaining the numbers recruited in the previous year. 10 fostering households retired during this reporting period.

52. During 2018-19 a greater percentage of our Looked After Children were cared for by foster carers, with a small reduction in the percentage cared for in residential units. The number of ‘in house’ Central Bedfordshire foster carer households remained the same. As a result, a greater proportion (44%) of fostered children were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies than the previous reporting year.
53. Whilst Independent Fostering Agencies provide excellent care to our children, we wish to significantly increase the percentage of Looked After Children cared for by Central Bedfordshire Council foster carers. This is because it a more efficient use of resources as the carers are more likely to be local to the families and schools of our children. It is also more straightforward to coordinate local multi-agency services to meet the needs of children.

54. Placement stability for looked after children continues to be strong with 90% of children looked after for +2.5 years had placement stability or adoption secured. Placement stability is a priority for the whole system, so that children feel settled and secure, but the support and training provided by the Fostering Service is a key part of this success.

55. The Fostering Service was assessed as Good in the Ofsted 2017 inspection. The Service was scrutinised by the Eastern Region Peer Review (November 2018) and Ofsted Focused Visit (February 2019) and judged to be effective and sound.

56. The views of children on their foster placements and the views of foster carers are secured through Fostering Reviews that take place a minimum of once each year. These views are acted upon to support continuous development of the service.

57. The Fostering Service celebrates the achievements of foster carers throughout the year. We were delighted five fostering households were successfully nominated for 2018 Royal Garden Parties. The Celebration of Fostering is held annually at Woburn Safari Park. This event recognises the commitment, hard work and achievements of Central Bedfordshire foster carers and their families and was attended by 62 foster carers and 53 children. At the Celebration of Fostering 2018 115 years of fostering was recognised.

58. Long service awards were given as follows:

- 8 households received a 5 year award
- 3 households received a 10 year award
- 1 households received a 20 year award
- 1 households received a 25 year award

59. In addition, six households received a nomination award for the following categories:

- Brilliant family and friends foster carers
- Outstanding contribution to fostering
- Outstanding contribution to caring for children with complex needs
- Special sons and daughters
- Your choice

60. We also had two foster carers receive awards at the BBC Three Counties People Awards for the foster carer category. They won the Gold and Bronze award.
Adoption

61. Children for whom the plan is adoption are placed with their adoptive on average within 375 of becoming looked after. This is strong and improving performance. 33 children were matched with prospective adoptive parents. 17 Adoption Orders were granted.

62. The continuation of the Adoption Support Fund has improved the local offer of adoption support to families with the emphasis being to access therapeutic intervention to improve the quality of life for families.

63. Adoption activity events continue throughout the year including the summer Family Barbeque and Christmas Party. These events were held in partnership with Bedford Borough and were well attended by over 73 adults and 71 children.

Resources and Placement Team

64. The Resources and Placement Team is made up of Placement Officers, Resources Officers and a Panel Coordinator.

65. The Team provides a service across all the Fostering and Social Work Teams in Central Bedfordshire, sourcing placements for Looked After Children. The expertise within the service means that timely and appropriate placements and resources are matched to the needs of children to ensure a high quality and value for money service.

Celebrating the achievements of Children and Young People in Care and Care Experienced Young People

66. Whilst the Social Work Teams address safety and vulnerability issues, Social Workers and senior managers have the privilege of recognising and celebrating the achievements and interests of our children and young people every day.

67. In addition, the annual Children in Care Council Awards Ceremony celebrates the successes of our children and young people. The theme, ‘A Summer Ball’, was chosen by the Children in Care Council members who designed and chose the fun activities, supported by Members and officers. This celebration took place on 20 July 2018 and was attended by 320 children, young people and their carers.

68. The Children in Care Council WhatsApp group provides lots of opportunities for children, young people and senior leaders to communicate. It is a great way for information to be shared and triumphs to be celebrated. It was also fun for the Children in Care Council Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Football Team to meet with the Chief Executive and elected members to celebrate their great success at the summer 2018 regional football tournament.
Legal Implications

69. This report does not have specific legal implications. However, the Council has a statutory obligation to looked after children and care leavers as Corporate Parents. This report provides information on how these statutory obligations are being met.

Financial and Risk Implications

70. This report does not have specific financial implications. However good outcomes for looked after children and care leavers supports efficient and effective use of available resources.

Equalities Implications

71. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and foster good relations in respect of the nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Ensuring that looked after children and care leavers are provided with effective support enables Central Bedfordshire Council to achieve better outcomes for children and young people who are additionally vulnerable.

Conclusions and Priorities for 2018-19

72. The achievements detailed are the result of a skilled and stable work force. Agency social rates continue to be low at 10% as of 31 March 2018. Staff churn is also low. As a whole service, we continue to actively recruit newly qualified Social Workers, with applicants significantly exceeding vacancies. We are proud to be an employer of choice for this key group of colleagues – the practitioners and leaders of the future. Our partnership with Frontline has resulted in seven Social Workers completing their social work qualification on the job in Central Bedfordshire and starting work with us. Two of these colleagues have joined social work teams within the Corporate Parenting Service. Social Workers tell us that they choose to continue working for Central Bedfordshire due to manageable caseloads and a great learning and development offer.

73. Achievements

- Performance measures of things that matter to children have been sustained
- Children have been visited in a regular and timely way
- The health of Looked After Children has been closely monitored, with the performance dip promptly addressed
- SDQ scores continue to indicate that the emotional health of most of our children is good
- Placement stability continues to be good
- Continuity of Social Workers continues to compare well to national performance
An expert and high quality service is provided to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People
An active and effective service is provided to children and young people who go missing and are at risk of Criminal Exploitation
Timely and well matched adoption for children
Successful external evaluation concluding that good progress has been achieved from the 2017 Ofsted Inspection

74. Challenges for the year ahead

- Medium Term Financial Plan – Ensuring that the service funds all required services within budget without compromising service quality for children
- Embedding the Regional Adoption Agency – Sustaining the Central Bedfordshire Council great performance and evidencing an even better service for children and their families
- Recruiting and retaining more Central Bedfordshire Council foster carers, including those who can take larger brother and sister groups, older children and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

Report author(s): Ruth Coals
Head of Professional Standards and Principal Social Worker
Ruth.Coals@Centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
8. Agency Report - Quarter 1 Fostering, 1 April to 30 June 2019

To receive the Fostering Agency Quarter 1 report.
Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL 24 October 2019

Agency Report Quarter 1 Fostering 1 April – 30 June 2019

Report of: Cllr Sue Clark Executive Member for Families, Education and Children and Lead Member for Children’s Services, (Sue.Clark@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Responsible Director(s) Advising Officer(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children’s Services, (Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk) and Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering Team (annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report

Fostering Services Regulations 2000 requires the Fostering Agency to monitor and control the activities of the Fostering Service and ensure quality performance. Quarterly reports are presented to elected members to outline the activities in the Fostering Service in order for members to monitor and feedback on the quality and performance of the Service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 1 Report

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. This report has not been to nor is planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny as no recommendations/decisions are required. Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 1 report.
2. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require the Local Authority Fostering Service to report to Members regularly on the activities of the Service. This report, therefore, focuses on the work undertaken in the Fostering Service during the first quarter of the financial year 2019/2020 (1 April – 30 June 2019). It focuses on the recruitment, assessment, approval and training of foster carers. It also reports on any Ofsted notifications, allegations, complaints or compliments received regarding foster carers or the Service as a whole.

### Recruitment of Foster Carers

3. During this quarter a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services Recruitment Strategy which included lamppost adverts, an ongoing advert and editorial regarding PACE fostering on the NARPO (National Association of Retired Police Officers) and various tweets and posts on CBC Twitter and Facebook.

4. As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period, we received a total of 23 enquiries; 8 in April; 6 in May and 9 in June (this is 14 less than in the last quarter). There were 17 Initial Visits during this period: 6 in April; 5 in May and 6 in June (this is 2 less than in the last quarter). There were 5 application forms received during this period: 2 in April; 2 in May and 1 in June (this is 2 less than in the previous quarter). The best form of recruitment during this period was through the CBC website (16 enquiries) followed by Google search (6 enquiries) then non-specific enquiries (4 enquiries).

### Assessments

5. As of the 30 June 2018 there were a total of 11 assessments in progress:
   - 6 career carers (which included 1 IFA transfer),
   - 5 Family and friends assessments

6. In the financial year, thus far, the fostering service had completed the following assessments:
   - 2 Regulation 24’s (Temporary approval)
   - 2 Family and Friends
   - 3 Special Guardianship Orders (2 of which were private applications)
   - 1 career carer
   - 1 supported lodgings

7. The recruitment targets set for 2019/20 is to recruit 11 new career carers.
Resignations/Termination of Approvals

8. During this quarter, 2 fostering households resigned as both retired.

Carer/LAC Data

9. As of the 30 June 2019 the Fostering Agency had a total of 105 fostering households (which is the same as at the end of the previous quarter), 83 of these were career carers.

10. In relation to the ethnicity of foster carers, there is a fair match of ethnicity with foster carers broadly reflecting the ethnicity of our children in care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Foster Carers</th>
<th>Looked After Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>89% (157)</td>
<td>80% (249)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual Heritage</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>5% (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>6% (11)</td>
<td>3% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4% (7)</td>
<td>3% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Gypsy/Traveller</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>2% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>7% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (176)</td>
<td>100% (310)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. On 30 June 2018 there were a total of 127 children (56%) placed with in-house foster carers compared to 130 at the end of the previous quarter.

12. 100 children (44%) were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA’s) compared to 102 at the end of the previous quarter.
Referrals/Placements

13. During this quarter there were 22 new fostering placements made. This is an increase of 8 new placements compared to the last quarter.

Placement Stability

14. Short term placement stability continues to remain good. This is defined as children looked after with three or more placements during the previous twelve months (national performance indicator). The target for Central Bedfordshire this year is 7% (low is good) and the figure achieved at the end of this quarter was 5.5%. This compares favourably with statistical neighbours at 12.1% and national average at 10.5%.

15. Long term placement stability also remains strong. This is defined by the percentage of children looked after aged under 16 who have been in the care for 2 ½ years and in the same placement for at least 2 years. The target for Central Bedfordshire this year is 80% (high is good) and the figure achieved at the end of this quarter was 82.8%. This is well above statistical neighbours at 70.2% and national average at 69.8%.

Special Guardianship Orders

16. As of the 30 June 2019 there were 176 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 163 at the end of the last quarter). Although Special Guardian Order (SGO) carers are generally expected to access universal services, they are entitled to seek support from the Local Authority as and when required.

17. The Fostering Service continues to work with a small cohort of families who contact the service for support and advice. On average the service works with about 5 families a month and will undertake visits or provide telephone support in order to meet the needs of individual carers.

Private Fostering

18. At the end of June 2019, there were no private fostering arrangements in place requiring support from the fostering service.

Training

19. During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided 20 specialist in-house training courses which included:
   - Advanced theraplay
   - The teenage brain
   - Early identification of eating disorders

20. No carers attended training from the Early Years and multi-agency programme, this was on the Vulnerabilities of mental health when safeguarding children.
21. 33 foster carers also accessed e-learning, which included:
   - Talking to your children about emotional resilience and self-harm;
   - Transitions and vulnerabilities;
   - Female genital mutilation.

22. As of the 30 June 2018 there were no fostering household that were overdue in completing their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD’s) in the required timescale.

**Ofsted Notifications**

23. Whenever a significant event happens i.e. a child goes missing from placement or a serious incident/accident occurs the agency have to report these to Ofsted.

24. During this period there were no required notifications.

**Allegations**

25. During this period there were 3 allegations made against CBC foster carers. 1 was in relation to manual handling, 1 in relation to a physical assault, the other was in relation to the conduct of a foster carer who held a professional role elsewhere in CBC. The L.A.D.O. (Local Authority Designated Officer) was informed regarding all 3 referrals. Both the manual handling and physical assault allegations were unfounded. A concerns meeting was set up to address the issues regarding the conduct of the foster carer and as at 30th June was still ongoing.

**Complaints**

26. During this period, there were no complaints made by foster carers about the fostering service.

**Compliments**

27. During this period the fostering service received 4 compliments from foster carers either about the support they had received or on services provided.

28. 1 was from a foster carer regarding the positive support they had received from their supervising social worker during the ending of a placement. The carer stated, ‘I cannot express how valuable your support has been throughout this placement’ and ‘once again I can’t express how much your backing and support have helped us’.

29. 1 carer provided positive feedback about the service stating that ‘we have support when it is needed. CBC are not in our pockets and this allows us to have private family time. There is a great deal of diverse training on offer and when you have fostered for a long
time as we have, this is fantastic. I really like that there is support for birth children whose parents foster as this makes a massive difference for my son.

30. Fostering and permanence panel provided positive feedback about 2 staff members who they felt had grown and developed as practitioners since joining the fostering service.

31. The final compliment was from the L.A.D.O. in Hertfordshire as some of our staff had worked with her team on a cross boundary matter. She stated 'these cases can be extremely complex and staff from CBC demonstrated a flexible approach to the challenges we faced, remaining ‘child focused’ at all times. This enabled an effective intervention in a timely manner.’

**Annual Budget**

32. For the year 2019/2020 the Fostering Service within Children’s Services had an annual budget of £1,010,560 for the running of the service, this excludes fees/allowances paid to foster carers.

**Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements**

33. Regulations; associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the requirements to report to Members on the management and outcomes of Services provided, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the Services provided are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

**Risk Management**

34. Regulatory Risks: Failure to report to Members would be a breach of National Minimum Standards.

**Staffing**

35. The Fostering Agency comes under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting Service and the Head of Service has overall management responsibility for Fostering. Under the Head of Service is the Practice Manager who is also the Registered Manager for Fostering. This person monitors and manages the activities of the Fostering Agency. She supervises 2 team managers who have day to day responsibility for management of 2 fostering teams. During this period 1 fostering social workers left the service to join Family Support Service for their career development and 1 of the team managers moved to the court and permanency team for 5 months secondment opportunity.
Council Priorities

- Children and Families First.
- Working as One Team close to our community.
- Being great Corporate Parents to children in care and care leavers – much more than care.
- Being a well-managed service and providing great public care.

Corporate Implications

36. Not applicable

Legal Implications

37. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Financial and Risk Implications

38. There are no financial issues arising from this report.

Equalities Implications

39. 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 report highlights ongoing efforts to recruit foster carers from diverse backgrounds and to provide training and development in relation to equality issues.

Implications of Work Programming

40. The 4 quarter reports for fostering feed into an annual report which is then presented to Overview and Scrutiny along with the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy.
Conclusion and next Steps

41. Our children continue to live in stable placements where both short and long term placement stability are strong. Targets in both areas have continued to improve over the last few years and compare very favourably with our statistical neighbours and with the national average.

42. The stability and quality of placements our foster carers offer is also evidenced by the fact that during this period there has been no complaints or Ofsted notifications required, no placement stability/disruption meetings and only 3 allegations 2 of which were unfounded whilst the other has not yet been concluded.

43. As of 30 June 2018, 56% of children were placed with in house foster carers compared to 44% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA’s).

44. Our Foster Carers are consistently attending core training to develop their skills and knowledge which means they are in a better position to support the children in their care.

45. Whilst only 1 career carer has been approved this quarter this is a similar start to the previous year’s quarter 1 where there were only 2 career carers approved. Whilst Ofsted and The Fostering Network (U.K.’s leading fostering charity) are indicating there is a ‘fostering crisis’ in terms of recruiting foster carers, there is no evidence at this early stage to indicate that CBC fostering service will not meet its recruitment target this year. The issue for the service is in its ability to increase its number of foster carers as each year similar numbers are recruited to those that leave the service. A long-term project is underway, however, which if fully implemented will help to transform the fostering service over the next few years.

46. The performance and available data for the service for this quarter, gives a good indication that foster carers are providing a high standard of care to the children placed with them, that children are well matched and supported in local resources and that outcomes for them are good.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None
Fostering: Quarter 1 Report

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering (NMS) require the Service to report to the executive side of the Local Authority every 3 months on the activities and outcomes the Fostering Service have achieved to satisfy themselves that the Service is effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Highlights for Quarter 1 (1st April- 30th June 2019)

Recruitment:
• A variety of recruitment activities and events took place in this quarter in line with the Fostering Recruitment Strategy. One of the activities proving positive in this quarter has been the lamppost adverts which have been placed in Biggleswade, Bedford, Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable.
• The best form of recruitment this quarter was through the CBC website followed by Google.

Assessments
• During this quarter 9 assessments were completed and approved, (2 temporary Reg 24’s, 2 Family and Friends, 3 Special Guardianship Orders, 1 Career Carer and 1 Supported Lodgings).
• 11 further assessments were in progress (6 Career Carers and 5 Family and Friends).
Fostering: Quarter 1 Report (continued)

LAC/Carer data
• As at 30 June 2019 the Fostering Agency had a total of 105 fostering households which is the same as in the previous quarter
• 127 children (56%) were placed with in-house foster carers
• 100 children (44%) were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA’s)
• There was an increase in referrals for placements during this quarter, from 14 in the previous quarter to 22 in this quarter

Placement Stability
• Short term indicators – 3 or more placement moves. Target set at 7% this year (low is good). The figure achieved at the end of this quarter was 5.5%. This compared favourably with our statistical neighbours at 12.1% and the national average at 10.5%.
• Long term indicator – In care for 2.5 years, in same placement for 2 years. Target set at 80% this year (high is good). The figure achieved at the end of this quarter was 82.8%. This is well above our statistical neighbours at 70.2% and the national average of 69.8%
• Other indicators of placement stability are positive i.e. only 1 placement stability meeting and no disruption meetings required
• No Ofsted notifications required, no complaints received.
• 3 allegations made against foster carers, none of them met the criteria for a S47 investigation
• The Fostering Service also received 4 compliments from various sources either about the support or services provided.
Fostering: Quarter 1 Report (continued)

Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)
- As at 30th June 2019 there were 176 SGO’s in place (13 more than in the previous quarter). The Fostering Service works with approximately 5 SGO carers a month supporting them with issues in relation to contact or requests for respite or therapy for the children etc.

Training for foster carers
- During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided 20 specialist in-house training courses which included: Advanced theraplay; The teenage brain and Early identification of eating disorders.
- 33 carers accessed e-learning training which included: Talking to your children about emotional resilience and self-harm; Transitions and vulnerabilities and female genital mutilation.

Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD’s)
- As at the 30th June 2019 there were no fostering household that were overdue in completing their mandatory TSD Standards in the required timescale.
Conclusion

• Short and long term placement stability figures are good
• The % of children placed with in-house foster carers remains stable at 56%
• CBC foster carers are consistently attending training to develop their skills and knowledge
• Whilst the number of Family and Friends and SGO assessments is increasing recruiting career carers is proving more difficult. This fits with Ofsted and ‘Fostering Networks (UK’s leading fostering charity) view that there is a ‘fostering crisis’. With this in mind CBC have a long term project underway which if fully implemented will help transform the fostering service and help increase CBC’s ability to recruit more foster carers
• The performance and available data for the service for this quarter gives a good indication that foster carers are providing a high standard of care, that children are well matched/supported in local resources and that outcomes for them are good.
9. Six Month Adoption Agency Report - 1 April to 30 September 2019

To receive the Six Month Adoption Agency report.
Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel 24 October 2019

Six Month Adoption Agency Report 1 April – 30 September 2019

Report of: Cllr Sue Clark Executive Member for Families, Education and Children and Lead Member for Children’s Services (Sue.Clark@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Responsible Director(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children’s Services, (Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Purpose of this report

The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Adoption Agencies to report to Members at six monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of a six-monthly update to the Corporate Parenting Panel and a full year Annual Report to this Panel each year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Consider, note and comment on the six month Adoption Agency report

Issues

1. The Regional Adoption Agency – Adoption Connects went live on 1st April 2019 providing adoption services to Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Councils. This saw launch of a new website offering Information Evenings twice per month in venues across the geographical area. Applicants considering adoption can either book to attend or just turn up as the details are available on the website. This has increased choice for enquirers.
2. The new agency offers a 5 day a duty week service where enquiries can be received from an online website enquiry form, via social media posts, email to the Adoption Team or telephone call directly to a duty Social Worker.

3. We have had 118 enquiries in this period of which 14 related to Step Parent Adoption, 78 enquiries to adopt, 6 Access to records/intermediary, 12 Post adoption support requests, 1 intercountry enquiry, 2 birth relatives enquiries, 4 general enquiries. Many enquiries are for the provision of advice and information only. All those enquiring about becoming a prospective adopter are invited to attend an information evening and initial interview. The new agency offers a choice of venue to improve accessibility.

4. Adoption Connects recruits prospective adopters for both Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Council.

5. As of 30 September, 9 households were in stage one of the process and 16 in stage two (the final assessment stage before Adoption Panel approval).

6. 9 new adoptive households completed their assessment and were approved as prospective adopters.

7. As of 30 September, there are 15 approved prospective adopter households of which 8 have a link with a child progressing to panel for a match.

8. 1 application was withdrawn in Stage 2 following agency advice.

9. The new agency has designed a joint training offer for prospective adopters which includes:

   - preparation training for prospective adopters which includes 3 modules of training covering loss, trauma and identity, assessment and matching and adoption support.
   - Carousel events provide new applicants with the opportunity to meet approved prospective adopters and adoptive parents.
   - Family and friends workshop providing opportunity for support networks to learn about adoption, explore their expectations and questions and their role offering support.
   - PACE training for all prospective adopters
Adopter Recruitment and Placements for Children

10. Central Bedfordshire year to date performance:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Adoption Connects Adult Approvals</th>
<th>2019-20 activity to date</th>
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<td>CBC Adoption Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBC Matched</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBC Adoption Orders</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. As of 30 September 2018, there were 10 children placed in adoptive placements pending the granting of an Adoption Order. 3 children have an application to adopt submitted to court with orders expected to be granted in the next few months.

12. The 3 children matched in this period were matched with prospective adopters approved and support by Adoption Connects.

13. There were 11 Adoption Orders granted in this reporting period.
   - 2 were placed via early permanence
   - 4 were placed with a sibling
   - 1 was adopted by their foster carers.

14. There have continued to be no adoption disruptions, pre the granting of an adoption order, of children placed by Central Bedfordshire Council in this reporting period.

15. As of 30 September 2019, there are 23 children with a placement order of which 10 are placed for adoption, pending the granting of the adoption order.

16. 1 child is placed in an early permanence - foster for adoption placement.

**Interagency:**

17. All children matched during this reporting period were placed with prospective adopters approved and supported by Adoption Connects.

18. 2 children from other Local Authorities were matched with prospective adopters approved and supported by Adoption Connects.

19. 4 adoption orders were granted to interagency placements provided by CBC adopters. This has a positive impact on national performance and reflects the successful recruitment of adopters for children requiring adoption nationally.
Adoption Support

20. 35 requests for adoption support assessments were received.

21. 15 Applications to the Adoption Support Fund have been completed and agreed. This has enabled the provision of therapeutic intervention to identified families.

22. Support also continues through post adoption contact arrangements for each individual child placed for adoption. It seeks to ensure a secure and consistent record of contact between birth family and adoptive family. This often includes letters and occasional photographs that are often of high significance to the adoptee later in life.

23. Adoption Connects are designing and implementing the universal adoption support offer. This includes support events for children and young people via a termly youth group. Connection events for adoptive parents, birth parent group and post adoption support consultations with a therapist. Support events have continued to be held such as the annual summer barbeque which was attended by over 71 adults and 73 children.

24. At a recent youth club some of the young people shared the following views regarding what adoption means to them and the youth group:

   “We are special as we were picked to be in our families” (male age 11)
   “It means we are accepted” (male aged 14)
   “The [youth] group means are we not judged” (female age 12)

Key Events

25. The Regional Adoption Agency went live from 1st April 2019. This has provided an opportunity to review all processes and design a service based on a combination of good practice in both CBC and MKC. Nationally 99 Local Authorities are now part of a Regionalised Adoption Agency programme.

26. The Adoption Panel has developed into Adoption Connects Panel which provides panel services to three Local Authorities.

Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements

27. Regulations associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the requirements to report to Members on the management and outcomes of Services provided, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the Services provided are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.
Risk Management


Staffing (including Trade Unions)

29. Not Applicable.

Community Safety:

30. Not Applicable

Sustainability

31. Not Applicable

Procurement:

32. Not Applicable

Council Priorities

- Enhancing Central Bedfordshire
- Great resident services
- Improving education and skills
- Protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing
- Creating stronger communities
- A more efficient and responsive Council.

Corporate Implications

33. Not applicable

Legal Implications

34. Regulations; associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards contain and outline the requirement to report to Members on the management and
outcomes of the Adoption Agency, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the services are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

35. The National Adoption Leadership Board continues to monitor performance and drive change. The quarterly survey reports on all significant data for children with a plan for adoption and adults who have expressed an interest in adoption.

36. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

**Financial and Risk Implications**

37. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

**Equalities Implications**

38. 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.

39. Adoption Connects provides a service for all those affected by adoption and considers applications on an individual basis and does not discriminate against any of the protected characteristics.

**Conclusion and next Steps**

40. Adoption Connects provides dedicated teams providing recruitment and family finding services and Adoption support services across two local authorities. This has provided a full review of service provision to embed good practice and focus on early permanence and early intervention.

41. Adoption Connects remains in its infancy and continues to recruit to full-service specification.

42. Service user engagement is being developed to inform the future development of the service. This includes an adopted young person assisting with the youth club and development of a youth panel, Peer support for adoptive families and the regeneration of a birth parent support group provided by a Voluntary Adoption Agency and RAA partner.
• RAA live from 1st April 2019
• Provides a 5 day per week duty system to be more responsive to enquiries
• Offers Information Evening twice per month in two venues to offer choice and flexibility
• Two specialist teams – Recruitment and Family finding and Adoption Support

• RECRUITMENT (as at 30/09/2019):
  • 25 assessments of prospective adopters in progress
  • 15 approved Prospective Adopters of which 8 have a match progressing to panel
  • Preparation Training redesigned to include:
    • 3 modules – covering loss, trauma, identity, adoption support, assessment and matching process
    • Carousel evenings – providing opportunity for prospective adopters to meet approved adopters and adoptive parents
    • Family and friends Workshop
    • PACE module – parenting with playfulness, acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy

www.adoptionconnects.co.uk
Performance (as at 30 Sept 19)

- Children:
  Placement Orders:
  23 (10 placed for adoption)
  Adoption orders:
  11
  Matched in the period:
  3 – All matched with Adoption Connects adopters
  1 – placed in an early permance
  No disruptions pre the granting of a placement order

Adoption Connects - Prospective adopters:
  9 approved in this period

www.adoptionconnects.co.uk
Adoption Support:

Adoption Connects have had 35 adoption support assessment requests (17 MKC) (18CBC)

Post Adoption Support universal offer designed and being implemented which includes:

- Termly Youth Club
- Adolescent Youth Group (beginning in November)
- Monthly connections drop in for parents
- Birth parent group (provided by a VAA partner)
- Post adoption consultations with therapeutically trained staff
- Family events such as – Summer BBQ, Christmas Party, half term activities

www.adoptionconnects.co.uk
10. Ofsted and Eastern Region Peer Review Action Plan 2019-20

To receive a report on the contents of the Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan.
Purpose of this report

To brief the Corporate Parenting Panel on the contents of the Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan. The Work Plan has been created in response to the Ofsted Focused Visit (February 2019) and Eastern Region Peer Review (November 2018) recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Note the contents of the updated Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan April 2019-20
1. Central Bedfordshire Council Children’s Services was subject to an Ofsted Focused Visit of the Local Authority arrangements for children in care, assessing the quality of practice and children’s experience and progress. The Focused Visit took place on 5 and 6 February 2019. Shortly before this, Children’s Services asked colleagues from the Eastern Region Peer Reviewer network to undertake an evaluation of Looked After Children and Permanence. This took place on 27-30 November 2018.

2. The Work Plan contains SMART objectives with detailed actions to be carried out. Monitoring of the Work Plan is as follows:
   - Quarterly monitoring of the plan by the Director of Children’s Services with the Directorate Team
   - Corporate Parenting Panel on a quarterly basis
   - Local Safeguarding Children Board (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements) on a quarterly basis
   - Frontline management team on a quarterly basis

3. The Eastern Region Peer Review (November 2018) concluded there was strong governance, strong management and strong frontline in Central Bedfordshire. The Ofsted Focused Visit (February 2019) concluded looked after children in Central Bedfordshire are provided with a responsive and effective service.

4. The Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan 2019-20 has been created in response to the recommendations from the Focused Visit and Eastern Region Peer Review. The Work Plan contains 17 recommendations. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with an update on progress. The Work Plan has been co-produced with managers and practitioners in Central Bedfordshire Council Children’s Services, led by the Director of Children’s Services.

5. The first three (of 17) recommendations are informed by the Ofsted Focused Visit and are in respect of Personal Education Plans for looked after young people from the age of 16, the timeliness of Health Assessments for children in care, and the development of auditing processes to include the views of parents, children and practitioners, and drive practice. Whilst all the recommendations are service priorities, the three Ofsted recommendations are of particular priority.

6. Good progress has been achieved on the first three Work Plan recommendations. All actions have been completed as planned.

7. Recommendation 1 - All looked after children including those who are 16+ have Personal Education Plans. These are reviewed to monitor compliance with agreed actions and progress a minimum of twice each year.

8. Recommendation 2 - Health assessments are in timescale and this outcome has been sustained over the last four months. Further work is in hand to ensure that there is optimum communication and collaboration with health colleagues so that
the physical, mental and emotional health of our children is well understood and attended to. This includes additional monthly meetings and review of practice so that refinements are implemented.

9. Recommendations 3 – Audit arrangements have been revised from April 2019. The numbers of audits completed each month has increased from 17 to 30 each month. Parent feedback and social worker self-reflection is integrated into the audit process. From October 2019, the views of children will be sought as part of the audit process. This will be done in partnership with the ViP Team.

10. The other 14 recommendations are informed by the Eastern Region Peer Review findings. The 14 recommendations actions are complete or on track for completion in timescale. These recommendations will support us to further explore opportunities to develop practice through refinements to existing processes.

Council Priorities

11. The Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan is enabling Children’s Services in Central Bedfordshire to ensure that we continue to protect vulnerable looked after children, young people and care leaver, and improve their wellbeing.

Legal Implications

12. This report does not have specific legal implications. However, the Council has a statutory obligation towards children and this report provides information as to how some of those obligations are being met in terms of the Ofsted regulatory framework.

Financial and Risk Implications

13. This report does not have specific financial implications. However timely, considered and effective service delivery for children and their families is an efficient use of resources and for this reason contributes to good budget management.

Equalities Implications

14. 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. Ensuring that looked after children are provided with timely, considered and effective services enables Central Bedfordshire Council to achieve better outcomes for children and young people who are additionally vulnerable.

15. It should also be noted that Looked After Children are not a protected group under the Equality Act, however the effective support of looked after children requires consideration of a range of issues related to their protected
characteristics. Consideration of mental health and wellbeing can be particularly important and has been highlighted by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner. Children who have been in care:

- are between four and five times more likely to attempt suicide in adulthood,
- have a fivefold increased risk of all childhood mental, emotional and behavioural problems
- have a six to sevenfold increased risk of conduct disorders.
- 60% of Looked After Young People have some level of mental health problem

**Conclusion and next Steps**

16. Children’s Services in Central Bedfordshire fully accept the recommendations from the Eastern Region Peer Review and Ofsted Focused Visit. The Work Plan informed by these recommendations from these inspections is supporting service development.

17. Monitoring of the Work Plan is as follows:

- Quarterly monitoring of the plan by the Director of Children’s Services with the Directorate Team
- Corporate Parenting Panel on a quarterly basis
- Local Safeguarding Children Board (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements) on a quarterly basis
- Frontline management team on a quarterly basis

**Appendix A: Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan 2019-20 V.5**

None

**Report author(s): Ruth Coals**

Head of Professional Standards and Principal Social Worker
Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Services
Looked After Children Post Inspection Work Plan
April 2019-March 2020
Introduction

Central Bedfordshire Council is committed to ensuring that all children are happy, healthy and safe so that they get the best start in life. These outcomes are achieved in partnership with children, their families and the multi-agency network.

This Post Inspection Work Plan has been developed in response to:

- The Ofsted Focused Visit of the Local Authority arrangements for children in care, assessing the quality of practice and children's experience and progress - 5 and 6 February 2019
- The Eastern Region Peer of Looked After Children and Permanence, 27-30 November 2018

The Eastern Region Peer Review (November 2018) concluded there was strong governance, strong management and strong frontline in Central Bedfordshire. The Ofsted Focused Visit (February 2019) concluded looked after children provided with a responsive and effective service.

The Work Plan is informed by the recommendations in the Eastern Region Peer Review letter (19 December 2018) and the Ofsted Focused Visit letter (28 February 2019).

This Work Plan has been co-produced with managers and practitioners in Central Bedfordshire Council Children’s Services, led by the Director of Children’s Services.

The Work Plan contains SMART objectives with detailed actions to be carried out. Monitoring of the Work Plan is as follows:

- Quarterly monitoring of the plan by the Director of Children’s Services with the Directorate Team
- Corporate Parenting Panel on a quarterly basis
- Local Safeguarding Children Board (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements) on a quarterly basis
- Frontline management team on a quarterly basis
The Work Plan monitoring will provide evidence of progress against timescales. This will form the basis of regular monitoring to the groups identified above to form the basis of the quarterly programme of review.

**Key to the RAG status**

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<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>The action is on track to achieve</td>
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**Document history**

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<td>Ruth Coals Head of Professional Standards and Principal Social Worker</td>
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| 1 | Ensure all PEPs result in appropriate actions and actions that are followed through in a timely manner. | A Post 16 PEP has been put in place. An Electronic PEP is under consultation, to include the voice of the child on actions. | Virtual School Head | July 2019 | Post 16 PEPs are now taking place. Every post 16 LAC in education will have at least two PEP meetings per year. The PEP now includes a section for the child and carer to comment on actions from the previous PEP. VSH fed back to SMT regarding Post 16 PEPs 25/6/19. | |}
<p>| 2 | Improve the process for delivering Health Assessments for LAC – to ensure that they are quickly identified and addressed. | Further refinements to the process for ensuring timely health assessments and service provision has taken place. | Head of Service North | October 2019 | Tight monitoring of IHA and RHA review timescales is in place and timescales are now met. Performance is reported monthly. Monthly meeting in place with LAC health colleagues to consider issues. HofS North attends the quarterly strategic LAC health meeting and will continue to do so. | |</p>
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<th>Next steps: Consider at Strategic LAC health meeting ensuring that the LAC health assessment reviews mental health as well as physical health. Meeting with LAC CAMHS September 2019 to consider partnership and improved delivery of outcomes.</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Develop audit arrangements that integrate the views of social workers, parents and children. Ensure that learning from audits and from feedback effectively drive and improve practice. The views of social workers and parents are now integrated into the monthly case file audit programme and this will be rolled out to the thematic audit programme. A partnership process with the Voice of the Child Service will be formulated to triangulate the views of children into audit. Feedback from parents on service quality is now integrated into each audit completed. Social Workers provide self-assessment on their practice quality on audited cases. Work is in hand (beg. Oct. 19) for children to be interviewed to seek their views on service quality, in partnership with the ViP Team.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first two quarter of audit improvement themes has evidenced practice improvement because of actions from audit learning. More cases are now audited each month (30 instead of 17), from April 19. From October 2019 audit improvement actions will be addressed at the monthly Quality Assurance Meetings with Team and Practice Managers.

<p>|   | Ensure a consistent drug and alcohol support service/offer. | Further development of partnership work with Public Health, including having a regular attendance at the Drug and Alcohol Partnership Board, work to reduce harms from parent/caregiver drug and alcohol use, regular co-location with Aquarius (young people’s drug and alcohol service) and landscape mapping. Creation of the FDAC from September 2019. | Head of Locality South/Head of Service Public Health | March 2020 | Monthly and thematic audit will evidence consistent and effective engagement with drug and alcohol services for families. Impact evaluation of the FDAC for children. |
| 5 | <strong>Involve the Adoption Service as soon as possible in planning and decision making processes, such as Resources Panel, PLO planning, Legal Planning Meetings for children and early permanency tracking meetings.</strong> | Chair of the Resources Panel to alert the Adoption Service Manager of LPMs for children. | Head of Service for Professional Standards | October 2019 | Briefing provided by AD from all Resources Panel to RAA Manager. Monthly PLO report provided to RAA Manager. RAA sits on the fortnightly Permanence Tracking Meetings. Practice is evidenced as embedded. |
| 6 | <strong>Expand and articulate how the information secured from the PLO tracker might be used more with Early Help Services to inform the targeted offer.</strong> | Themes to be taken from the PLO tracker to support identification and development of the Early Help offer in terms of prevention opportunities. | Head of Locality South/Head of Service Transformation | March 2020 | Evidence of implementation of learning, action and emerging impact for children and their families of identified actions with particular reference to prevention opportunities. |
| 7 | <strong>Increase the consistency of practice in the use of genograms.</strong> | Best practice on genograms and eco maps to be shared with and cascaded by managers and leaders, by the Frontline CSW at PSMT by May 19. Best practice guidance to be produced and added to | Head of Professional Standards | March 2020 | Monthly case file audits evidence use of eco maps and genograms that inform assessment and care planning for children. Further work required. Guidance on best practice to be completed by Nov. 19 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Articulate clearly the purpose of Complex Case Discussions how this builds on supervision.</th>
<th>Guidance on how supervision and Complex Case Discussions to be amended Supervision Policy.</th>
<th>Head of Professional Standards/Regional Adoption Agency Practice Manager</th>
<th>Procedure update by October 2019 Survey of impact March 2020</th>
<th>Detailed review of supervision practice experience since the introduction of a revised Supervision Policy has been completed in August 2019. The recommendations from this review and guidance on Complex Case Discussions will update the Supervision Policy. A manager and practitioner survey will evidence clarity of understanding and application through PSMT.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Adoption social workers to contribute to sibling assessments and planning for sibling contact.</td>
<td>Experienced adoption practitioners will offer consultation and comment on complex sibling assessments and planning.</td>
<td>Head of Professional Practice</td>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>Permanency Planning Meetings and Matching Decisions for children provide a forum for ensuring that Adoption social workers provide guidance on together or apart decisions, and</td>
</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Clarity of who leads the Permanency Planning Meetings</td>
<td>Procedures will be updated to provide clarity on who leads the Permanency Planning Meeting for children.</td>
<td>Head of Professional Practice</td>
<td>March 2020</td>
<td>Consistent and effective practice for children will be evidenced through a themed audit.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Make sure all practitioners can articulate the timeframes for matching for all permanency options and the Quality Assurance Framework surrounding these.</td>
<td>A quick guide on timeframes and the Quality Assurance Framework surrounding these will be created, shared with all practitioners and managers and added to Procedures.</td>
<td>Head of Professional Practice</td>
<td>March 2020</td>
<td>Refresh reminder circulated Sept 19. Refresh reminder circulated Sept 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Use social workers in the Adoption Service to contribute to the induction of newly qualified social workers, reinforcing the importance of timely adoption planning to achieve best outcomes for children.</td>
<td>Ensure the Adoption Social Workers have a regular presence at the quarterly induction events for colleagues new to Children’s Services.</td>
<td>Head of Transformation</td>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td>Information on adoption is included in the revised Children’s Services induction events for new colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Activity Description</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Responsible Officer</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Promote the impact of the IRO role within quality assurance.</td>
<td>The IRO quality assurance process will be revised to differentiate between practice and outcomes for children. The collated findings, recommendations and action impact tracking from IRO quality assurance activity will be included in and triangulated with the quarterly Audit Reports.</td>
<td>Head of Professional Standards</td>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>Practice improvement case examples collated by the IROs and shared at the monthly Quality Assurance Meetings. September 2019 – draft revised QA process to be presented to SMT (24/9/19). These proposed changes will be incorporated into the quarterly Audit Reports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Reinstate the Permanency Tracking Panel</td>
<td>The Permanence Tracking Panel for Looked After Children was reinstated in March 2019.</td>
<td>Head of Professional Standards</td>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>The Permanency Tracking Panel was reinstated on 5/3/19. Since this time 12 meetings have taken place that considered 131 children. The % of children who have been looked after for +2 years and matched has increased.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Articulate the Relationship Based approach in opening presentations and literature</td>
<td>The suite of documents on the Central Bedfordshire Model of Practice will be reviewed and a communication strategy implemented.</td>
<td>Head of Professional Standards</td>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td>Documents have been drafted for publication in Nov 19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Revisit checks and balances to ensure they address the challenges of over optimism in relationship based practice, particularly for younger children</td>
<td>Rigorous oversight processes will be sustained to ensure against over optimism. This includes regular reflective supervision, use of scaling in supervision and meetings, Complex Case Discussions, and use of performance information and audit. An evaluation of Risk Training for practitioners and managers will be undertaken.</td>
<td>Head of Professional Standards</td>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td>Practice quality will continue to be monitored through monthly case file audit. The evaluation of Risk Training completed – high ratings by all attendees and examples of changes to practice identified. Range of checks and balances in place including oversight of practice quality by the AD at Resources Panel, midway reviews by Review Managers for CP and LAC, monthly peer challenge of timescales and progress for children who are subject of a CP Plan by Practice Managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Identify opportunities for team and practice managers to act into positions that stretch their potential through safe delegation of some decision making tasks.</td>
<td>Redesign of the service will create additional for opportunities for managers to take on new responsibilities. Your Years will be an integral part of this.</td>
<td>Head of Professional Standards</td>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>This issue will continue to be scrutinised through SMT. Update at SMT on 10/9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. Verbal update from the Director of Children's Service on matters of interest to the Panel
12. Work Programme

To consider the Panel's work programme.
Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to assist the Corporate Parenting Panel in discharging its responsibilities by providing a proposed work programme for consideration.

RECOMMENDATION

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to consider the proposed work programme attached at Appendix A.

Background

1. To assist the Corporate Parenting Panel a work programme is attached at Appendix A to this report. The work programme contains the known agenda items that the Panel will need to consider.

2. Additional items will be identified as the municipal year progresses. The work programme is therefore subject to change.

Council Priorities

3. The activities of the Corporate Parenting Panel are crucial to ensuring that the Council effectively discharges its role as Corporate Parent of Looked After Children. By considering, approving and following its work programme the Panel helps support the Council’s priorities of providing improving education and skills, protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing and being a more efficient and responsive Council.
**Corporate Implications**

4. There are no corporate implications.

**Legal Implications**

5. There are no legal implications.

**Financial and Risk Implications**

6. There are no financial and risk implications.

**Equalities Implications**

7. 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.

8. Report authors will be encouraged to work with the Corporate Policy Advisor (Equality & Diversity) in order to ensure that relevant equality implications are identified.

**Conclusion and next Steps**

9. This report will assist the Corporate Parenting Panel in discharging its responsibilities. Any amendments approved by the Panel will be incorporated in the work programme.

**Appendices**

10. The following Appendix is attached:

Appendix A: Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme

**Background Papers**

11. None

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Report author: Sharon Griffin  
Committee Services Officer  
Sharon.griffin@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
## Corporate Parenting Panel work programme – 2019/20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of meeting</th>
<th>Agenda items</th>
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</table>
| 19 December 2019  | 1. Understanding our Looked After Children population  
2. CiCC updates  
3. Fostering Q2 report (Annie Craig)  
4. Walking Alongside You (WAY) project update (Tracie Collins)  
5. Transitions report on Adults’ Social Care/ Children with disabilities as LAC (Ruth Coals/ Sarah Cavill)  
6. Update from a representative from the Youth Offending Service (Pat Jennings)  
7. Verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services on matters of interest to the Panel |
| 17 February 2020  | 1. Understanding our Looked After Children population  
2. CiCC updates  
3. Supported Accommodation for 16-17 year olds (Sally Harvey / Hannah Miles)  
4. Fostering Q3 report (Annie Craig)  
5. TACT Dictionary  
6. Update from a Personal Advisor on the support given to a LAC  
7. Verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services on matters of interest to the Panel |
| 6 April 2020      | 1. Understanding our Looked After Children population  
2. CiCC updates  
3. Fostering Q4 report (Annie Craig)  
   - Fostering Annual report 2018/19  
   - Fostering Panel Chair report  
   - Recruitment and Retention report 2019/20  
   - Statement of Purpose 2019/20  
4. Review of The Pledge and a social activity with the CiCC  
5. Verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services on matters of interest to the Panel |

### Unscheduled reports
- Presentation on the overview of the process of a Health Passport (LAC Health Team)  
- LAC Health report (Teresa McDonald)  
- Looked After Children SW Stability update report / Children’s Commissioner annual report (Ruth Coals)  
- Aspirations Wish List (Gill Wall)

Updated 10 October 2019
13. Exclusion of Press and Public

To consider whether to pass a resolution under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the Press and Public from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that the consideration of the item it likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 A of the Act.
Exempt Items
14. Children in Care Council update

To receive the Children in Care Council update.

Document is Restricted

To receive a report on the role of the Virtual School and the unvalidated outcomes at Key Stages 1, 2, and 4 for Looked After Children (LAC) in Central Bedfordshire for the Academic Year 2018/19.

Document is Restricted