## Corporate Parenting Panel

### Schedule
Thursday 30 May 2019, 10:00 AM — 1:00 PM BST

### Venue
Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, SG17 5TQ

### Description
To Chairman and Members of the Committee:

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

Cllrs S Goodchild, C Hegley, G Mackey, G Saunders 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

1. Apologies for Absence
   To receive apologies for absence

2. Election of Chairman
   To elect the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the municipal year 2019/20.

3. Election of Vice-Chairman
   To elect the Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the municipal year 2019/20.

4. Minutes
   To approve as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 8 April 2019.
   190408 CPP minutes.pdf.doc

5. Members' Interests
   To receive from Members any declarations of interest.

6. Chairman's Announcements
   To receive any matters of communication from the Chairman.
7. 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.

- 7. Understanding our LAC Population Cover.docx
- 7. Appendix 1 to Knowing Our LAC Population 30 05 19.xlsx - Group.pdf

8. Children in Care Council update

To receive a presentation on the work being undertaken by the Children in Care Council in conjunction with exempt Item 16.

- 8. CiCC update.docx
- 8. CiCC presentation to CPP 300519.pptx

9. Adoption Annual report

To receive the Adoption Agency Annual Report including the Adoption Panel Annual Report, Recruitment and Retention Strategy and the Adoption Statement of Purpose 2019-20.

- 9. Appendix 3 Adoption recruitment strategy 201920.docx
- 9. Appendix 4_Statement of purpose_Adoption Connects_April19-March20.docx
### 10. Fostering Annual Report


- 10. Appendix 1 Fostering Agency Annual Report 2018-19.doc
- 10. Appendix 2 Fostering Permanence Panel Chair Annual Report 2018 2019 .docx
- 10. Appendix 3 Fostering recruitment & retention strategy_2019 - 20.docx
- 10. Appendix 4 Fostering_Statement of Purpose_2019 - 20.docx

### 11. Leaving Care

To receive a report outlining the new approach to offering support to our young people leaving care.

- 11. Appendix 1 Leaving Care Offer.docx
- 11. Appendix 2 Financial policy 201819.docx

### 12. Verbal update from the Director of Children's Service on matters of interest to the Panel

To consider the Panel's work programme.

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

### 14. 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exempt Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. <strong>Children in Care Council update</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To receive a presentation from the Children in Care Council in conjunction with Item 8.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 16. **Children in Care Council - Aspirations Wish List** | 224 |
| To receive a report on the Children in Care Council Aspirations Wish List |

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1. Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies for absence
2. Election of Chairman

To elect the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the municipal year 2019/20.
3. Election of Vice-Chairman

To elect the Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the municipal year 2019/20.
4. Minutes

To approve as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 8 April 2019.
At a meeting of the CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL held at Room 14 - Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford, SG17 5TQ on Monday, 8 April 2019

PRESENT

Elected Members (voting)

Cllrs  
Mrs A L Dodwell (Chairman)  
S Dixon (Vice-Chairman)  
Mrs S A Goodchild  
Ms C Hegley  
M A G Versallion  
B Wells

Officers (voting)

Mrs S Harrison  
Director of Children’s Services

Carers (non-voting)

Mr P Albon

Children in Care Representative (Co-Chairman) (non-voting)

Apologies for Absence:  
Cllr Mrs A Barker  
Mrs J Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing  
Mrs T Stock, Deputy Executive Member for Health  
Mr L Youngman, Foster Carer

Members in Attendance:  
Cllr  
R D Berry (in place of Cllr Mrs A Barker)

Officers in Attendance:  
Ms T Badnall-Neill  
Strategic Commissioning Officer  
Ms R Coals  
Principal Social Worker and Head of Professional Standards  
Ms A Craig  
Practice Manager, Fostering  
Mrs S Harrison  
Director of Children’s Services  
Mr T Hoyle  
Assistant Director of Strategic Commissioning  
Ms S Rymell  
Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Early Help  
Ms M Short  
Participation Officer, Professional Standards  
Mr N Stock  
Interim Head of Service

Others in Attendance:  
Children in Care Council Representatives
CPP/18/1. Minutes

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on the 11 February 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CPP/18/2. Members' Interest

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

CPP/18/3. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

The following announcements and communications were made:

- The Chairman advised that she had recently written to Members regarding the aspirations wish list. The wish list was currently comprised of 16 young people and 16 different placements.
- At the suggestion of the Director of Children’s Services, the possibility of expanding the aspirations wish list to officers would be looked into.
- The aspirations list would be added to the work programme for a future meeting.

CPP/18/4. Understanding our Looked After Children population

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

Points and comments included:

- A revised version of the report had been circulated which included comparative data for statistical neighbouring authorities and nationally.
- The figures for the Looked after Children/Young People and Carer Leaver population in Central Bedfordshire remained stable.
- The total number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children for March 2019 was the same as in March 2018.
- The number of Looked After Children in Independent Living in Central Bedfordshire is significantly higher than the national average. The most significant factor in this is that CBC uses Residential Children’s Homes only for those who need it and takes advantage of provision which provides a stage between family or children’s home care and independent living. CBC does this only when it is appropriate for the young person. This approach
also acknowledges that some young people “outgrow” residential or family care and are ready to move to this next stage

- Central Bedfordshire has a much lower percentage of residential placements due to ability of being able to put LAC into foster care rather than residential in conjunction with the factors outlined in response to the question above.

NOTED

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

CPP/18/5. Children in Care Council update

The Panel received a presentation from the Children in Care Council in conjunction with exempt Minute Item CPP/18/12.

Points and comments included:

- Discussions were taking place about the possibility of changing the name of the Children in Care Council as the current group name immediately identifies the young people as children in care.

- Children in Care Council members are planning to introduce a Central Bedfordshire Council writing competition.

- CiCC members attended an event for Frontline Social Work Training and delivered a workshop to the participants. During the workshop discussions took place with students about the key requirements that children in care and those leaving care would like and ideas of support.

- With regard to future events, the possibility of a fun/festival day in the summer had been discussed. The social aspect of having a day out was very important for some young people living in independent accommodation.

NOTED

the presentation from the Children in Care Council.

CPP/18/6. Fostering Agency Q3 report

The Panel considered a report outlining the work and activities in the Fostering Service during the third quarter of the financial year 2018/19 (1 October – 31 December 2018).

Points and comments included:
1. The number of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) had increased steadily for a number of years. The increase is seen as positive as more children are able to live within family networks.

2. In terms of support, Universal Services tended to be the first point of contact for SGO carers. Support is also available from the Fostering Services and access can be given to foster carer training information and resources. In Central Bedfordshire on average five foster carers a month get in touch with the Fostering Service mainly about issues with contact.

3. In response to a Member’s query about the percentage of children being placed with in-house foster carers previously being 65% and any long term concerns in the decrease of this percentage to 57%, the Head of Professional Standards and Principal Social Worker explained that there was an acceptance that nationally there was a crisis in terms of the number of children coming into care increasing by 6% and a decrease in the number of foster carers by 4%. Ofsted were also reporting a crisis in fostering. Thought needed to be given to creative ways of addressing the crisis and practices that could be put in place to transform fostering.

4. The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Early Help explained that the reason for the increase in the number of children coming into care was a complex issue and could be attributed to a number of reasons such as family breakdown and the impact of benefit changes. The number of children coming into care in Central Bedfordshire remained relatively stable. This indicated that the thresholds in place are correct and the benefits of the proactive work taking place in terms of the early help offer for families and support given when a child came into care.

5. The Head of Professional Standards and Principal Social Worker explained that in comparison with other local authorities, the recruitment of foster carers in Central Bedfordshire remained strong. CBC can learn from best practice taking place in other local authorities where a greater percentage of children placed with in-house foster carers.

6. In response to a Member’s query about the health and wellbeing of foster carers and the provision of respite support, the Head of Professional Standards and Principal Social Worker explained that the local authority has a duty of care for foster carers and that the supervising social worker was the main point of contact for any concerns. Part of the work around the recruitment strategy included addressing the issue of the low number of respite carers, a package of care to prevent the need for respite, and support networks and initiatives to transform foster care. The Mockingbird programme is an example of an innovative programme to improve foster care and outcomes for fostered young people.

7. The Head of Professional Standards and Principal Social Worker explained that raising awareness about private fostering was an ongoing issue. Consideration needed to be given to ways of ensuring that all professionals were aware of what private fostering care is as well as ways of increasing knowledge of this service in the public domain.
8. Following the question raised by the Co-Chair at the February meeting about ways of increased involvement from Children in Care Council members, the Head of Professional Standards and Principal Social Worker explained workshops had been planned during the summer holidays to look at ways of supporting the Fostering Services in areas such as recruitment, training and ensuring that forms used are child friendly.

NOTED

the Fostering Agency Quarter 3 report.

CPP/18/7. Placements Commissioning (Sufficiency) Strategy: options appraisal

The Panel considered a report detailing the options for the commissioning and/or service development of out of home accommodation placements for Looked after Children.

Points and comments included:

1. Placements Commissioning (Sufficiency) is a statutory duty on local authorities introduced by the Children’s Act 1989. Further obligations were introduced in 2010 for local authorities to include plans for meeting the statutory duty in their relevant commissioning strategies. Work has been taking place to establish the approximate number of placements required in Central Bedfordshire over the next 3 years.

2. In Central Bedfordshire an increase had been seen in the requirement for 16+ Semi Independent placements. This was due to our growing Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker population.

3. Part of the development of the Sufficiency Strategy included discussions with the Commissioning Team and Children in Care Council representatives. Feedback was received from Members of the Children in Care Council around the types of placements and care young people want to receive, in particular about their move of placements when they leave care. Consideration needed to be given on how the sufficiency strategy can best meet the needs of children and young people and the commissioning of the appropriate services.

4. The Strategic Commissioning Officer, Children’s Services explained that a freedom of information request had shown that the percentage split of in-house and Independent Fostering agency placements in Central Bedfordshire was on par with statistical neighbouring local authorities.

5. In response to a question raised about accommodation provided for young people who go to university out of county and subsequently return to Central Bedfordshire, the Participation Officer, Professional Standards explained that 52 week accommodation was provided for care leaver students. The Director of Children’s Services added that the new statutory duty on local authorities of the provision of Personal Assistant (PA) support
to all care leavers up to age 25, ensuring that support would be provided to help a young person find accommodation.

6. The Strategic Commissioning Officer, Children’s Services explained that some of the accommodation for 16+ Semi Independent living was commissioned in other areas outside Central Bedfordshire including Luton due to the difficulty in finding suitable accommodation in the local area.

7. The Director of Children’s Services explained that aspiration was to commission small blocks of placements within CBC which would benefit children using the service and placing children who want to remain in Central Bedfordshire in in-county accommodation whenever possible.

**NOTED**

the report detailing the options for the commissioning and/or service development of out of home accommodation placements for Looked after Children.

CPP/18/8. Children's Services Transformation

The Panel received a presentation on the transformation of Children’s Services.

Points and comments included:

1. Part of the transformation of Children’s Services included the creation of two Locality Teams for the North and South of the county. One of the aims of the new Locality Teams was to ensure consistency of the offer being given. There would be some crossover of services across localities and the ages of the children.

2. The North Locality Team is a mirror version of the South Locality Team but included the Young People Support Team and Youth Support as the North of the county was different in terms of its demographic and youth needs.

3. The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Early Help explained that the transition to the Localities Teams would be a gradual process until there was a natural point of change as the children in care came through the system. Key aspects are that Localities will have knowledge of the child and oversight of their journey and collaborative working to ensure a better outcome for the child/young person.

4. In response to a query raised about the new posts of Business Support Officer and Assistant Inclusion Officer in the Education team, the Head of Children’s Services explained that these posts were already in structure as funding has been received from demographic growth.

5. The Head of Children’s Services explained that the new structure is stronger than previously as the Head of Inclusion (Education) is now responsible for all vulnerable learners not just Looked after Children. Work
was also taking place to put funding in place for schools for future work. The vision is to have a multi-agency performance team in place which included colleagues from partner agencies such as public health and the police.

6. In response to the question about Children’s Centres Services remaining in house, the Director of Children’s Services explained that this decision would go to Executive for ratification. The tendering process for Children’s Centres was stopped when it became apparent that a better service could be delivered in house.

7. The Director of Children’s Services explained that the Voice of the Child and Family Strategic Manager was in the process of setting up user groups for adult representatives for Children’s Centres.

8. A Member of the Panel referred to the Family Services Team providing support for children and young people aged between 0-12 years and asked if the reason for this particular age range was the alignment with children going into the first year of their secondary education in the 3 tier education system. The Director of Children’s Services explained that an options analysis had taken place as part of the commissioning process. The outcome had shown gaps in services for 5-12 year olds and the decision had been made that Children’s Services would provide support to children the age range of 0-12 years of age. It was not good for a child to have more than one transition point for each service and for this to be at the same point as a change in the transition point of a phase in their education.

9. The Head of Children’s Services explained that in terms of synergy between the transformation of Children’s Services into Locality Teams with the Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) and partners in Health, there would be some cross border of services if appropriate and the commissioning of some specialist services. There was a joint commissioning board in place working towards the STP footprint. Clarification of the role and responsibility of Children’s Services would be helpful for partner agencies.

**NOTED**

the presentation on the transformation of Children’s Services.

**CPP/18/9. Verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services**

The Panel received an update from the Director of Children’s Services in conjunction with Minute Item CPP/18/8 - Children’s Services Transformation.

**NOTED**

the verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services.

**CPP/18/10. Work Programme**
Members considered the report of the Committee Services Officer which set out the Panel’s proposed work programme for 2019.

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 addition of the following reports:

29 July
  • Ofsted and peer review work-plan

24 Oct
  • Aspirations wish list

CPP/18/11. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

CPP/18/12. **Children in Care Council update**

The Panel received an exempt presentation from the Children in Care Council in conjunction with Minute Item CPP/18/5.

**NOTED**

the exempt presentation from the Children in Care Council.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.40 a.m.)

Chairman ........................................

Dated ...... ........................................
5. Members' Interests

To receive from Members any declarations of interest.
6. Chairman's Announcements

To receive any matters of communication from the Chairman.
Reports
7. 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 30 May 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 30 May 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 Tue 8 May 2019

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Read the report
2. Receive, at panel, a verbal briefing regarding any exceptional or noteworthy data from the Interim Head of Service, Corporate Parenting
3. Ask Interim Head of Service, any questions that they have about the data.

Appendices

Understanding our LAC Population – CYP Performance Team
Report author(s):

Nigel Stock
Interim Head of Service, Corporate Parenting
Nigel.stock@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>30/04/18 (1 year ago)</th>
<th>31/07/18 (9 months ago)</th>
<th>31/10/18 (6 months ago)</th>
<th>31/01/19 (3 months ago)</th>
<th>30/04/19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total LAC</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>30/04/18 (1 year ago)</td>
<td>31/07/18 (9 months ago)</td>
<td>31/10/18 (6 months ago)</td>
<td>31/01/19 (3 months ago)</td>
<td>30/04/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC Rate per 10,000</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>51.9</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>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Average March 2018 Rate per 10,000</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>63.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total UASC</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LAC (excluding UASC)</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC (excluding UASC) Rate per 10,000</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>46</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1) Understanding our population of Looked After Children and Young People: SUMMARY

![Graph showing changes in Total LAC over time.]

- **Total LAC:**
  - 320 (31/04/18)
  - 314 (30/07/18)
  - 322 (31/10/18)
  - 320 (31/01/19)
  - 318 (30/04/19)

![Graph showing changes in Total UASC and Total Non-UASC over time.]

- **Total UASC:** 36
- **Total Non-UASC:** 284

![Graph showing LAC Rate per 10,000.]

- **SN Average:** 51.9
- **National Average:** 50.4

![Graph showing Total LAC (excluding UASC) Rate per 10,000.]

- **SN Average:** 45.4
- **National Average:** 44.2
2) Understanding our population of Looked After Children and Young People: AGE AND GENDER, UASC, m & f
### 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>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total LAC Turning 18 in Next 6 Months</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total LAC in Foster Placements</strong></td>
<td>228</td>
<td>71.25%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total IFA Foster Placements</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>43.86%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total In House Foster Placements</strong></td>
<td>128</td>
<td>56.14%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total In House that are Friends or Family placements</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12.28%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Foster Placements**

![Bar Chart showing foster placements: Total IFA Foster Placements, Total In House Foster Placements, Total In House that are Friends or Family placements]
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>228</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent/Semi Independent Living</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed with Parents</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed for Adoption</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Residential</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total LAC                      | 320                  |       |          |          |

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**Placement Type**

- **Foster Care**: 228 placements, 71.3% of CBC placements, SN average 72.9%, national average 73.2%
- **Independent/Semi Independent Living**: 39 placements, 12.2% of CBC placements, SN average 4.8%, national average 4.1%
- **Placed with Parents**: 15 placements, 4.7% of CBC placements, SN average 7.1%, national average 6.2%
- **Residential**: 19 placements, 5.9% of CBC placements, SN average 11.7%, national average 11.5%
- **Placed for Adoption**: 17 placements, 5.3% of CBC placements, SN average 4.1%, national average 3.0%
- **Other Residential**: 2 placements, 0.6% of CBC placements, SN average 1.9%, national average 2.4%

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**Graphs**

- Bar graph showing the number of placements for each category.
- Line graph showing the placement type with percentages and average percentages.
5) Understanding our population of Looked After Children and Young People: \textit{YOS and Remand}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Children</th>
<th>of which; Total UASC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young Offender Institution or prison</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LAC Open to YOS:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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8. Children in Care Council update

To receive a presentation on the work being undertaken by the Children in Care Council in conjunction with exempt Item 16.
Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel 30 May 2019

The Children in Care Council update

Report of: Children in Care Council Representatives

Responsible Officer: Marie Short / Kam Mathu
Children and Young Peoples Participation Officers for Children in Care

Marie.short@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
Kam.mathu@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Purpose of this report
To receive a presentation on the work being undertaken by the Children in Care Council Representatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note the presentation

Appendix A
The Children in Care Council update.
Children in Care Council
Update – 30th May 2019

CiCC
Giving Young People a Voice
Activities over the Easter Holidays

Treasure Hunt for Young People Leaving Care

• 6 young people attended and a consultation on the Pledge took place. One of the main points discussed was that the young people would like a Pledge specific to children and young people leaving care.

• Young people gave positive feedback on the opportunity to meet with Councillors and have requested further opportunities to meet with Councillors to understand what they do.

• One of young people had a conversation with Cllr. Dixon about the recent local elections.

• Here a few pictures of the event…
Consultation Event with the Independent Reviewing Team

- The purpose of this event was to look at making our reviews more child and young person friendly. 11 young people attended.
- Sharon Keenan will be writing a report about our discussions and how our ‘Review Meetings’ will look like in the future.

University of Bedfordshire (UOB) Reach your Goal

- The UOB offered us a day at the Bedford campus. This event focused on raising aspirations and exploring the opportunities of further and higher education.
- There was 10 young people that attended this event. One CICC member said, ‘There was lots of fun activities as well as looking at different options for the future’.
Bowling Activity in Dunstable

• This was a real fun activity especially as some young people had never been bowling.

• We had the opportunity to play 2 games and were also provided lunch. 12 young people attended.

Providing Language that cares – TACT

• At lunch time, Kam shared a dictionary of terms that were created by an organisation called TACT.

• We then agreed that some of the words could be replaced with words that are positive and make us feel empowered.
Eastern Region Film Festival 2019
Lights, Camera Action!

• CiCC’s from the Eastern Region got together to discuss some standards to bring positive change.
• A film showing of the ‘Top Ten Tips for Social Workers’ made by all the Children in Care Councils in the Eastern Region was premiered on 17th April in Greenwich.
• The film can be used to train new social workers. There will also be some posters designed to help and remind our workers.
• The film will be screened at the next CPP.
Young People working closely with the Commissioning team

• A team of 8 young people will be working closely with the Children’s Services Commissioning team to help make sure that care providers are providing the highest quality 16+ supported accommodation services to care leavers.

• As a Young People’s Quality Assurance Assistant role, we will work with the team Sharon and Sarah on visits to existing or perspective providers helping to make sure young people feel happy and safe and use our experiences to improve the service.

• One CICC Member will join CBC as a Health and Social Care work experience student from May to July 2019.
Thank you for listening to our presentation

We are happy to answer any questions.
9. Adoption Annual report

To receive the Adoption Agency Annual Report including the Adoption Panel Annual Report, Recruitment and Retention Strategy and the Adoption Statement of Purpose 2019-20.
Purpose of this report

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to Consider and note the Adoption Agency Annual Report including the Adoption Panel Annual Report; Recruitment and Retention Strategy; and Adoption Statement of Purpose 2019-20.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The annual report for adoption does not need to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Issues

2. The National Minimum Standards for Adoption (NMS) and Adoption Regulations 2014 require the service to report to the executive side of the activities and outcomes the Adoption Service have achieved during the year to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and achieving good outcomes for children, this includes a panel report – see Appendix 1 and 4.

3. The NMS require the Adoption Service to implement an effective strategy to ensure sufficient prospective adopters to be responsive to current and predicted demand on the service – see Appendix 3.
4. The NMS and Adoption Regulations also require the Adoption Service to produce a Statement of Purpose, detailing its aims and objectives, the services provided and to keep it under review – see Appendix 4.

Options for consideration

5. To consider and note the Adoption Agency Annual Report 2018-19, including the Recruitment and Retention Strategy, Adoption Statement of Purpose and Adoption Panel Annual Report – See Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Reason/s for decision

6. No decisions needed.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

7. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

Financial and Risk Implications

8. There are no direct unbudgeted financial issues arising from this report.

Equalities Implications

9. 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.

10. A core objective is to recruit and assess a diverse range of adoptive families who are able to meet the needs of children with an adoption decision. This includes the recruitment of adopters able to offer foster for adoption placements, placements for siblings and children with significant needs.

11. The Adoption service strive to ensure that all children are placed with adoptive families who can meet all their identified needs including, ethnicity, culture and religion where possible.
12. In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited a range of recruitment activity has taken place during the year. 15 children adopted were recorded as White British and 2 recorded as mixed heritage. Social Workers from the Adoption service provide a range of training and support adopters.

13. The Adoption panel consists of members who are diverse and with a wide variety of life experience. Panel members are White British, Black British, Indian and European. There are five members who have adopted, two were adopted themselves and one who is birth parent of an adopted child. Panel members have family of their own with children of differing ages. A welcome addition this year has been two panel members who are in same sex relationships, who have adopted.

Conclusion and next Steps

14. Corporate Parenting Panel are required to consider and note the Adoption Agency Annual Report including the Recruitment and Retention Strategy, Adoption Statement of Purpose, Adoption Panel Annual Report – see Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Adoption Agency Annual Report 2018-2019
Appendix 2: Adoption Agency Panel Chair Annual Report 2018-2019
Appendix 3: Adoption Recruitment Strategy Report 2019-2020
Appendix 4: Adoption Connects Statement of Purpose 2019-2020

The following Appendix is attached/ provided through an electronic link:

Background Papers

None

Report author(s): Nickie Phillips
Practice Manager, Corporate Parenting Service – Adoption
Nickie.phillips@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
Annual report
Adoption Agency, Central Bedfordshire Council
For the period:
1\textsuperscript{st} April 2018 – 31\textsuperscript{st} March 2019

Appendix 1
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Section 1: Introduction

1.0.1 This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire Council Adoption Agency during the period 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019, noting their achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of their work and identifying recommendations for the development of the service.

1.0.2 This report is provided as part of the monitoring of the Adoption Agency required under the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards 2011. This report will be presented to Central Bedfordshire Council Children’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a six-monthly update report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

1.1 The Adoption Team

1.1.1 The Adoption Agency is co-located within the Corporate Parenting Service of Children’s Services. This supports the close working relationship with the children’s teams to achieve early permanence planning for children.

1.1.2 The Adoption Agency has remained conveniently located to support the provision for providing the range of adoption services as specified within the current legislation. The Statutory Guidance underpinning adoption legislation prescribes all the services and process to be followed by an Adoption Agency and the qualifications required by Social Workers.

1.1.3 The Agency has an experienced team of Social Workers and has retained a consistent staff group over the period.

1.1.4 During this reporting period the Adoption Team Staffing has been:

- 1 x full time Practice Manager
- 1 x Senior Practitioner
- 5.5 x Social Workers
- 1 x Social Work Assistant
- 1 x Business Support Administrator
- 1 x Panel Advisor
- 1 x Panel Secretary

1.1.5 All employed staff are permanent

1.1.6 All social workers are qualified and registered with the Health and Care Professions Council and have three years post qualifying experience required by the ‘Restriction of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005’.

1.1.7 The team carries out the full functions of an Adoption Agency, with social workers undertaking a range of adoption work, including recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters, adoption support and family finding.

1.1.8 The Adoption Agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering Service. These include a Recruitment and Marketing Officer and a Training Coordinator.
1.2 The Adoption Panel

1.2.1 The Adoption Panel is a shared panel, hosted by CBC, providing panel services for Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. Adoption Panel usually sits twice per month, with extraordinary panels as and when required to meet timescales and avoid delay for children’s care planning.

1.2.2 Adoption Panel considers the following:

- Whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter
- Should be placed for adoption decisions relating to relinquished children
- The termination of approval of prospective adopters

1.2.3 Each panel considers a maximum of six cases per panel.

1.2.4 The Agency Decision Maker makes the ‘should be placed for adoption’ decision without a recommendation from the Adoption Panel. The only exception being for a plan for adoption for a child relinquished by their birth parent.

1.2.5 The panel management team meet 6 monthly and a six month and annual report is provided by the panel Chairperson on the quality of panel business and Agency practice.

1.2.6 In this period a new Chairperson, Mark Smith, was appointed and has undertaken his first year as Chair.

1.3 Adoption Panel membership

1.3.1 As at 31st March 2019 the Adoption Panel Central List was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel Chair</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Adoptive Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Adoptive Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Birth Parent of an Adopted Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Gypsy and Traveller Educational Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Adopted Person,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Member</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Member</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Member</td>
<td>Independent Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Member</td>
<td>Social Worker, Adoption Team CBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Adviser</td>
<td>Consultant Community Paediatrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Member</td>
<td>Central Bedfordshire Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent (Vice Chair)</td>
<td>Adopted Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Member</td>
<td>Bedford Borough Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3.2 In attendance but non voting members are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Adviser</th>
<th>Central Bedfordshire Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panel Secretary</td>
<td>Central Bedfordshire Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3.3 The Legal Adviser and Medical Advisor provide advice, in writing, in advance of Panel meetings for each case presented.

1.4 **Panel and Agency Decision Maker activity**

1.4.1 In this period the Adoption Panel met on 21 occasions.

1.4.2 The Agency Decision Maker decided that adoption should be the plan for 39 children. This compares to 26 in 2017/2018.

1.4.3 33 plans for adoption where rescinded within this period due to a change in the Care Plan. This related to children who had a plan for adoption agreed in previous years and included several historical decisions.

1.4.4 17 households were recommended for approval by Adoption Panel. All positive recommendations were later ratified by the Agency Decision Maker as suitable to adopt. All applicants were invited and attended the panel.

1.4.5 The panel considered a match with prospective adopters for 22 children. All 22 recommendations were ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. This is an increase of 8 from the previous year.

1.5 **Panel training and development**

1.5.1 The Adoption Agency strives to ensure that there is a good level of training, appraisal and induction offered to Panel Members.

1.5.2 An annual training day was held on 8th October 2018 covering the following subject matters:

   - Attachment, Trauma & Recovery Seminar, presented by Lisa Cherry, an ex-care leaver
   - Adoption Matching Practice and Process, presented by Social Workers from the Agency

1.5.3 All Panel Members had an annual appraisal completed by the Agency Panel Advisor and Panel Chairperson where their personal training needs are discussed and considered.

1.5.4 In addition, the Panel Chair attends the national CoramBaaf panel chairs meeting to support learning, good practice and updates to legislation. The Panel Chair and Vice Chair also attended a meeting with the Agency Decision Maker for each authority.

1.5.5 Panel members can access the annual training programme to address any training needs identified from their annual appraisal.

1.5.6 The Panel Chair is invited to attend adoption disruption meetings to learn from practice.

There have been no adoption disruptions, pre the granting of an adoption order, within the reporting period.
1.6 Provision of information on adoption

1.6.1 Central Bedfordshire Council has a single point of contact to the service through a local rate telephone line. Enquiries can also be made via the council website, where information on adoption is readily available, directly to an adoption email address and via the social media page. Enquirers are provided with information about the assessment process and the needs of children placed for adoption. They are invited to attend an information evening and in addition, are offered an initial interview with a Social worker to consider their personal circumstances and assist their decision to make an application to adopt.

1.6.2 Information Evenings are held monthly and presented by social workers from the service. Dates and details of information events are easily accessible on the council website and promoted via social media.

1.6.3 Some feedback from attendees includes:

“completely clear and extensive”
“staff very welcoming and passionate about the subject”
“trainers were warm friendly and informative”
“information was really helpful”

Statistics in relation to the number of enquiries received are included later in this report.

Section 2:

Children and adoption

2.0 Children referred for adoption

2.0.1 In this reporting period 22 children were referred to the service for parallel planning where adoption would be the alternative plan if no other permanent options were available.

2.0.2 In order to avoid case drift or delay for children, children are referred for family finding when adoption is a possible alternative outcome for that child. This does not mean that all children referred will subsequently have a plan for adoption but ensures that robust early permanence planning is considered as part of a child’s care plan, including the duty to consider foster for adoption. In many cases, children safely return to their families or are placed with extended family members under other orders, such as Special Guardianship.

2.0.3 Early Permanence has remained a focus including the provision of Foster for Adoption placements for children. Such placements will only be progressed for children who meet the criteria.

2.0.4 CoramBaaf guidance reflects that foster for adoption may apply in one of the following circumstances:

- Where parents have had one or more children previously placed for adoption or other forms of permanent placement and the evidence strongly suggests that their circumstances have not changed and pose the same risks.
• The local authority does not have a proactive plan to rehabilitate the child as the circumstances of the parents are such to pose a serious on-going risk.

• Where this is the first child, the circumstances of the parents and the risks to the child are such that there is no proactive plan to return the child to the birth parents or to other family members.

• Where parents have indicated that they may want their child adopted, but have not formally consented. (S52(3) Adoption and Children Act 2002)

• There are other circumstances where placement with a dually approved carer may be in the best interests of the child. Concurrent planning is the clearest example.

2.0.5 A counselling service for birth parents who wish to voluntarily relinquish their child for adoption is provided by the team. This requires intensive support to the parent to enable them to make an informed decision.

The service received 1 referral for this service.

2.1 Outcomes for children with plans for adoption

2.1.0 Of the 39 children with plans for adoption in this period (1.4.2) as of 31st March 2018:

- 16 were matched and placed with prospective adopters
- 1 remains placed in a foster for adoption placement at the end of this reporting period

2.1.1 22 children in total have been matched with prospective adopters.

2.2 Placements of children

2.2.2 There were 3 sibling groups placed for adoption during this period comprising:

- 2 x 2 siblings and
- 1 x 3 siblings

2.2.4 6 children were placed via Foster for Adoption/early permanence placements with 5 being matched for adoption in the same period.

2.3 Type of adoption placement

2.3.1 Of the 22 children matched in this period:

- 13 were matched with prospective adopters approved by CBC
- 9 were matched with prospective adopters approved by other agencies.

2.3.2 6 children were placed in Fostering for Adoption/early permanence placements approved by CBC.
2.4 Ethnicity of children adopted

2.4.1 15 were recorded as White British and 2 recorded as mixed heritage

2.5 Adoption Orders

2.5.1 17 Adoption Orders were granted during the period.

2.5.2 This included 14 single children, of which 3 were placed with a birth sibling previously adopted and sibling group of 3.

2.5.3 10 were male and 7 were female.

2.5.4 At the end of the reporting period 13 children were placed for adoption, pending the adoption order were it is anticipated that Adoption Orders will be granted in 2019/20.

2.6 Gender of children placed for adoption

2.6.1 Of the 22 children matched for adoption by Central Bedfordshire, 11 were male and 11 were female

2.6.2 Of the 17 children subject to Adoption Orders, 10 were male and 7 were female

Section 3:

Adopters

3.0 The work of the Adoption Team

3.0.1 A core objective is to recruit and assess a diverse range of adoptive families who are able to meet the needs of children with an adoption decision. This includes the recruitment of adopters able to offer foster for adoption placements, placements for siblings and children with significant needs.

3.0.2 The Adoption service strive to ensure that all children are placed with adoptive families who can meet all their identified needs including, ethnicity, culture and religion where possible. A match with adopters who are able to meet most of the child’s identified needs will be considered to avoid delay.

3.0.3 CBC offer timely information, advice and counselling to members of the public enquiring about adoption and access to records via a duty service

3.0.4 Children and families are provided with information explaining adoption support and information is readily available on the council website.

2.0 Recruitment of adopters

2.0.1 In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited a range of recruitment activity has taken place during the year. The strategy continues to ensure that, were possible, children are placed with prospective adopters approved by Central Bedfordshire Council.
2.0.2 In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited a blended marketing approach of traditional and digital marketing was utilised to attract a diverse range of people and families to consider adoption for Central Bedfordshire Council.

This has included:

- Regular information evenings
- Local news webpage takeovers
- Radio advertising
- Facebook advertising
- Regular advertising in electronic newsletters across community groups, staff groups and through our local doctors and dentist surgeries
- Newspaper advertising.

3.1.3 The strategy continued with a targeted approach to provide a clear picture of the needs of Central Bedfordshire with marketing specifically targeting those who would consider:

- Foster for adoption
- Sibling groups
- Children with additional or more complex needs.

2.1 The assessment process; enquiries, assessments and approvals

3.2.1 Prospective adopter assessments are carried out in accordance with the 2011 National Minimum Standards for Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Statutory Guidance for Adoption published in July 2013. The two-stage process for adopters, which was introduced as part of the Government’s Adoption Reform Agenda, remains to be implemented.

3.2.1 176 enquiries were received in this period

3.2.2 17 recommendations for approval were presented to panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

3.2.3 In addition to providing placements for children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire 5 CBC approved adoptive families have provided placements for 9 children from other Local Authorities within this reporting period.

3.2.4 No approvals were terminated

3.2.5 As of 31st March 2018, Central Bedfordshire had 4 approved prospective adoptive families seeking a match.

3.2.6 9 prospective adopter applications and assessment were in progress

3.3 Post approval support

3.3.1 All approved adopters are supported by a Social Worker from the Adoption Team from approval, through the process of matching and placement of a child, to the application and granting of an Adoption Order.
3.3.2 Post Adoption Order, adoptive families can continue to access support and/or request an assessment of their additional support needs via the Adoption Team.

3.3.3 Approved prospective adopters must be reviewed annually if not matched or linked with a child. There is no requirement for the review to be presented to the Adoption Panel unless the agency consider that approval is no longer appropriate.

3.3.4 2 Annual Reviews were completed within this period with approval continuing to be appropriate.

3.4 Training for adopters

3.4.1 Social Workers from the Adoption service provide the preparation training for prospective adopters.

3.4.2 Training is accessed in Stage one of the assessment process and is provided in three modules:

- **The Process** – information about the assessment process and matching.
- **The Child** – Explores the experiences and trauma of children placed for adoption
- **Adoption for Life** – Explores a child’s life story and Adoption Support

3.4.3 A Foster for Adoption module is available for applicants wanting to consider providing this type of placement.

3.4.4 Adopters also have access to the full annual training programme offered by CBC. This annual programme is available to both prospective adopters and adoptive parents for adoption support.

3.4.5 Parenting with PACE – Playfulness, Acceptance, Empathy and Curiosity was added to the training programme in this period and will be an integral module to the training pathway.

Section 4:

Adoption support services

A local authority must provide a range of adoption support services under Section 3(1) of the Children and Families Act 2014. The Adoption Support Regulations 2005 (ASR) set out the detail of such provisions. In summary these include

- Counselling, advice and information;
- Therapeutic services;
- Financial support;
- Services to ensure discussion of matters relating to adoption;
• Services to ensure the continuation of adoptive relationship;

• Assistance in relation to arrangements for contact.

The Statutory Guidance on Adoption (2013) provides greater clarity for the provision of Adoption Support and the specific role of the Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) when carrying out duties.

The Adoption Support (Amendment) Regulations 2014 make it the duty of a local authority to provide information about adoption support and make further provision to provide the following information about adoption support services;

• The Adoption Passport

• availability of assessments for adoption support,

• information on priority school admission for looked after children and those placed for adoption,

• details of where to find information on statutory adoption pay and adoption leave,

• Information about the prospective adopter’s right to receive the child’s permanence report including medical adviser’s report on the health of the child and the complaints procedures.

4.0 Post adoption support to families

4.0.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 established the right of adopted families to request an assessment of their adoption support needs. To inform people about support available we have a booklet called ‘Adoption Support Services in Central Bedfordshire’. Also available is a ‘Children’s Guide to Adoption Support’, both can be downloaded from the Council website.

4.0.2 In this period the service had 32 new enquiries for adoption support 22 new adoption support assessments were completed. Where possible advice, guidance and support are provided initially including signposting to universal services. Alternatively an adoption support assessment is completed to define need and offer an adoption support plan which may include a prescribed service such as therapy or counselling

4.0.3 Adoption support is accessed via self-referral or referral via other agencies such as school or health services. In such instances the team either provides direct social work support or where a specific need is identified, a specialist service may be commissioned.

4.0.4 The Adoption Support Fund has remained available throughout this year to provide therapeutic support and intervention for adopted children and their family to improve family life and outcomes.

4.0.5 The existing fair access limit has remained in place – the FAL is up to £2,500.00 for specialist assessment and up to £5,000.00 for direct therapy

4.0.6 A small number of children may require an exemption to the Fair Access Limit and funding will be available for such children in exceptional circumstances. In such cases funding would be available but only where the Local Authority agree to ‘match’ funding.

4.0.7 The scope for access to the fund has remained unchanged.
4.0.8 51 applications for funding were approved of which 2 required Local Authority match funding. £47,183.00 of funding was secured for therapeutic assessment and £118,693.84 was secured to a therapeutic intervention to children and families.

4.0.9 The agency maintains a mailing list of adoptive families to send newsletters, invitations to support groups, family activity days and the annual training programme.

4.0.10 Each child placed for adoption has a contact plan in relation to post adoption contact with their birth family. Birth family includes birth parents, siblings, grandparents and any other significant family member. The service currently manages 123 individual arrangements of post adoption contact.

4.0.11 Financial support for adopters continues to be available to meet the needs of the child and the circumstances of adopters.

4.1 Services to adopted adults and birth relatives

4.1.1 Social Workers provide an advice and counselling service to adopted adults seeking access to their birth records. For all residents of CBC an access to records counselling service is offered. Information is also provided to other councils who are supporting adopted adults living in their area who were adopted through Bedfordshire.

4.1.2 An initial counselling interview is offered to those seeking birth records and work is undertaken to locate records held by other Adoption Agencies. Counselling and advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support are also available to adopted adults and their birth relatives.

4.1.3 6 requests for access to adoption records were received in this reporting period.

4.1.4 Birth relatives or those with a prescribed relationship, seeking to make contact with adopted adults are offered information and advice. An intermediary service can be offered where appropriate and if there is capacity in the service.

4.2 Disrupted adoptions

4.2.1 Disruption in prospective adoption placements refers to placements that have ended prior to an adoption order being granted.

4.2.2 No placements have experienced a disruption in this reporting period, which continues a low disruption rate for a third year running.
Section 5:

Other activities

5.0 Inter-Country and non agency adoption

5.0.1 No enquiries were received relating to Intercountry adoption.

5.0.2 Non Agency Adoption - 13 enquiries regarding step parent adoption were received and 1 progressed to a notification of intention to adopt.

5.1 Regional Adoption Agency

5.1.1 CBC continued as members of the Central East Partnership with other Local Authorities. In addition, the partnership includes two local Voluntary Adoption Agencies:

- AdoptionPlus
- St. Francis Children’s Society

5.1.2 In this reporting period CBC became the lead Local Authority for the Regional Adoption Agency. The design and development phase have progressed during this reporting period with Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Council securing agreement to launch a collaborative adoption service from 1st April 2019.

Practitioner groups and a matching projects have met on a regular basis to share learning, good practice and support matching for children within the region to develop and design a best practice approach.

5.2 Membership

5.2.1 The agency has continued its membership with New Family Social, a national charity supporting adopters and foster carers from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gender community. The organisation provides social events, a website and membership events for carers, and support and advice to adoption agencies.

5.2.2 Membership with Adoption UK has continued.

5.3 Commissioned services: Independent birth family counselling

5.3.1 The agency provides an Independent Birth Family Counselling and support service. This service is provided by Adoption Plus Limited on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council. Adoption Plus is an independent adoption support agency.

5.3.2 The aim of the service is to provide birth relatives of children who might be/are adopted an opportunity for independent counselling support. Although the agency are involved in commissioning this service, Adoption Plus will undertake all counselling work with the birth family members which will be confidential unless concerns arise about the safety or welfare of a child.
5.3.3 Ongoing contract reviews are held each quarter to ensure there is maximum support available for those accessing the service and to ensure optimum take up by birth parents.

5.4 The Adoption Scorecard

5.4.1 In 2012 the Department for Education published ‘An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay’ in which they outlined the intention to publish Adoption Scorecards for each council outlining performance in relation to numbers and timeliness of adoptions. This introduced a number of key indicators to measure local authority performance in relation to achieving permanence for children. The scorecard details a 3-year average for:

- **A1.** Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family
- **A2.** Average time between the council receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family
- **A3.** Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)

5.4.2 Central Bedfordshire’s provisional performances:

- **A1. Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days), 2015-18**

In comparison to 2014-17 (450 days), performance has improved by a further 42 days to 408 days. Our performance is better than all of our statistical neighbours, and consequently better than our SN average of 455 days. We have the 30th lowest average number of days nationally (upper quartile) meaning we perform better than the national average of 486 days.

- **A2. Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days), 2015-18**

We have the 60th lowest average nationally, and only 3 of our statistical neighbours have a higher average for this indicator. We are below the national average which is 201 days.

- **A2. Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (%), 2015-18**

Central Bedfordshire perform well in this indicator as 67% (55 children) of our children who are adopted, wait less than 14 months to move in with their adoptive family after entering care. We are above the benchmarking averages, which are 60% (SN) and 56% (National). Our performance is the 27th highest nationally (upper quartile), and the 2nd highest compared against our statistical neighbours.

- **Proportion of approved adoptive families who were matched to a child during 2017-18 who waited more than 3 months from approval to being matched to a child (%)**
We are ranked in the upper quartile for this indicator, as only 15 other local authorities have a lower percentage than us.

Section 6:

Service Developments in 2018/19

6.0.1 The Regional Adoption Agency for Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Council, namely Adoption Connects, will be ‘live’ from 1st April 2019. A recruitment strategy has been developed to promote sufficiency of adopters to meet the needs of children with a plan for adoption across the two authorities.

6.0.2 A transition plan will be developed to implement the new structure and shared services across the authorities.

6.0.3 A primary objective will be to focus on early permanence for children by maintaining a robust parallel planning process. The option of early permanence placements will continue to be routinely considered within the parallel planning process and Adoption Connects will work closely with childcare colleagues to achieve this.

Report written by:

Nickie Phillips
Adoption Practice and Registered Manager
Telephone: 0300 300 8090

This information can be made available in large print and in other languages if required.
Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Joint Adoption Panel

Overview Report – Panel Chair

1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019

1. Introduction

Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough have a joint Adoption Panel. From 1st April 2019 Panel will change to a Regional Panel as a Regional Adoption Agency namely Adoption Connects to include Milton Keynes City Council.

The Joint Adoption Panel for 2018/19 was scheduled to meet twice, most months. This schedule has been amended to include (where possible) provision for three panels a month from April 2019.

Panel Membership

Fran Thompson, Independent Panel Chair left the position at the end of 2017-18. Fran was succeeded by myself, who took up the Independent Panel Chair role from May 2018.

I have sat on the Bedfordshire Panel (as was) for over 12 years and was Vice Chair of the Panel, prior to appointment as Chair. My background is in education. I have previously been a Headteacher of a Residential Special School for Secondary aged pupils with Emotional and Behavioural difficulties. Following this I was a Special Educational Needs Operations Manager, for two Local Authorities. My most recent position was as a Senior Manager, working for Watford Football Club Community Trust.

Currently, as well as Chairing the joint Panel I am Vice- Chair of another Local Authority Adoption Panel and also a member of an Independent Fostering Agency Panel.

My personal experience is that I was adopted as a baby and have experience of tracing birth relatives in adulthood.

I am independent of both Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Authorities –a requirement of the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determination (Amendment Regulations 2011).

The Joint Adoption Panel for 2018-19 holds a central list of panel members that each panel could call upon to be quorate. The Adoption Panel remained a Joint Panel for the period of this report, quoracy continued to consist of:

1) The person appointed to chair the panel, either the substantive Chair or Vice Chair.
2) A social worker with at least three years relevant post qualifying experience and
3) Four other members.
Panel membership at start of reporting period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Chair</td>
<td>Adopted person – left April 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Vice Chair</td>
<td>Head of SEN Provision and ex Head Teacher and adopted person – Chair from April 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel Medical Adviser</td>
<td>Paediatrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Social Worker</td>
<td>IRO left February 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>St Francis' Children's Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>BBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>CBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Social Worker</td>
<td>CAFCASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Member</td>
<td>BBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Adoptive Parents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Member</td>
<td>Adopted Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Member</td>
<td>Birth Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Member</td>
<td>Gypsy and Traveller Education Consultant – left June 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional panel members were recruited during the reporting period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Vice Chair</td>
<td>Adoptive Parent – January 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Member</td>
<td>Adoptive Parent – October 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Member</td>
<td>Adoptive Parent – February 2019</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the required six an extra member is scheduled to attend each meeting, to provide resilience and prevent cancellation and delay if a panel member is unable to attend on the day, or is held up en-route.

Given the number of panels now operating, panel members have the opportunity to attend a panel regularly, which leads to consistency and development, particularly when prospective adopted parents have been approved and return to be matched with their child(ren).

All new panel members are required to observe a panel as part of their induction process before becoming part of the Central list. All panel members are provided with a hard copy of ‘Effective Adoption Panels’ (updated 2016).

The panel consists of members who are diverse and with a wide variety of life experience. These members have shown a very high level of commitment to attending panels and to sharing their knowledge and experiences, in order to reach a professional recommendation around the suitability of applicants and the matching of children with the applicants.

At the start of the reporting period, male representation on the Central list stood at three. This has been increased during the reporting period to five, giving a better gender balance, as was highlighted as desirable, in the Chairs report of 2017-18.

Throughout the reporting period panel members received their papers via Box on the iPads provided by the LA. Reading the papers supplied, in preparation for discussion is a considerable undertaking, which can take up to five hours. All panel members have demonstrated a high level of commitment to this task and come well prepared with identified strengths, areas for clarification and questions to ask applicants and social workers.

Areas for improvement

Ensuring that each panel has a membership which is broad and balanced is constantly under review. The skill sets and experiences of individual panel members need to reflect the cases presented at panel. With the introduction of additional panel business from Milton Keynes, it will give the opportunity for further recruitment of panel members.

Diversity

Across Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough there is a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicity and culture. Panel members are White British, Black British, Indian and European. There are five members who have adopted, two were adopted themselves and one who is birth parent of an adopted child. Panel members have family of their own with children of differing ages. A welcome addition this year has been two panel members who are in same sex relationships, who have adopted.

2. Panel Support

As Chair, I am wonderfully supported by the Panel Professional Adviser. The quality of documentation presented at Panel has improved, due to diligent quality assurance by the Panel Advisor.

The Panel continues to be supported by two excellent Panel Administrators who oversee and action all administrative functions, relating to the Panel.

The Medical Adviser has provided advice in writing prior to the Panel and is always prepared to provide further specific detail on individual cases, as requested. It should be noted that adopters have been very grateful for the opportunity to speak to the Medical Adviser around specific issues, relating to the child they are adopting. These consultations frequently take place over the phone, at a time convenient to the adopters.

There are two Legal Advisers to the panel, who give advice in writing regarding the cases involving matching children with adopters. The Panel Adviser uses the legal team effectively as and when required to support her work and this is fed back accordingly within panel meetings.
Areas for improvement

On 2 occasions we have not received legal advice from Bedford Borough in time for panel and this has been addressed between the Panel Adviser and legal representative. With the introduction of Milton Keynes business, it is essential that the quality and quantity of panel professional support and administrative capacity, is able to meet the increased work load.

New relationships with MK legal advisers will be needed to be established and I would recommend that they observe the panel as a starting point.

3. Panel Roles/Tasks

There have not been any changes to legislation or regulation during this reporting period, which has impacted on role of Panel. The Panel business continued to consider:

- Applications from prospective adopters
- Matching of children to approved adopters
- Considering best interest recommendations in cases of relinquished children
- Quality assurance of work presented

Panel makes a recommendation on whether to approve prospective adopters, potential match of children with adopters and best interest recommendations to the Agency Decision Makers from Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Council. The Agency Decision Maker will either ratify or reject the recommendation. Applicants have the right to review through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or return to Panel for the case to be re-heard.

The work load of the Panel is high and will increase with the introduction of Milton Keynes business.

During the reporting period the Panel met 21 times.

35 prospective families were recommended to the ADMs, as suitable to adopt:

18 from BBC and 17 from CBC.

46 children received a recommendation from the Panel to proceed with a match with prospective adopters:

24 from BBC, 22 from CBC (4 sibling groups BBC, 3 sibling groups CBC).

1 relinquished child was presented for a Plan of Adoption.

2 Termination of approval were acknowledged.

4 Appraisals
The appraisal of all members continues to take place annually. This year the Panel Chair and Panel Professional Adviser reviewed the documentation for the appraisals, in order to make the process more user friendly and to refresh the focused development areas. The appraisals are conducted by the Panel Chair and Panel Adviser and reflect on the Panel Members contribution for the year, comments they have on improving processes and any training they wish or have been identified to undertake over the coming year.

The Panel Chair was appraised on 26.03.19 by the Agency Decision Maker for Central Bedfordshire Council and the Panel Professional Adviser. This resulted in positive feedback from CBC ADM.

5. Panel Training

The annual Panel Training Day was held on 8th October 2018. The morning was a combined session with both members and professionals of Adoption and Fostering Panels and teams present. This was also attended by representation from Milton Keynes.

Lisa Cherry, delivered training on Attachment, Trauma and Recovery. This proved to be a very stimulating, thought provoking and interactive session. In the afternoon training was led by the Panel Professional Adviser who was assisted by two Social Workers from both Local Authorities. The afternoon session focussed on the process of family finding and matching children to adopters. Overall the training was well attended but unfortunately a number of Panel Members were unable to attend. The information from the session was provided, to those unable to attend to ensure the learning was shared.

Training materials are provided to each Panel Member and are stored in a file within Box accessible via the iPads.

As Panel Chair I have attended one training session on 7/12/18 run by Family Action. The training was specifically for Panel Chairs and Advisers and focussed on making well evidenced, robust and child focussed recommendations.

6. Observers

Fifteen observers have attended Panel over the reporting period including: student Social Workers, solicitors, Agency Decision Makers, Panel members designates and administrators. This is an excellent way to see how Panel works and helps demystify the process. I think it is fair to say that, without exception, every observer has found this to be a learning and positive experience.

7. Feedback

Applicants and Social Workers attending Panel are asked to complete and return an evaluation form. In the previous reporting period 15 completed feedback forms were received from applicants and 11 from Social Workers. This has risen this year to 22 feedback forms from applicants and 15 from Social Workers. I disseminate this detail during Panel business.
All feedback forms received have confirmed that both Social Workers and applicants were happy with procedural matters relating to Panel administration. Positive comments were received regarding the actual Panel, for example:

“Ample opportunities to share views and questions.”
“The Chair was very supportive.”
“The Panel was very professional.”
“The process was well explained by Panel Chair.”
“We were made to feel at ease.”
“Everyone was really welcoming and we enjoyed meeting Panel Members.”
“We felt it was an organised and positive experience.”

8. Conclusion

This has been my first year as Panel Chair. It is a year that I have enjoyed enormously and I feel that we have made strides to:

➢ Improve professional practice for all professionals attending panel
➢ To improve the experience of applicants attending Panel
➢ To extend the Panel membership to give a better balance of experience, diversity and expertise.

I was aware from having served on the Panel for over 12 years, of ways we might improve practice. With this in mind myself and the panel Professional Adviser attended a social work team meeting, for both LA teams, in order to hear the views of the panel experience, from the professionals. I believe that the following, are some of the areas that I feel we have made progress, in the last year.

❖ Timekeeping –We have made a real effort to keep to the Panel Agenda times and this limits the waiting time, particularly for applicants. We recognise that the Panel is a particularly stressful time for applicants, and we are mindful that delay in waiting time adds to this.
❖ Reflecting the strengths of applicants -We have altered the beginning of the Panel case meetings, in order to start with identifying strength of the applicants and matches. Panel members come prepared with a list of strengths which I gather and reflect back to the applicants, at the start of the Panel.
❖ Creating a welcoming but professional atmosphere in Panel – I feel that we have made significant efforts to be more welcoming, open and user friendly to all who attend Panel. I do not feel that Panel should be a place where anyone attending should feel very uncomfortable. We have asked Panel members to consider how best they can facilitate this via positive body language and in the way, they communicate the questions they ask.

The main objective for the forthcoming year is to embed the work from Milton Keynes, ensuring that the service we provide remains of a consistent high quality for children requiring adoption.

Mark Smith
Adoption Panel Chair

April 2019
Appendix 3

Recruitment strategy

1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020

www.adoptionconnects.co.uk
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1) Introduction
This is the first recruitment strategy for Adoption Connects, the exciting new joint adoption agency for Central Bedfordshire Council and Milton Keynes Council.

As stated in Regionalising Adoption (June 2015) published by the Department of Education, the proposal to move to regional adoption agencies aims to help:

• Speed up matching
• Improve the life chances of neglected children
• Improve adopter recruitment
• Improve adoption support
• Reduce costs.

National statistics show that during 2018 there was a 7% national increase of children waiting to be adopted. Recruitment of adopters continues to be challenging and during the last year saw a 17% decline nationally in the number of people approved as adopters (First4Adoption, Children Awaiting Adoption in the UK, May 2018). Therefore, the need for a robust recruitment strategy remains a high priority as the newly regionalised service promotes the new agency, brand and identity.

This strategy sets out the ways in which the agency will promote the new agency, build on brand and identity and how it will work towards recruitment of adopters across Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes.

2) Development and implementation of service
Both councils have worked together, with an independent project lead, towards a smooth transition for both new and existing service users during the soft launch of Adoption Connects that took place on 1st April 2019. The information below is a brief snapshot of the developments which took place prior to the implementation and soft launch of the new joint agency.

2.1) Service user questionnaire
The first key step was to reach out to our existing service users in both Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes to gain valuable feedback to help shape our new brand, our recruitment messaging and the audiences we target in recruitment. The survey concentrated on areas such as:

• Basic information e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, when they contacted us, why they contacted us and which mode of communication they used
• Priorities and what are important to people as individuals e.g. staff being approachable, being able to trust the social worker, understanding the needs of adopted children
• If they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the service with space for additional comments and learning points for the new service
• Asking them what they felt the service did well
• Asking them what they felt the service could have improved
• Why they chose Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes for the service they required
• An option to leave additional comments and feedback for valuable learning points for the new service.
From the above feedback, the top 5 priorities for service users were consistent across the two Local Authorities. They were (with highest percentage first):

Central Bedfordshire service users:
- Being available to answer my questions, whenever I have them
- Being approachable
- Having continued support after I have adopted a child
- Having an experienced team of social workers
- Understanding the needs of the adoptive child.

Milton Keynes service users:
- Having continued support after I have adopted a child
- Being approachable
- Understanding the needs of the adoptive child
- I can trust the social workers
- Being available to answer my questions, whenever I have them.

The findings from the survey were used to shape the new brand and identity of the agency and going forward will be used to produce engaging straplines and advertising campaigns.

2.2) Brand design
Following the survey, brand design begun with five design companies invited to provide a quote following a tender process. Doug Dawson Design was the successful bidder for the task of brand design and development of Adoption Connects.

Following initial meetings with the service, Doug Dawson begun creating three possible concepts. The three concepts were discussed with service users, the Communications Team and the RAA Board the brand concept and basic colours were confirmed. The initial requirements required to complete pre soft launch were:

- Basic brand - logo, fonts, colour palette, supporting graphics
- Brand guidelines
- Social media profile and header graphics
- Initial literature - adoption information pack, presentation templates for information evenings and preparation training
- Marketing materials - staff lanyards, marketing resources for information evenings and training such as roll up banners and table cloths.

At the time of writing this strategy the following work was underway:
- Basic stationery – letterhead, agenda, minutes, memo, compliment slip
- Basic templates – A4 factsheet, A4 report template
- Child’s profile template
- Further work will be carried out before the official launch to update and produce required literature for the service.

This stage of work will be developed and reviewed throughout the year as the needs of the service become clear.
2.3) Website
Content for the new website was created and the service worked closely with Central Bedfordshire’s Web Manager to build an engaging new website. The pages were produced to give service users as much information on the pages as possible, with very limited links to external documents where possible to improve the customer journey through the website pages.

The existing pages within the Central Bedfordshire Council and Milton Keynes Council websites were redirected to ensure that those visiting the Council’s websites are given a direct link to the new site. This work also ensured that service users who may have saved existing Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes adoption website pages were redirected to the relevant pages with the new joint agency website. It was important to have one page remaining on both council’s website pages, with some introductory text regarding the new joint agency and a direct link to the new website. This will encourage those people viewing the council website pages to get in touch with Adoption Connects through the new site and contact details.

An important part of the website development was to ensure the Google Business Listing was updated. The Google Business Listing is free and ensures the agency has a visual presence on google whilst work is carried out to improve Adoption Connects Google rating (see below).
2.4) Social media presence
Starting a new Facebook page can take time to develop therefore the decision was made to use the existing Central Bedfordshire’s adoption service Facebook page. Milton Keynes Adoption service did not have an existing page and the Central Bedfordshire Adoption Facebook page had an existing following and small number of likes. This existing Central Bedfordshire adoption Facebook page was reviewed and rebranded to become Adoption Connects. The page’s name, brand, contact details and content was updated in the brand and launched on 1st April 2019.

Further work will be completed over the next year to promote the page across both Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes and utilise as a marketing tool. Further details can be found later in this report.

3) Target and current need for the year ahead
This strategy looks to recruit those people and families interested in adoption from within 20 miles of Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes. It also aims to support the service’s priorities by recruiting a diverse pool of adopters.

The target for 2019 – 2020 is to recruit 35 adopters from a range of backgrounds and ethnicities who are willing to consider:
- Foster for adoption
- Siblings
- Older single children
- Children with additional needs.

4) Recommended marketing plan for the year ahead
4.1) Website and search engine marketing
With the Adoption Connects website being a new domain, the main focus for the first six months of this strategy will be to work with Net Natives (a digital advertising company) to complete search engine marketing (SEM). SEM is an effective marketing tool to help with the online presence of a new website within popular search engines, in our case Google. This type of digital marketing is crucial to encourage as much traffic to our website as possible and to have Adoption Connects new website visible alongside and preferably above the competitive agencies and Local Authorities in the area. The adverts are pay per click and are based on bids for keywords that service users enter when they are searching for adoption. Net Natives will firstly carry out research into the most popular keywords used when people Google adoption and will then tailor adverts that appear on the first page of Google.

The service will continue to work closely with the web team in order to receive training on the website package (Squarespace) in order for the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer to make the relevant changes and updates to the website throughout the year and to keep information up to date including information evenings in both Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes.
Additional areas to explore on the website are:

- The possibility of producing marketing pages for national campaigns
- The use of private and password protected areas. This will enable the service to use the website for existing adopters to share information, children’s profiles and events.

### 4.2) Information evenings

Information evenings will continue to be held in both Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Council offices. This will enable the service to hold two information evenings a month and will reduce disruption to service users by having one a month in Central Bedfordshire and one a month in Milton Keynes. All dates will be advertised through the website pages and through social media to enable prospective adopters to drop in and attend an evening that suits them. A link will also be included in the information pack email that is sent to prospective adopters that have enquired about adoption. The evenings will be held twelve times a year (one per month) at Priory in Chicksands and a further twelve times a year (one per month) at the Civic Offices, Milton Keynes with roughly two-week intervals between each session.

### 4.3) Net Natives - digital advertising

Facebook advertising allows the service to reach a diverse audience in terms of ages, interests and faiths. This year the service will work with digital advertising experts Net Natives who have an extensive and proven experience of successful digital marketing campaigns. The following advertising will take place:

- **Facebook advertising**
  Four separate, four week campaigns will be produced for Facebook. The adverts will run during proven successful times of the year and around times of national campaigns promoting adoption – May, July, September/October and January.

- **Google Dynamic Words**
  Two separate, four week campaigns will take place in September/October and January/February.

### 4.4) Radio advertising

Radio advertising reaches an additional audience who may not use/have an active lifestyle on social media. An Adoption Connects advert will take place on both Heart Radio Bedford and Heart Radio Milton Keynes with a one-week advert on each station on two occasions across the year ahead.

### 4.5) Press

With local press in decline it is becoming more challenging to gain interest from the local media. An additional challenge for the service will be engaging with the two communications teams across both Central Bedfordshire Council and Milton Keynes Council to ensure messaging is consistent and shared across both social media channels and with local media in both areas. The service will work to:

- Build relationships and working practices with both Central Bedfordshire Council and Milton Keynes Council’s communications teams
- Build and share information regarding the brand guidelines with staff across both councils
- Build relationships and engagement with local media in both Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes
- Be creative in its approach to message sharing e.g. use of video, real life stories and testimonies
- Work with both councils to share internal messaging to staff through staff newsletters
• Work with both councils to share internal messaging to Councillors through members newsletters
• Produce new films and testimonies with adopters and where possible adopted children who are now adults
• Work with both councils to share external messaging to residents in both Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes
• Engage residents in both Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Council by sharing messages through each council’s social media channels and YouTube.

4.6) Lamppost banners
Lamppost banners were installed for the last adoption strategy for Central Bedfordshire Council. The lamppost banners are large scale posters that are used to raise brand awareness. The banners will be reviewed this year to reflect the new brand of Adoption Connects with the existing Central Bedfordshire locations changed, artwork amended and further locations across Milton Keynes considered. Areas will be chosen depending on footfall of residents, slow moving traffic or where they are located close to supermarkets, town centres and market towns.

4.7) Social media
Social media is a positive, quick, responsive and free way of spreading messages and good news stories about adoption to the public. The numbers of likes on Central Bedfordshire Council’s and Milton Keynes Facebook pages are extremely high with the following number of likes on each page:

- Central Bedfordshire Council Facebook
  - 12,066 page likes
  - 12,836 followers
- Milton Keynes Council Facebook
  - 8,683 page likes
  - 9,569 followers

The Adoption Connects Facebook page has a small number of likes and will need further work this year to improve the number of page likes and the service will work to promote the page further, to enable the page to be used a vital route of information sharing and advertising.

Twitter and Instagram are also vital tools which will be utilised this year, making good use of the Councils existing pages and followers:

- Central Bedfordshire Council Twitter
  - 12,200 followers
- Milton Keynes Council Twitter
  - 14,500 followers
- Central Bedfordshire Council Instagram
  - 1398 followers
- Milton Keynes Instagram
  - 652 followers

The service will work towards a monthly focus for social media posts as well as building relationships with other community based pages. Part of the work will include reaching out to those groups on Facebook to share messaging about adoption through Adoption Connects.
4.8) Outreach and drop ins
A small amount of outreach will be considered for the year ahead to help promote the new joint
service of Adoption Connects with stands and drop ins being held at:

- Pride in Milton Keynes
- Costa Coffee stores across Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes
- Service presentation and information stand at Kings Church during National Adoption
  Week.

As opportunities arise throughout the year, they will be reviewed and considered as further
possible outreach.

4.9) Carousel evenings
Following the success of the carousel evenings in Milton Keynes Council, Adoption Connects will
continue to provide Carousel evenings for prospective adopters. The evenings provide prospective
adopters the opportunity to meet approved adopters to talk informally about their adoption
experience. The evenings will be available to prospective adopters every quarter.

4.10) Newsletters and information sharing
With many people finding information digitally, the service will work with local community groups
and employers in both Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes to access their electronic
newsletter to include articles to promote adoption.

5) Training and support
Within the transitional period of the first year of Adoption Connects, each Local Authority will
continue to run events and support as they have previously but will ensure that all adopters across
Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes are invited and able to access all events and training.

5.1) Training
Prospective adopters will be given many opportunities to attend adoption preparation training
which will be held twelve times per year, with one session each month at Priory House in
Chicksands.

Two comprehensive training programmes will be available to both prospective and approved
adopters across Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes covering key areas such as first aid,
safeguarding, attachment, trauma as well as an extensive list of further learning opportunities.
This will include a vast number of courses available via elearning.

In addition to this adoption training will be available for areas such as life story, PACE for adopters
and let’s talk about adoption.

As the service develops and the needs of adopters are identified, further training opportunities will
be considered.

5.2) Social events
Social events are an important resource for adopters to build relationships with adoptive families
in their local area, to provide peer support to each other.
Historically events run through the two councils have been extremely well attended therefore, the service will provide events across Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes such as:

- Summer BBQ and picnic
- Christmas party
- Easter party
- Organised trips for adoptive families for example sledging, trampolining.

5.3) Support groups and drop ins
Support groups and drop ins are another way in which adopters can network, socialise and gain valuable support from each other with adopters in their local area. The service will provide opportunities for adopters across Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes in the form of coffee and play mornings and letterbox drops ins. A member of the adoption team will be present at the support groups to answer any queries or worries adopters may have and to provide queries regarding letterbox.

5.4) Buddy scheme
Informal networking is encouraged by social workers within the team to strengthen support networks within the adopter’s local area. A buddy is identified for prospective adopters who would benefit from peer support.

5.5) Youth clubs
After a successful start to the running of a youth club for adopted children in Milton Keynes, Adoption Connects will be arranging new dates for the coming year. The group is run by play Therapists from the team and the sessions are part fun and part educational and therapeutic. Going forward the group will be invited to meet each half term with a group for older children and a group for younger children.

5.6) Communication
Email correspondence to adopters will be used for the year ahead to ensure that adopters are aware of the range of events and training provided. Part of the communication to adopters includes an Adoption Newsletter which is sent to adopters three times a year with articles of interest relating to adoption, adoption support, child development and activities.

5.7) Memberships and subscriptions
The service promotes the use of Adoption UK and New Family Social and holds a membership with each of the organisations. Each organisation has been made aware of the new joint agency and is currently in the process of setting up the new agency with each organisation. Each website has been/will be updated with the new branding and contact details of the agency.

5.7a) Adoption UK
Adoption Connects are members of Adoption UK with adopters encouraged to become members. Adoption Connects holds five free household memberships which are provided each year, these are distributed to adopters who will benefit from the membership the most, free of charge. Local Authority membership includes:

- Access to and features within Children Who Wait magazine, a family finding resource
- Access to training workshops
- Promotion of the service within the online database of agencies
- A helpline for staff and adopters
- Access to the Adoption UK library
• Access to online information for example; articles, factsheets, recommended reading lists.

5.7b) New Family Social
The service is dedicated to supporting all adopters and ensure the needs of LGBT+ adopters are considered through membership of New Family Social (NFS). Membership includes services such as:

• Adopters who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender are able to join NFS for free and access unique peer support networks of other LGBT+ adopters
• Inclusion of the service on the websites agency finder to enable LGBT+ potential adopters to choose an agency that will welcome and support their application
• Inclusion of the service’s information events on the NFS website
• Access to NFS children’s profiles for family finding
• Agency discount to suggested training providers
• Regular magazine
• Access to free flyers and logos to promote adoption within the LGBT+ community.

6) Other areas for consideration
6.1) Production of literature
Following the design of the new brand a small amount of literature was updated to ensure a smooth transition through the soft launch of adoption connects for example, information pack, letterhead, presentation templates, report templates and website and social media branding.

During the year ahead and prior to the official launch later this year, the service will work to produce full literature and stationery to meet the needs of the service.

6.2) Marketing materials
The service has purchased a small amount of marketing materials which will enable promotion of the service such as branded table cloths, roll up banners and staff lanyards. During the year ahead and prior to the official launch later this year, the service will work to produce and purchase the following:

• Information stand
• Marketing resources such as cotton bags, pens, trolley coins
• Printing of new literature for use at information evenings and on information stands.

7) Review of strategy
As the needs of the service change throughout this year the service will regularly review the strategy and monthly working plan to meet any challenges of needs that arise.
Appendix 4

Statement of purpose

1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020

www.adoptionconnects.co.uk
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1) Introduction
This statement of purpose has been produced in accordance with the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011, Standard 18 and is reviewed annually.

It sets out the core aims and objectives of Adoption Connects and the range of services provided to children, prospective adopters, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth family.

Adoption Connects is a joint service for Central Bedfordshire Council and Milton Keynes Council, hosted within the Professional Standards Service in Central Bedfordshire Council.

Information about adoption can be obtained from www.direct.gov.uk/adoption. Further information can be obtained from www.first4adoption.org.uk. Detailed information about adoption procedures can be found via http://centralbedfordshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com and https://mkscb.procedures.org.uk/page/contents.

2) Aims and objectives
Adoption Connects recognises the lifelong nature of adoption with the following aims and objectives:

Adoption Connects endorse the view that it is in a child’s best interests to be brought up within their birth family where possible. Where this is not possible Adoption Connects are committed to finding a suitable adoptive family when adoption has been identified as the Care Plan for a child. Such placement will provide permanence and a safe and stable care to promote good outcomes and life chances.

Good Care planning is effective in achieving early permanence for children looked after. Adoption Connects will work in partnership with national and local organisations to achieve early permanence and avoid delay.

Adoption Connects will refer children to national family finding resources and consider bespoke family finding modes such as the media, if unable to identify a suitable match within its own resources.

The child remains paramount throughout care planning and the rights, needs and welfare of the child are valued at all stages.

Adoption Connects aim to provide high quality adoption service that meets the needs of all those who are affected by adoption.

A core objective is to recruit and assess a diverse range of adoptive families who are able to meet the needs of children with an adoption decision. This includes the recruitment of adopters able to offer early permanence via foster for adoption placements.

Adoption Connects will place children with adoptive families who can meet most of the child’s identified needs including, ethnicity, culture and religion where possible. Each may be reconsidered if there is a delay in identifying a suitable match in which case a match with adopters who are able to meet most of the child’s identified needs will be considered to secure permanence.
Adoption Connects will provide a responsive adoption support service that is available to adopted children, adoptive families, birth families, prescribed persons and adopted adults. Children and families will be provided with information regarding adoption support.

Adoption Connects will offer timely information, advice and counselling to members of the public enquiring about adoption or affected by adoption.

3) Management and organisational structure
Adoption Connects forms part of Central Bedfordshire Council and Milton Keynes Council Children’s Services for which the Director of Children’s Services is responsible. Operational managerial responsibility sits with the Head of Professional Standards. The Service Manager for Adoption Connects supervises the Social Workers and the Agency Advisor for adoption.

4) Staffing
The current complement within the Adoption Service is:

- 1 Service Manager
- 2 Team Managers
- 2 Senior Practitioner
- 12 Social Workers
- 2 Social Work Assistants
- 1 Business Support Officer
- 1 Panel Secretary

The Practice Manager and Social Workers are all professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience and are registered with the HCPC. All staff have a Personal Development Review (Your Year) and have an identified training plan from which training will be provided on a bespoke basis or from Adoption Connects Learning and Development Programme.

The Practice Manager for Adoption provides operational management, quality assurance, performance and budget management for the team and panel and co-ordinates the work of the team. In addition to supervising the work of the staff the manager also supervises the Adoption Panel Advisor and reports to senior managers including the Governance Board on service activities and issues of concern.

The Adoption Agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering Service. These include a Recruitment and Marketing Officer and a Training Officer.

5) Services provided to children
Adoption will be considered as a positive first option for a child looked after who are unable to live with their birth family.

The particular needs of children with a disability and special needs will be recognised and positively valued in decision making and achieving permanence via adoption.

A permanence plan will be considered at the second LAC review, at the latest, if a child remains looked after for four months and reconsidered at subsequent reviews.
Adoption Connects will assist children to understand about adoption and why they are unable to live with their birth family. The Children’s Guide will be made available to age appropriate children to support their understanding.

All children placed for adoption will have a life story book completed within 10 days of the adoption celebration hearing. They will also have a memory box from foster carers and will be supported to retain key mementoes from their past.

A later life letter will be written by the child’s social worker and will be given to prospective adopters within 10 days of the adoption celebration hearing.

Children will be placed with adoptive families that are best able to meet their needs and are able to share life story information throughout childhood and support the proposed contact plan to support the child’s identity.

Adoption Connects will aim to keep siblings together, where this appropriate, and will place them together with an adoptive family.

The adoption service will consider Adoption Connects approved adopters and if no suitable match is available other agency approved adopters will be considered.

The option of the child remaining with existing foster carers through adoption will be considered and explored if appropriate.

Children who do not have a match identified six months after the permission to place for adoption will be reviewed regularly to ensure that the care plan remains appropriate for the child.

Foster for Adoption placements will be considered for children who meet the criteria to ensure early permanence is achieved.

Adoption Support needs for the child will be identified in the Adoption Support Plan and reviewed regularly or at the request of the adoptive family.

Children’s adoption records will be carefully stored, archived and retained for 100 years.

6) Services to birth families

Birth parents will be referred to an independent agency, Adoption Plus, who are commissioned to provide independent counselling to birth parents and relatives. Birth parents will be provided with information about this service.

The views of birth parents will be recorded on the child’s record and the Child’s Permanence Report. The wishes and views of birth parents will be considered in the adoption planning process and they will be encouraged to contribute to the child’s permanence report and life story book.

Birth parents and/or appropriate relatives will be given the opportunity to meet with the identified adoptive parents unless this would pose risk or detriment to the child.

Adoption Connects maintain the contact plan for the child and provide a service to support the exchange and management of contact. A guide on letterbox contact leaflet will be provided.
7) Prospective adopters
Adoption Connects will recruit and assess a diverse range of adoptive families who are able to meet the needs of children with an adoption decision. This includes the recruitment of adopters able to offer foster for adoption placements.

The needs of looked after children in Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes will determine the priority given to progressing applications to adopt.

8) Eligibility criteria
The applicant(s) is single, married, in a civil partnership or an unmarried couple and is over 21 years old.

The applicant or one of the applicants is domiciled in the British Islands and have been habitually resident in the British Islands for at least a year.

Neither the applicant(s) nor an adult member of their household has been convicted or cautioned in respect of a specified offence.

Enquiries can be received via the council website www.adoptionconnects.co.uk, telephone calls to the Adoption Duty Worker on 0300 300 8090 who is available on Monday to Friday or email to enquiries@adoptionconnects.co.uk.

9) Preparation and assessment
Applicants will be invited to attend an information evening and those who wish to proceed with an application will be offered an initial assessment meeting. Applicants are expected to have childcare experience or to undertake such experience during assessment.

The two-stage process will be fully explained to applicants and will be comprehensive, transparent, thorough and fair. The adoption service will work in partnership with applicants at all stages.

Checks and references are undertaken in Stage 1. These include:
- Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (DBS)
- Three written personal references, one family member and two friends
- Employment references
- Local Authority checks
- Medical checks
- School references (for children already in the family)
- Pet assessment
- In addition, DBS Checks are taken up on any other person in the prospective adopter’s household aged 18 and over.

Preparation training is provided, and all applicants are expected to attend and complete the required training programme. Further training is encouraged and can be accessed via an annual training programme.

If Adoption Connects comes to a view that an application will not succeed applicants will be informed and given reasons verbally and written. Some information for the assessment is provided in confidence therefore there may be some occasions where it may not be possible for reasons to be fully explained.
The assessment is undertaken in compliance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Practice guidance for the Preparation and Assessment of Prospective Adopters.

Applicants will receive a copy of the completed assessment and have the opportunity to comment and sign.

The assessment will inform whether Adoption Connects can provide a positive recommendation for approval as prospective adopters to the Adoption Panel. If recommendation cannot be agreed full reasons will be given to the applicants verbally and written. Support and advice will be offered to understand the recommendation.

If applicants do not agree with the recommendation they can request a brief report is presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration.

The Agency Decision Maker will consider the panel’s recommendation and a written decision (a qualifying determination) will be provided to the applicants. Advice will be provided about the Independent Review Mechanism.

Applicants will be provided with information about the Adoption Panel and encouraged to attend.

Applicants will be informed of the panel recommendation on the day they attend. The decision of the Agency Decision Maker will be provided verbally on the day it is received and followed up in writing.

Approved adopters will be linked with a Central Bedfordshire or Milton Keynes Child or their details will be circulated to regional partner members and Adoption Match. Approved adopters cannot self refer to profiling sites within the first three months of approval without agreement from the Adoption Connects service.

If a match has not been identified within a year of the approval an annual review will be completed to review the approval and determine if the applicants continue to be suitable to adopt.

Advice and Information will be provided if applicants are unsure as to whether they wish to consider inter-country or domestic adoption

Adoption Connects will manage and respond to enquiries and undertake assessments in respect of step-parent adoptions. Enquirers will be provided with a guide to assist them consider other options available and the assessment required.

10) Procedure for assessment

Central Bedfordshire Council and Milton Keynes Council have detailed policies and procedures for the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of prospective adopters. The following is a summary of the recruitment, assessment and approval process. This follows the two-stage adopter recruitment and approval process as introduced by the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 and Statutory Adoption Guidance 2013 which came into force in July 2013, as part of the Government’s Adoption Reform.

Enquirers can telephone the Service on 0300 300 8090, email their interest to enquiries@adoptionconnects.co.uk or express an interest via an e-form at www.adoptionconnects.co.uk. The Adoption Duty Worker will gather basic information about the
enquirer and answer questions about adoption to assist them to consider whether adoption is the right choice for them.

Prospective adopters contacting Adoption Connects are provided with information about adoption within 5 working days. They are also given the opportunity to meet with a social worker and attend an information session.

If the enquirer submits a registration of interest form, this is passed to the Adoption Manager, who will consider whether or not to accept the registration of interest within 5 days. If accepted the prospective adopter(s) are invited to attend training and a stage one plan will be completed to agree tasks and checks to be completed in this stage.

The applicant should use this time to gain childcare experience and explore the extent of their interest in and capacity for adoption, including considering whether they could offer a fostering for adoption placement.

Adoption Connects offer support to prospective adopters during stage one as appropriate, the process being monitored by a co-ordinator within the team.

Towards the end of stage one, prospective adopters are offered an end of stage one Interview in order to consider the information gained during the period including the completed checks and whether the applicants have successfully completed stage one.

Should the Adoption Manager decide that a prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt, either during stage one or at the end of stage one, they will provide the prospective adopter with a written explanation of the reasons, where possible any next actions.

If the Adoption Manager decides that the prospective adopters can proceed to stage two, the case will be allocated to a Social Worker once the applicants are ready and want to proceed. Following notification, a stage two plan will be completed, and the Social Worker will be allocated to complete the assessment to consider the suitability to adopt. The report and the decision as to the applicants’ suitability to adopt should be completed within four months.

Once the assessment is completed this will be presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation. The recommendation is then presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a final decision on the applicants’ suitability to adopt.

Adoption Connects demonstrates a positive and supportive approach towards applications to adopt from previous adopters and foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care. These assessments will be fast tracked.

Adoption Connects aims to provide ongoing support to adoptive families, and an adoption support plan will be developed before panel and placement which identifies the likely support needs of the placement. This is then reviewed prior to the Adoption Order being granted and annually thereafter as required.

Children in adoptive placements are reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Officer via an Adoption Review. The review helps identify when it is appropriate for an Adoption Order to be lodged by the applicants. In most cases, this would be decided by the time of the second Review. Adopters are supported by their Social Worker in making the application.
11) Adoption support services

The service is available to children, adopters, birth relatives and adopted adults living in Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes. The Practice Manager is the Adoption Support Advisor.

Adoption Connects recognise that support may be needed at various stages and the support required is varied and will differ from each child and family. The assessment process aids to identify support that may be required.

Adoption Connects provides a range of ongoing support to adoptive families, including family events and activity groups for adopted young people. In line with legislation, adopters for whom we are the responsible Adoption Agency can ask for an assessment of their adoption support needs.

Adoption Connects will offer a counselling service to adopted adults who live in Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes and wish to access their records. Intermediary services may also be available if there is capacity within the service, if not advice will be provided to individuals who wish to trace their birth relatives.

A post adoption contact service is available for all parties involved in ongoing contact

Adoption Connects will provide access to counselling services for birth family members affected by adoption.

Details of services can be found on Adoption Connects website. A children’s guide to adoption support is also available on request.

Adoption Connects ensures that all those seeking to adopt are fully informed as to their entitlements in regard to adoption support. Updated information is provided upon request and via the periodic newsletters.

12) Adoption panel

The Adoption Regulations require the adoption panel to consider the case of every child, prospective adopter, and proposed adoption placement referred to it by the adoption agency for consideration, prior to making its recommendation as to:

- Whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter
- Whether on the information so far available a prospective adopter is unlikely to be suitable to adopt a child
- Whether a prospective adopter, following review, is no longer suitable to adopt a child.

The adoption panel meets twice per month but can meet more frequently if required. The panel is chaired by an independent person who has considerable professional experience of adoption. The Agency Adviser and a Panel Secretary are in attendance at each panel but are non-voting members. Written legal advice is available to the panel from the Legal Adviser who on occasion may be present but is not a panel member.

Decisions about whether a child should be placed for adoption are made by the Agency Decision Maker without recourse to the panel. The exception of this are children relinquished by consent from the parent.
The Agency Decision Maker for Adoption Connects is the delegated Senior Manager – the Assistant Director of Children’s Services.

13) Complaints
Complaints and queries will be dealt with in a manner that meets local and national requirements.

Complaints by children are dealt with under the Children’s Services complaints procedure, which means a shorter time for responding to children’s complaints and the provision of independent advocacy for complainants.

The complaints procedure has several stages: stage 1 applies to local resolution but if this is not achieved, there are 2 more stages. Information on these further stages is available from Adoption Connects or from Central Bedfordshire’s Customer Relations Department.

14) Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption
Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption are dealt with in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures and Adoption Connects procedures for managing allegations.

15) Arrangements for the revision and circulation of the statement of purpose
The Registered Manager is responsible for the annual revision of the statement of purpose. Revisions may occur at other times if necessary.

The revised statement of purpose will be presented to the adoption panel annually for their information.

The statement of purpose will be available to all staff via the council’s intranet and to members of the public via Adoption Connects website.

16) The Registration Authority
The Registration Authority is Ofsted:
Website: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

17) Contacts
For more information about Adoption in Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes please contact:

Adoption Connects
Priory House, Monks Walk
Chicksands
SG17 5TQ
Website: www.adoptionconnects.co.uk
Email: enquiries@adoptionconnects.co.uk
Telephone: 0300 300 8090
For copies of the complaints procedure please visit:

For further copies of this statement of purpose, please contact Adoption Connects on the contact details above.

If you wish to comment on this statement of purpose, on Adoption Connects or make a complaint, please contact the Head of Professional Standards on the details above.
10. Fostering Annual Report

Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel 30 May 2019

Fostering Annual Report 2018-19

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

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

Purpose of this report

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to:

Consider and note the Fostering Agency Annual Report including the Fostering and Permanence Panel Annual Report; Recruitment and Retention Strategy; and Fostering Statement of Purpose 2019-20.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The annual report for fostering will not need to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Issues

2. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering (NMS) and Fostering Regulations 2011 require the service to report to the executive side of the Local Authority every 3 months on the activities and outcomes the Fostering Service has achieved during the year to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and achieving good outcomes for children, this includes a panel report – see Appendix 1 and 2.
3. The NMS required the Fostering Service to implement an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted demand on the service – see Appendix 3.

4. The NMS and Fostering Regulations 2011 also require the Fostering Service to produce a Statement of Purpose, detailing its aims and objectives, the services provided and to keep in under review – see Appendix 4.

**Options for consideration**

5. To consider and note the Fostering Agency Annual Report 2018-19, including the Fostering and Performance Panel Annual Report; Recruitment and Retention Strategy and Fostering Statement of Purpose – See Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4.

**Reason/s for decision**

6. No decisions needed.

**Corporate Implications:**

**Legal Implications**

7. There are no immediate legal implications arising.

**Financial and Risk Implications**

8. There are no financial implications in this report. All activity is budgeted.

**Equalities Implications**

9. 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.

10. The service aims to ensure equality of service is promoted for all individuals who apply to foster or are approved as Central Bedfordshire foster carers. We will also ensure that children in care have their ethnic, cultural, religious, heritage and language promoted and that they are not discriminated against based on their protected characteristics. Whilst the profile of foster carers generally reflects the
ethnicity of our Looked After Children population there is still a need to recruit more foster carers from different ethnic minorities in order to refine the matching process further. This is therefore, an ongoing focus of our marketing and recruitment strategy.

11. As in previous years, there was a large range of marketing activity that encouraged members of the public to get in touch to find out more about fostering and there has been an 18% increase in initial contacts. The focus for recruitment of fostering households will be for:
   - Sibling groups
   - Older children (10 years plus)
   - Parent and child
   - Respite
   - Children with additional or complex needs and challenging behaviour through the intensive support fostering scheme.

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

13. Each year the Fostering Service produces a comprehensive Training Programme covering a wide range of topics to help foster carers develop their skills and knowledge. The fostering service also provides a range of a high level of support to foster carers

14. The Fostering and Permanence panel is working to ensure that the composition of the Panel reflects as far as possible the diversity of the wider local community. The Panel Adviser and Chair ensure that all Panel Members are kept abreast of latest research and national issues.

Conclusion and next Steps

15. Corporate Parenting Panel are required to consider and note the Fostering Agency Annual Report including the Fostering and Permanence Panel Annual Report; Recruitment and Retention Strategy and Fostering Statement of Purpose – see Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Fostering Agency Annual Report 2018-2019
Appendix 3: Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2019-2020
Appendix 4: Fostering Statement of Purpose 2019-2020
Background Papers

None

Report author(s): Annie Craig
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Appendix 1

Foster
Do something incredible today!

Annual report

Fostering Team, Central Bedfordshire Council
For the period: 2018 – 2019

A great place to live and work.
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Introduction

This Fostering Service Report provides information to Elected Members and decision makers about the progress and developments in the Fostering Service between 1 April 2018 - 31 March 2019. The report may also be of interest to service users, staff and colleagues from partner agencies.

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

Section 1

The Fostering Service

1.1 Service Overview

1.1.1 The Fostering Service is currently co-located within the Corporate Parenting Service of Children’s Services. This supports the close working relationship between the operational childcare teams and the Fostering Service.

1.1.2 The Fostering Service provides a range of services as required within the current legislation. The Statutory Guidance underpinning fostering legislation prescribes the services and processes to be followed by a Fostering Service and the qualifications required by Managers and Social Workers.

1.1.4 The Fostering Service staff team is made up of the Practice Manager, 2 team managers, 2 senior social workers, 11 social workers, a Family Support worker and 2 business support officers.

1.1.5 All employed staff are permanent and have a wide range of experience, knowledge and skills. The service has provided placements for 2 students during this year and is currently supporting 2 ASYE’s through their first year of qualification. All members of the team actively support students and peer support is provided for the ASYE’s.

1.1.6 All fostering social workers are qualified and registered with the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC). They have access to the Council’s extensive Learning and Development Programme and can apply to attend external courses and conferences where appropriate. The Council’s Learning and
Development Programme also provides diversity training for staff in order to ensure they understand and address issues of diversity when working with foster carers and children in care. Staff are encouraged to embrace and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

1.1.7 The teams carry out the full functions of the fostering service with social workers completing a range of fostering work, including foster carer assessment (family and friends and career carers), supervision/support, reviews etc. In addition, the fostering service is involved in the assessment of Supported Lodgings carers and the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers and Private Foster carers.

1.1.8 The Fostering Service is also supported by specialist staff across the Fostering and Adoption Service. These include a Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer, a Marketing, Recruitment and Training Support Officer, a Professional Panel Adviser and 2 Panel Secretaries who support and manage the work of the Fostering and Permanence Panel. The Fostering Service has access to CAMHS (Children and Mental Health Service) clinicians who provide support to Social Workers, Children in Care and Foster Carers. The Fostering Service also works particularly closely with the Placement and Resource Team whose staff are responsible for making placements and foster carer payments.

1.2 The Fostering and Permanence Panel

1.2.1 The Fostering and Permanence Panel meets generally once or twice a month, depending on demand and considers a maximum of 6 cases per panel. During the period between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, the panel met on 12 occasions.

1.2.2 The Fostering and Permanence Panel considers applications from prospective foster carers and makes recommendations as to their approval. First annual reviews and those reviews where there has been a proposed change in carer’s approval or where there has been an allegation made against the foster carer are presented to panel for consideration. Panel also make recommendations in relation to children being matched to their permanent foster carers.

1.2.3 The attached Fostering and Permanence Panel Chairs Report (Appendix 2) includes detailed information and feedback on the function of panel business.
1.3 Provision of information on fostering

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

Section 2

Children and Fostering

2.1 Children accommodated

2.1.1 Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 there were 113 new foster placements made compared to 123 in the previous year. Looking at the 113 LAC admissions during the year;

- 2 young people (2%) were in independent living
- 16 young people (14%) were in semi-independent living
- 7 (6%) were placed with parents
- 2 (2%) were placed in ‘Homes and Hostels’
- 5 (4%) were placed in NHS/Health Trust placements
- 1 (1%) were placed in a family centre or Parent and Child unit
- 5 (4%) were placed in a Young Offenders Institute or Prison
- 1 (1%) was placed in a Residential School
- 27 (24%) were placed in Regulation 24 placements (temp. approval)
- 3 (3%) were in foster care with relative/friend (not long term)
- 43 children (38%) were in a placement with other foster carer (not long term)
- 1 (1%) child was in a placement with a foster carer who is also an approved adopter/FFA.

2.1.2 As at 31 March 2019, 130 of all children in care were placed with in house foster carers (56%) and 102 (44%) were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies compared to 131 (61%) in house and 75 (35%) IFA’s last year.
2.1.3 The number of children placed in foster care increased this year from 216 as at the 31 March 2018 to 232 at the 31 March 2019.

2.1.4 The referral for the child/young person which includes essential and preferable matching criteria is crucial to identifying which carers may be able to support a child. Where a placement does not meet the essential criteria or where any identified risk cannot be managed, an alternative placement is sought. 21 of the young people placed either with in-house foster carers, Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA’s) or in semi-independent living were unaccompanied asylum seekers (compared to 20 in the previous year). The main countries of origin for these young people were Eritrea (9), Sudan (3) and Ethiopia (2).

2.1.5 Regular respite placements were provided on 179 occasions (compared to 102 in the previous year), this is an increase of 57% and more respite carer are therefore required to take account of this increase in demand. In addition, ad hoc respite was provided on 78 occasions (compared to 79 in the previous year).

2.1.6 16 referrals for foster placements were received from the Emergency Duty Team (EDT), (compared to 24 in the previous year), 3 of the children were Luton children, 1 was from Bedford Borough and the remaining 12 were from CBC. This is a shared EDT service that provide emergency services out of the office hours for CBC, Bedford Borough and Luton areas.

2.2 Age of Children Accommodated

2.2.1 The highest percentage of the 113 individual children accommodated between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 were aged between 0-4 years of age (37%) this was followed by young people in the 16 + age range (25%).

The full age distribution was as follows:

- 0-4 years – 42 children (37% compared to 38% in the previous year)
- 5-10 years - 20 children (18% compared to 23% in the previous year)
- 11-15 years – 23 children (20% compared to 20% in the previous year)
- 16+ years – 28 young people (25% compared to 19% in the previous year)
2.3 Gender of children accommodated

2.3.1 Of the 113 children accommodated between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, 75 (66%) were male and 38 (34%) were female. This is evidence of a slight increase in males and a slight decrease in females accommodated during this period compared to last year, where there were 70 (57%) males accommodated compared to 53 (43%) females.

2.4 Ethnicity of children accommodated

2.4.1 In terms of ethnicity of the children accommodated between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019:
- 73 (64%) were of White ethnicity;
- 2 (2%) were Asian/Asian British,
- 10 (9%) were Black/Black British,
- 9 (9%) were Dual Heritage
- 7 (6%) Gypsy/Roma/Travellers of Irish heritage and
- 12 (11%) were classed as Other Ethnic Groups (some may be Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People).

2.5 Sibling Groups of children accommodated

2.5.1 There were 50 sibling groups within the children accommodated during the year compared to 64 sibling groups in the previous year; the breakdown of which is: 17 groups of 2, 23 groups of 3, 13 groups of 4 and 10 groups of 5. 12 of these sibling groups were placed in-house with the remaining 38 needing to be placed in IFA placements.

2.5.2 One of the significant criteria for matching children with carers is enabling them to be placed with their siblings, wherever possible. Out of these sibling groups all but 2 of the sibling groups were assessed as needing to be placed together.

2.5.3 As at 31st March 2019 there were a total of 130 children (56%) placed with in house foster carers (compared to 131 as at 31st March 2018) with 102 children (44%) placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (compared to 85 as at 31st March 2018.)
2.6. **Placement Stability**

2.6.1 Research indicates that placement stability for children and young people in care is an important factor for them having more positive outcomes during their lives. Changes of placements and primary carers causes instability in terms of attachment and sometimes disruption in education/friendships etc.

2.6.2 The Service has 2 targets in relation to placement stability; one for short term and one for long term stability.

2.6.3 The short-term indicator is in relation to the percentage of Looked After Children with 3 or more placement moves over the previous year. The target set for this financial year was stretched from last year’s 11% to 8% (low is good) and at the end of March 2019 the Service had well exceeded this target having achieved 6.2%. This compares very favourably with our statistical neighbours at 12.1% and the national average of 10.5%.

2.6.4 The long-term indicator looks at the percentage of children under 16 who have been looked after continuously for 2.5 years and been in the same placement for at least 2 years or have been placed for adoption. The target set for this financial year was stretched from last year’s 70% to 80% (high is good) and at the end of March 2019 the Service had again exceeded this target having achieved 84.8%. This is a 9% increase on the previous year and is a fantastic achievement. This figure is well above our statistical neighbours at 70.2% and the national average of 69.8%.

2.6.5 Placement stability is also measured by the number of placement stability and disruption meetings held during the year. The service only held 2 placement stability meetings where additional support needs were identified and addressed. There was also 1 disruption meeting held in March 2019, once the minutes and recommendations have been circulated any learning from these will be put into practice.
Section 3

Foster carers

3.1 Recruitment of foster carers – enquiries through to approval

3.1.1 In order to ensure a range of foster carers are recruited for Central Bedfordshire children a range of marketing and recruitment activities have taken place during the year. These have mainly included on line marketing/recruitment but also includes some general advertising and radio/press coverage and awareness raising within the community.

3.1.2 Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 there were 104 enquiries (compared to 110 in the previous year) from people who were interested in becoming foster carers.

3.1.3 During 2018/19 most enquiries came about as a result of a Net Native Facebook advert, followed by the CBC website and then a Facebook at regarding the need to recruit PACE carers.

3.1.4 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and Statutory/Practice Guidance. All prospective foster carers are required to attend in-depth 'Skills to foster' training as part of the preparation and assessment process.

3.1.5 The Fostering Service’s recruitment target for 2018/19 was to recruit 15 new career carers which is a 50% increase on the previous year. It looked like this target might be achievable, however towards the end of the third quarter a significant number of planned assessments ceased and it became clear that we would fall short of this target. The total number of new fostering households approved for the year was 11, 4 short of the set target.

3.1.6 As at the 31st March 2019 the fostering Agency had a total of 105 fostering households (compared to 101 as at 31st March 2018). 86 of these were career carers (compared to 82 as at 31st March 2018).

3.2 De-registrations/termination of approvals

3.2.1 Foster carers cease to foster either because their approval has been terminated by the Service or because they wish to resign. Termination of approvals occur usually because there has either been an allegation
against a foster carer or concerns arisen regarding the standard of care provided.

3.2.2 Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, 1 fostering household had their approval terminated compared to 2 in the previous years, due to concerns about the carers ability to work with professionals and meet the children’s health needs.

3.2.3 During 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, there were 10 de-registrations compared to 19 in the previous year, of which:

- 4 de-registered due to moving away from the area.
- 2 de-registered due to the impact of fostering on their family.
- 2 de-registered following concerns being raised with them.
- 1 de-registered due to a Special Guardianship Order being granted.
- 1 de-registered due to retiring.

3.3 **Ethnicity of foster carers**

3.3.1

- 150 (88%) of foster carers are from a White British ethnic background.
- 10 (6%) of foster carers are Black or Black British.
- 6 (4%) of foster carers are from Asian backgrounds.
- 1 (1%) of foster carers are Dual Heritage.

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

3.4 **Age of Carers in Fostering Household**

3.4.1 The average age of CBC foster carers is 40-54 years with 22% aged 45-49 years, 18% aged 50-54 years and 17% aged between 40 and 44 years. Research showed that within CBC there was a vast age range of foster carers with the youngest being 24 years and the oldest being 77 years.

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 years and under</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 years plus</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Intensive Support Fostering Scheme

3.6.1 This scheme provides specialist care from experienced foster carers to children and young people mainly over the age of 10 (although younger children can and are placed) who have particularly challenging behaviour/complex needs.

3.6.2 As of 31 March 2019, there were 8 approved Intensive Support Foster Carers (which is the same as in the previous year) caring for 4 children (compared to 6 in the previous year).

3.7 Family Link Scheme

3.7.1 The Family Link Scheme offers short breaks to children of all ages who have a physical or functional disability. Foster carers can care for a child in their own home, the child’s home or take the child out to an activity. Periods of short breaks are planned and can be for a few hours or weekends on a regular basis.

3.7.2 As of 31 March 2019, there was 1 exclusive Family Link salaried carers supporting 2 children. 2 other foster carers also provided regular respite to children with and without disabilities during the year.
3.8 **PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) Scheme**

3.8.1 The Local Authority has a duty to provide accommodation to children and young people under the age of 18 who have been arrested and charged in relation to a criminal offence. CBC want to limit the amount of time children and young people have to spend in police custody. The fostering service, therefore, set up a PACE fostering scheme in April 2017 and currently have 2 PACE foster carers. The plan is for the relevant child or young person to be transferred to a Local Authority PACE foster carer overnight before they are presented to court the following day, rather than remaining in police custody until the hearing. Since setting up the scheme there has only been a need to accommodate 1 young person on 2 separate occasions, this was a Bedford Borough young person.

3.9 **Supported Lodgings Scheme**

3.9.1 The Supported Lodgings Scheme provides 16-17 year olds with a secure place to live, whilst at the same time providing them with a supportive adult who can help them to develop vital life skills necessary to live independently such as budgeting, cooking, and emotional support. It offers young people the opportunity to move towards independence in a planned and secure way, whilst remaining close to their network of family and friends. As at 31 March 2019 there were 4 Supported Lodgings Carers caring for 2 young people.

3.10 **Staying Put**

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

3.10.2 According to Ofsted National Statistics 2017/2018, young people were less likely than in previous years to stay put with their foster carers when they turned 18. This is the case locally as at 31 March 2019 there were only 2 young people placed in in-house staying put arrangements.
Section 4

Special Guardianship Orders

4.1.1 The Fostering Service is involved in the assessment and support of Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers. The number of SGO carers in Central Bedfordshire has been increasing steadily year on year. As at 31 March 2019 there were 163 SGO’s in place, compared to 140 in the previous year.

4.1.2 Once assessed and the SGO is granted, the majority of SGO carers do not receive ongoing support (apart from a financial allowance) as they access universal services.

4.1.3 There are, however, a small cohort of families who contact the service for specific support when issues arise. Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, the Fostering Service supported 17 families (compared to 16 in the previous year). The areas of support requested from families were in the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SGO Support</th>
<th>Number of times support given</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support re housing (1 x extension request)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play therapy/life story work</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial assessment/support requested</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play therapy/life story work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a CIN meeting to support an SGO carer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advise re applying for an SGO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 5

Private Fostering

5.1.1 Family Support team have overall responsibility for monitoring Private Fostering arrangements in Central Bedfordshire and for providing a separate annual report in relation to Private Fostering. The fostering service, however, provide support once the carer has been assessed and approved for 6 months. As at the end of March 2019 there were no private fostering arrangements therefore no support required from the fostering service.
Section 6

Training and Development of Foster Carers

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

6.1 Skills to Foster

6.1.1 New Fostering applicants have many questions prior to and during the assessment process. As an essential part of the fostering assessment, preparation to become a foster carer the ‘Skills to Foster’ training examines issues that are relevant, such as what it will be like to have children placed with them or working in tandem with the Local Authority in order to reach positive outcomes for children.

6.1.2 Spread over several dates, this training provides an opportunity for prospective foster carers to reflect on their values and attitude to caring and learn more about the skills and attributes needed to become a foster carer.

6.1.3 During 2018/2019, the Fostering Service ran 4 ‘Skills to Foster’ courses with a total of 32 delegates attending.

6.1.4 As part of the application and assessment process, all applicants must complete Emergency First Aid training; 6 courses were held during 2018/2019 with a total of 70 delegates attending.

6.2 Induction

6.2.1 Following approval, foster carers enter their 12-month induction phase into the Service and are required to complete their mandatory Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards. As at 31 March 2019 85 fostering households had successfully completed the Standards, 10 were yet to complete, but still had time to address within the required timescale and 1 household was overdue in completing the Standards and were outside the required timescale. Supervising Social Workers and the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Support Officer were providing additional support to help this carer achieve the standards.
6.3 The Fostering Training and Development Programme

6.3.1 Each year the Fostering Service produces a comprehensive Training Programme covering a wide range of topics to help foster carers develop their skills and knowledge. During this financial year, a total of 74 specialist in-house training courses were provided (compared to 49 in the previous year) on 44 subjects (compared to 36 in the previous year). Through imaginative work with our neighbouring authorities the service were able to improve its training offer to foster carers. The available training provided was diverse in order to meet the differing needs of carers and included training such as: Self harm, first aid, radicalisation, tax talk, allegations, introduction to Theraplay, depression and Internet Safety.

6.3.2 Foster carers are able to access training on-line and between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, 148 carers accessed on line training on a wide variety of topics.

6.3.3 Foster carers were also able to access training from the LSCB (Local Safeguarding Children’s Board), Social Care, Virtual Schools Domestic Violence and the Early Years Teams. 7 foster carers attended training on the following: Vulnerabilities of mental health when safeguarding children; Child Sexual Exploitation; Sexual trauma; Understanding the impact of CSE; Domestic abuse LGBT community; Implementing NSPCC reunification framework; Transgender and County Lines, Gangs and Young People.

6.3.4 Having access to many specialist training courses in different formats enables foster carers to tailor their training to suit their specific requirements/style of learning/development needs. If training meets the needs of the children they have in placement as well as ensuring they attend the core training required by the National Minimum Standards for the Fostering Service. If the training programme doesn’t meet the needs of the carer, the service will identify creative ways to support them, for example, identifying particular books/videos/articles to help or by providing 1-1 support.

Section 7

Support for foster carers

7.1 The Fostering Social Worker

7.1.1 The fostering social worker is responsible for the foster carer’s ongoing
assessment and support and must provide regular supervision that addresses their learning and development needs. It is the key role of the fostering social worker to support foster carers in meeting the National Minimum Standards required in the care they provide to children and young people.

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

7.2 Advise and Mediation Service

7.2.1 Independent advice and mediation is provided to foster carers via Fostering Network (a national organisation supporting foster carers). This service is primarily used by foster carers during an allegation as it helps to provide independent support and advice during these times. The Fostering Service spot purchases this service as and when it is required. During this financial year there were no requests for this service.

7.3 Foster carer support groups

7.3.1 Local monthly support groups are held for foster carers across the county. These are held in Dunstable, Millbrook and Cardington and have been well attended throughout the year.

7.3.2 Monthly support groups are also held for Intensive Support carers. As part of the support offered to Intensive Support carers a clinician from CAMHS attends these to provide group supervision and offer advice and support to help aid placement stability.

7.3.3 2 evening social events for foster carers and their families took place over this financial year and included a Cinema night (20 adults and 22 children attended) and a Christmas party (23 adults and 36 children attended).

7.4 Celebration of Fostering event

7.4.1 A Celebration of Fostering event is held every year to recognise the commitment, loyalty, hard work and achievements of our foster carers and their families. This year the event was held at Woburn Safari Park and was extremely well received with 62 adults and 53 children attending. Staff from the Corporate Parenting Service attended as well as the Chief Executive, Deputy Director (Safeguarding & Early Help, Children’s Services) and, Executive Member for Adults, Social Care and Housing Operations (HRA).
13 foster carers received long service awards this year;

8 for 5 years
3 for 10 years
1 for 20 years and
1 for 25 years.

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

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

7.5 Queens Garden Party

7.5.1 In recognition of foster carers’ hard work and dedication to their role the Service nominated a number of foster carers for attendance at one of the Queen’s Garden Parties. 5 foster carers were nominated and all applications were successful. Feedback from those carers who attended was very positive and carers felt honoured to be recognized for their role as foster carers.

7.6 Foster Carers 'Talk Time'

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

7.7 'Tea with Alex'

7.7.1 'Tea with Alex' was an initiative set up by the Head of Service, Alex Coman, when he took over in November 2017. It gave foster carers an opportunity to meet with the Head of Corporate Parenting Service, on a
regular and informal basis to help him shape the service and support foster carers to improve the lives of our children in care. With Alex Coman leaving the service in December 2018 the service are reviewing whether to continue with this initiative or find alternative ways to gain foster carers views and support.

7.8 The Mentoring Scheme

7.8.1 As at 31 March 2019 the fostering service had 6 foster carer mentors who specialise in specific areas such as care of teenagers, short term care for younger children, and long-term care. All newly approved foster carers are allocated a mentor at the time of approval and existing foster carers are able to access the scheme during challenging times or if they require additional support.

7.9 Out of hours service

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

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

7.10 The Foster Carers Association

7.10.1 The Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association is run by foster carers and provides local support and social activities for foster carers. The council actively encourages and supports the Association and provides financial support and services in kind to assist with producing and circulating a quarterly newsletter. During this financial year the Foster Carers Association organized a variety of events which included an Easter Egg Hunt, Picnic in the Park, Wickstead Park and BBQ, a Halloween Disco and a Christmas Party with Disco.

7.11 Fostering Network and BAAF membership

7.11.1 The Fostering Service is a corporate member of Fostering Network that
works to promote fostering in the UK. All approved foster carers are provided with individual membership, funded by the Fostering Service. The Fostering Service also spot purchases Fostering Network’s advice and mediation service for foster carers, as and when required.

7.12 Sons and daughters

7.12.1 The Fostering Service run holiday activities for sons and daughters of foster carers which are activity-based but also aimed to support them with the impact of fostering on their family. This year 3 events took place, these included horseriding (6 children attended), the Pantomime (16 children and 2 adults attended) and a visit to the Forest school (8 children attended).

Section 8

Notifications

8.1.1 The Fostering Service has to notify Ofsted (Schedule 7) of any significant events, accidents or incidents that occur for children whilst placed in foster care.

8.1.2 Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 there were no notifications required compared to 3 in the previous year.

Section 9

Allegations

9.1.1 Allegations against foster carers are dealt with in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB), procedures for managing allegations/concerns about foster carers. All foster carers, subject to any allegation are offered independent support from the Fostering Network’s Advice and Mediation Service.

9.1.2 Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, there were 8 allegations made against foster carers (compared to 2 in the previous year). They were all referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (L.A.D.O), and all were deemed as NFA (no further action). Whilst the number of allegations made is significantly higher than in previous years there is no evidence to suggest any of these carers were not effectively protecting and supporting children in their care.
Section 10

Complaints

10.1.1 The Fostering Service uses the Children’s Services Complaints Procedure for dealing with and monitoring complaints by foster carers, birth parents and relatives, staff and other partners with a relevant interest in the way CBC fostering services are provided.

10.1.2 Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 there was only 1 complaint made by foster carers on behalf of a young persons regarding their stay in respite. This was partially upheld and action was taken to address the areas of the complaint that were upheld.

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

Section 11

Compliments

11.1.1 Compliments about service delivery from customers and for their representatives are recorded within the service as these, alongside complaints and comments, can be shared to promote learning and make improvements.

11.1.2 Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 the Fostering Service received 25 compliments which is a significant increase on the 7 received in the previous year. These complements were from foster carers either about the support they have received or about services provided. Examples of some of the compliments are outlined below:

- 1 newly approved foster carer wrote about her assessing social worker ‘I have every faith, you have it in your hands…. We will always be grateful you were our assessing social worker. We think and speak highly of you. If you ever question why you do the job you do….. take it from us you do it perfectly and you will have helped us make what I hope will be one of the best family journeys we will ever do.'
• Another newly approved foster carer praised their assessing social worker for her ‘first rate’ professionalism, for making the assessment process very easy and clear, challenging but supportive’. The carer felt this worker was a great ambassador for the fostering service.

• Another foster carer attending fostering panel for her annual review stated that ‘the success of the placement had been on no small part due to the support of the supervising social worker and childcare social worker’. Panel felt this positive support enabled the carer to really grow as foster carers.

• Another foster carer complemented the service on the fostering conference provided which was facilitated by a young man who had been through the care system. The carer stated ‘the course was excellent, informative and gave us a different perspective on many things that we as foster carers witness and deal with on a daily basis. It was very direct and hard hitting and gave a very emotional account of their experiences to date. The course is without doubt the best we have attended with Central Bedfordshire and we both feel that all professionals involved in the whole process would benefit from attending such a course as part of their training plan’.

Section 12

Conclusion

12.1.1 In conclusion it has been a very busy year for the fostering service with the introduction of many new schemes/innovations/procedures.

This year the service has been part of a peer review and Ofsted focus visit. Very positive feedback was received from both these visits which noted the excellent direct work with children and families, appropriate and timely planning, good management oversight and placement stability.

The service implemented a procedure for looked after childrens savings which now means that all children in care whether in-house or in IFA/residential placements will have regular savings made that they can then access to support them as they move into independence.

A review of the fostering enquiry process was also undertaken in order to improve the customer experience and ensure that the correct information is
collated in a timely manner.

The service developed an in-house Parent and Child fostering scheme during this year due to the increasing demand for such placements.

Another initiative introduced in this financial year was the interest free loans scheme for foster carers allowing them to extend/adapt their property in order to be able to offer permanence or care for more children.

This was the first time in 5 years that the Fostering Services did not meet its recruitment target for career carers. This may have been because the target increased by 50% this year or because nationally it is getting harder and harder to recruit foster carers. The service worked extremely hard to try to achieve this new target and up until the end of the third quarter it looked like this might be achievable. There were, however, a significant number of assessments during this time that ceased and it became clear this target would not be met. 11 career carers were, however, recruited during the year which provided a net increase of 4 in the overall number of fostering households approved.

The % of children placed in house has also decreased from 61% at the end of March 2018 to 56% at the end of March 2019, however the stability of placements for those children placed significantly increased.

Short term placement stability has improved from 7.1% (low is good) at the end of March 2018 to 6.2% at the end of March 2019 and long term placement stability has improved from 75.6% (high is good) at the end of March 2018 to 84.8% at the end of March 2019. Both these figures far exceed the targets set and compare very favourably with our statistical neighbours and the national average.

Other indicators of placement stability include the fact that no notifications have had to be made to Ofsted regarding any events/significant incidents and that only 1 complaints was received regarding the service. Whilst there have been 8 allegations made against foster carers during the year, all were investigated appropriately and none were substantiated. The service also received a 72% increase in the number of compliments received this year which also indicates that foster carers are happy with the service received which all contributes to the stability of carers and placements for our looked after children.

The number of available training courses foster carers could attend
increased this year by 39% (from 49 to 74) with the number of carers attending training also increasing this year by 34% (from 484 to 742). More foster carers are therefore developing their skills and knowledge which means they are in a better position to support the children in their care which also has a positive impact on placement stability.

The fostering service has experienced a number of staff changes this year and although most posts have now been recruited to, the changes in staffing have had an impact on foster carers who rely on the close working relationship they have with their supervising social workers. Staff recruited recently are now working hard to develop good working relationships with their foster carers to ensure they feel valued and supported and can continue to foster for CBC for the foreseeable future.

Whilst our current in-house foster carers are doing a fantastic job in the support and care they are providing there is an urgent need for the fostering service to recruit more foster carers. It is nationally accepted that there is a ‘crisis’ in foster care, this is according to the recent Independent Review of Foster Care (DoH 2018) because since 2014 the number of children in foster care has risen by 6%, however, over the same period there has been a 4% drop in the number of approved fostering households. Ofsted figures for 2017/18 evidences a steady ‘downward trend of available and suitable foster carers in England’. This means that the council are having to work even harder to recruit carers just to break-even. Whilst the fostering service has a robust marketing, recruitment and retention strategy in place there is a need to transform the fostering offer in order to recruit more foster carers not just to break-even but to significantly increase its number of in-house foster carers.

12.1.2 Next Steps

In terms of the forthcoming year the services main priority will be on trying to address the shortage of in-house foster carers. CBC have recognized the impact of the ‘national crisis’ in foster care and a 2 year transformation plan is being put forward which has highlighted a number of creative ways in which CBC can help the fostering service increase its number of in-house foster carers and retain the experienced and valued carers already fostering for CBC.
This Report has been composed and presented for members to consider and note by:

Annie Craig
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This information can be made available in Large print and in other languages if required

Produced by Central Bedfordshire Council, Fostering Team
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/fostering
APPENDIX 2

ANNUAL REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE FOSTERING AND PERMANENCE PANEL

1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019

Introduction

This report covers the year from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019. We have held twelve panels this year, five less than last year, which on average has meant one per month. Panel has generally remained stable in its membership, with two new members and one long term absence through sickness.

Panel Membership

Panel has continued to be chaired by Suzannah Robinson, a qualified Social Worker, with experience in Fostering, Adoption, Child Protection, Looked after Children and Residential Care. She is currently employed part time by another Local Authority as an Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference Chair, and also sits as Chair of Northamptonshire County Council Fostering Panel. During the year, she has resigned as a Panel Member for the shared Adoption Panel hosted by CBC and an IFA Fostering Panel. She is independent of Central Bedfordshire Council.

Fostering Regulations require that Panel runs with a minimum of five members including the Chair or vice-chair and a social worker with a minimum of three years’ experience in order to be quorate. CBC Panel runs with a preference of six members where possible, to ensure that panel can still run in the event of any conflicts of interest or unexpected absences. CBC has two vice-chairs, both of whom are independent Social Workers. Unlike last year, we have been unable to ensure that one of the vice-chairs has been present at each panel, to ensure that panel is able to go ahead if the Chair is unexpectedly unavailable or discovers a conflict of interest, because one of the Vice-Chairs (Lyn Peachy) has been unable to attend panel at all this year, due to illness. The other Vice-Chair (Lynn Busby) has chaired one case this year, because of a conflict of interest with the Chair. Usually the Vice-Chair would expect to chair more often, but until recently, the Chair has been able to observe Lynn Busby chairing an IFA Panel, which has been helpful for her appraisal. Going forward, the Vice-Chairs will be asked to chair occasional cases while the Panel Chair is present, to enable her and the Panel Advisor to observe their practice.
Panel continues to have a central list of Members from which attendees are drawn. This list currently comprises of the following:

**Independent Members:**

- **Vice Chair:** Social Worker – Reviewing Officer, Independent Social Worker, Chair of two IFA Panels.
- **Vice-Chair:** Independent Social Worker (currently on long term sick leave).
- **Social Worker, recently retired from front line Social Work.**
- **Educational Psychologist, Former Foster Carer for IFA**
- **Social Worker and trainer, previously Reviewing Officer, Panel Member for other LAs and Connected Person carer for Granddaughter**
- **Foster Carer for IFA, Panel Chair for another LA**
- **Adoptive parent and Magistrate**
- **Foster Carer for another Local Authority, Panel Member for an IFA**
- **Retired Health Visitor / School Nurse**
- **Previously fostered and adopted child, grew up in a fostering household, now a Social Worker (previously a CAFCASS Guardian)**
- **Adoptive parent and foster carer with same sex partner, teacher, panel member for another LA.**

**CBC Members**

**Elected Council Member, experience of children with disabilities**

**Social Worker – Children with Disabilities team (currently on maternity leave)**

During the year, we have had one resignation. Our Teacher has moved out of the area and has made the decision to resign. She took with her a wealth of experience of working with children and families in the Gypsy and Traveller community but had delivered panel training in this area before she left.

It is important that the composition of the Panel reflects as far as possible the diversity of the wider local community. At this stage, Panel Members range in age from 38 to 70, include both genders and come from a variety of heritage and ethnic backgrounds. We have a member who was Looked After as a child, one who looks after a child as a Connected Person, and several who are foster carers and adopters, one of whom parents in a same sex partnership. We have a parent of a child with disabilities but would like to recruit a panel member with disabilities, to enhance our understanding of the challenges of living with a disability, either as a foster carer or as a child.
Panel Members have shown a varied commitment to attending Panels, depending on their availability and other commitments. As Panel dates are set for the year ahead, all Panel Members are able to indicate their availability in advance and commit to as many Panels as they feel they can manage. Once committed to panel, Panel Members rarely withdraw, but on the odd occasion that they do, they always gave us enough notice to arrange for another member to sit instead. We have had very few conflicts of interest this year, and these have been known about in advance so panel can still go ahead.

Because of the volume of work, Panel Members have to allow several hours of reading for each Panel, and all come well prepared. It is clear that all reports are always read, as Panel Members come with a good level of understanding of the issues, and always with areas they require further clarification on.

**Panel Adviser**

Panel has a permanent Panel Adviser, which has ensured stability and consistency throughout the panel process.

The role of Panel Adviser, although not statutory, is crucial to the functioning of the Panel. The Panel Adviser spends a considerable amount of time ensuring that all paperwork is ready for Panel, available on time and complies with regulations and good practice guidelines. On a significant number of cases, the Panel Adviser will return paperwork to the Social Worker for clarification and will not book it in to panel until she is satisfied that all the required information is available. This ensures that Panel is able to make a fully informed recommendation, without needing to seek further information from the Social Worker or Applicant/Carer. Applicants/Carers need to be confident that Panel will not become a re-assessment process, so it is essential that the Panel Adviser role is fully supported within the Service to enable the quality of paperwork provided to panel to be as high as possible. This enabled Panel Members to focus on questions which provide evidence of the Applicants’/Carers’ level of understanding and insight, rather than factual details.

The Panel Adviser is the link between the Panel Chair, Panel Members and the Fostering Team and is available at Panel to give advice as needed. The Panel Adviser also takes back issues raised by Panel to the Practice Manager, and co-ordinates the responses to those issues.

During panel meetings, the Panel Adviser guides and advises us about panel processes, especially if matters become complicated. She is particularly clear about the remit of panel, and our responsibilities to both the Carers and the Agency.
Panel Administration

During this period, Panel has continued to be supported by two Panel secretaries. The quality of this support remains consistently high. These secretaries are shared with Adoption Panel so have to support between two and four Panels a month. The volume of work is significant, but timescales and deadlines are always achieved. As part of the panel preparation, the Panel secretary, in discussion with the Panel Adviser, draws up an agenda and sends out invitations to all those attending. Reports are available to Panel Members without fail eight working days before every Panel, minutes are swiftly produced and are of a very high standard, appraisals are booked in and organised efficiently, and any additional requests for help or information are responded to very quickly.

Panel tasks

The Fostering and Permanence Panel’s primary legal function is to make recommendations about the approval of Foster Carers including first reviews, subsequent reviews (which take place every three years), changes of approvals and reviews following allegations or complaints, as well as matches of children on a permanent basis to Foster Carers. The Local Authority must ensure that all prospective Foster Carers are considered by Panel before approval and placing children. The only exceptions to this process for approving people as Foster Carers are in relation to connected persons, when a Local Authority can place a child with a relative, friend or other person connected to a child for up to sixteen weeks without referring it to a Fostering Panel, and a Local Authority can grant temporary approval as a Foster Carer to a prospective adopter for a named child. (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.)

At the 12 Panels held during this period, the following was achieved:

53 cases were presented in total, a breakdown of this figure is as follows:-

13 were presented for approval to include;

- 11 new households were recommended and agreed by the ADM as approved Foster carers, of these 1 was re-approved as a single carer
- 2 approvals were Family and Friends carers

33 were annual reviews to include:

- 2 were first annual reviews approved with a change
- 19 were subsequent annual reviews approved with no change
- 11 were subsequent annual reviews approved with a change
- 1 was an annual review following a complaint, allegation or concern

1 was an extension of temporary approval.
6 children were matched to their permanent foster carers, 4 of which formed two sibling groups.

In addition, 7 variations of approval were acknowledged.

There were 8 terminations / resignations acknowledged.

As mentioned earlier, a crucial role of Panel is to quality assure the work of the department, in order to contribute to raising the standards of practice throughout fostering in Central Bedfordshire. For all cases presented to Panel, feedback is given on the quality of the paperwork, and the verbal presentation of the Social Worker(s) and the Foster Carer(s). Panel will always take into account the fact that many new Applicants, Foster Carers and indeed some Social Workers find Panel daunting so these nerves are always taken into consideration when giving feedback. In addition, agency advice is given about any tasks that are outstanding, most often unannounced visits or outstanding professional feedback, any specific training needs identified, or any matching requirements.

Although in the majority of cases, Panel supports the recommendation of the Social Worker and Reviewing Officer, there have again been occasions when Panel has not reached a unanimous conclusion. All Panel Members’ views are given due weight, and a majority decision is reached. In this event, the Foster Carers and Social Workers are advised that the recommendation was not a unanimous one, along with the reasons, so they can be prepared for any issues that may be raised by the ADM as a result of this. As always, if a majority recommendation is reached rather than a unanimous one, clear reasons for dissent are given, to enable the ADM to be clear about the views of all Panel Members.

Alongside the number of challenges to practice, on six occasions this year, Panel has made a recommendation that is not in agreement with that made by the Social Worker or Reviewing Officer.

In one case, the case was presented as approval as a single carer, as there were issues about the male partner in the couple. However, as it became clear from reading the reports in advance of panel that the male partner would be contributing to the care of the children, panel reached a view that they should be presented as a couple, so the reports were amended accordingly before panel.

Another family were presented following allegations having been made and as a result of a proposed significant change in circumstances. The Social Worker was seeking an increase in numbers, but Panel did not agree with this and recommended an updated assessment be
presented to panel before any further children were placed. These Foster Carers were unhappy about this and made a complaint. In the course of this complaint being considered, the male Foster Carer who was the main carer decided that he would no longer be returning to work (which had been the significant change in circumstances), so as Panel Chair, I agreed that Panel could support continued approval, but for two children, not the three as requested.

In another case, a single Carer had been previously approved for a specific age group stating she didn’t want a child the same age as her daughter. She then was offered and accepted such a placement soon after approval. As this was going well, her terms of approval were changed but then the placement broke down in April 2017. The Carer’s own daughter was suffering from anxiety as a result of the impact of fostering. The Carer returned to panel following her review in December 2017 and there was a split in the recommendations at panel with the recommendation then being to no longer support approval. This was overturned by the ADM, who decided she should be approved for respite care only. In November 2018 the same young person whose placement had previously broken down was placed back with this Carer and panel have seen two variations for her as the Carer remains only approved for respite and emergency. Panel can only note that we have read the variation forms and make any comments as we see fit. Panel members were very concerned to read that the same concerns were again happening. Panel members had been clear before that they did not feel that this carer’s circumstances and own family situation were suitable for fostering, and that she was not considering her own daughter’s needs above her own need to foster. We understood that she felt that she wanted to help the young person but were also very concerned that she had said herself that she had felt that she had no choice but to take this young person back. Panel has requested that the next annual review comes to panel, given she is currently fostering outside of her approval terms, but have not yet received it.

In two cases, the Assessing Social Worker was requesting carers be approved for two children, but panel felt that at that stage, they had only evidenced the capacity to meet the needs of one child. In one of these families, the concerns were about the high level of need already being managed with two birth children. However, two children were placed with them soon after approval, and panel was challenged about the reason for making the recommendation for only one child. All panel members responded clearly with their reasons, but we understand the two children have remained there, so panel is waiting for review paperwork to enable us to consider whether a change of approval is now appropriate.

In one further case, the carers were seeking to add Long Term to their approval terms, but panel felt there was no evidence in the reports of their understanding of the implications of
long term fostering, and evidence of their ability to provide a permanent placement for a child.

There is further evidence of the quality assurance function of the Panel in the number of cases that are withdrawn from Panel or deferred prior to being listed by the Panel Adviser. The level of scrutiny by the Panel Adviser ensures that the standards expected by Panel, and therefore by the Local Authority, are driven up as Social Workers have to meet those higher standards before a case can be placed on the agenda.

The value of the Panel Adviser has been clear this year, as the difference in the quality of reports that came to panel whilst our Panel Adviser was off sick was marked. In addition, the Panel Adviser has been working on and promoting a clear checklist of reports needed for panel, and this had come into effect prior to her sick leave so we were starting to see a significant reduction in the volume of reports filed for panel members to read. However, whilst our Panel Adviser was off sick, the number of reports filed went up again significantly, sometimes to up to thirty-six documents for an approval.

Panel Members continue to feel confident in robustly challenging information they are given, both in their questions to Applicants and Carers and their Social Workers, and in their recommendations. Panel Members are encouraged to contribute to the summary of strengths, and always provide reasons for their recommendation. All are confident in their ability to be the sole voice of dissent if necessary.

**PACE**

Panel has recommended for approval two PACE carers this year and are looking forward to hearing about their first years.

**Panel process**

Panel has continued to use a Panel Member Profile folder. Prior to Panel starting, the Panel Adviser prepares the folder by removing the profile of anyone not sitting on Panel that day, and this is given to applicants while they wait. These profiles include a photograph and brief summary of experience of each Panel Member, so the Applicant/Carer is better prepared for coming in to Panel.

Each case begins with a discussion amongst Panel Members about areas they need further clarification on. To reduce anxiety felt by Carers, when possible, the Chair very briefly meets with the applicants before discussion starts, to explain the process and give them an approximate timescale for them joining the panel meeting.
The Chair compiles and allocates a list of questions from the panel discussion then goes out again and has a brief discussion with the Carers and their Social Worker, if she has not already done so, or if she has, goes out to fetch in either just the Social Worker, or the Social Worker and Applicants/Carers. Occasionally, the Social Worker(s) come in to Panel first to address any confidential or practice issues. Otherwise, it is general practice for Applicants/Foster Carers and their Social Worker to come in to Panel together and respond to questions between them. The Carers and Social Worker/s then leave Panel while a discussion takes place and a recommendation agreed.

As a result of one case above, Panel has now changed the process for notifying Carers of the recommendation, as we now bring them back in to panel to hear this. Each panel member is expected to give a reason for their recommendation. This was changed to ensure that Carers and Social Workers leave with a clear understanding of the recommendation and allows scrutiny of the information previously given by the Chair on her own, to ensure the correct and detailed recommendation is given.

The Carers and Social Workers are then asked to complete feedback forms prior to leaving. As most people do complete them, the response rate has been good. It also means that feedback relevant to that panel is received that day, rather than feedback being read out to Panel Members who may not have been in attendance at that panel.

Quality assurance

The Panel has independent oversight of all aspects of the Fostering service and has a responsibility to provide the Local Authority with feedback on the quality of the work undertaken. The Panel Adviser collates feedback after each case is heard and will then email this to the relevant social workers copying in their manager so it can be discussed in supervision. Any wider practice issues are recorded on a spreadsheet by the Panel Adviser who will then raise them with relevant Managers and where appropriate feedback at a later panel any actions and outcomes.

Feedback responses received from Carers and Social Workers have continued to be positive. Comments from foster carers reflect a consistent view of Panel as being welcoming and friendly whilst remaining professional. None made specific suggestions for change.

Other Panel Business

It is important that Panel is kept abreast of changes within the Fostering team, and with fostering on a local and national level. The Panel Adviser provides regular feedback to Panel regarding staff, policy and process changes within the agency. The agency Practice manager
has attended Panel twice this year to provide detailed information about areas of change within the department. The ADM has attended Panel once as an observer and fed back her views about the functioning of panel which were positive.

We also share any learning from the Fostering Network Panel Chairs Forums (we have three members as two other Panel Members chair other panels) and from any other training Panel Members have attended.

The Panel Adviser and Chair ensure that all Panel Members are kept abreast of latest research and national issues by sending out information as and when it is available. A resource folder is available to panel members and any research or articles of interest can be added. Panel members currently have articles and latest research on Compassion Fatigue in Foster Carers (University of Bristol); CoramBaaf – Decisions about assessing couples and other partnerships in foster care; several recent Serious Case Reviews; Attachment and Trauma – Emotional Wellbeing for Children in care; PACE fostering; Parent and Child Fostering; Financial Guidance for Foster Carers; Islamic Adoption and Fostering Guide; National Minimum Standards for Fostering; Data Protection Guidelines; Gypsy and Traveller research; Intensive Support Fostering Scheme; and Moving Children on to Adoption – a Foster carer’s view.

Post-panel

The Panel Secretary who attends Panel provides a draft set of minutes two days (sometimes one day) after Panel. These are checked and agreed by the Panel Adviser and Chair and are then distributed to all Panel Members via their Box account. It is the expectation that all Panel Members who attended that Panel will respond within the deadline given, usually either one or two days. If a Panel Member is consistently not responding, this is addressed within their appraisal. Especially during the holiday period, Panel Members are expected to consider whether they will be available to check the minutes when they agree to the dates they can attend Panel.

These minutes are then sent to the ADM, along with all other reports.

After panel, all documents relating to that Panel are deleted from Box accounts by the Panel Secretaries. At this stage, it is the responsibility of all Panel members to delete any notes they may have made in other applications.

Appraisals

All Panel Members, including the Chair, have an annual appraisal. For Panel Members these are undertaken by the Chair and Panel Adviser. Appraisals are organised where possible after Panels to limit the additional costs of attendance.
Appraisals are the Panel Member’s opportunity to give and receive feedback about their role and about the functioning of the Panel generally. Any suggestions and ideas are welcomed as Panel is an ever-evolving process as legislation, guidance and good practice change. It is the appropriate time for any training needs to be identified, either because of a gap in the Panel member’s skills or knowledge, or to develop a particular interest which can then be shared with the rest of Panel. The change in process for telling Carers the recommendation came directly from discussions during appraisals.

**Panel training**

There has been one full day’s training this year, attended by Panel Members and the Fostering team. This focussed on:

- Attachment, Trauma and Recovery
- Experiences of Care from Children in Care Council.

Feedback from the training was that it was well received and thought to be helpful.

In addition, Panel Members do have access to the online training programmes available to staff and carers and I am aware of at least one Panel Member who has undertaken several online courses and found them to be helpful.

The Chair and one of the Vice-Chairs attend the Fostering Network Panel Chair’s forum when possible. These are very helpful in terms of keeping up to date with national issues, practices and legislation, as well as seeking advice and guidance from other Chairs based on their experiences. The Panel Adviser networks with other Panel Advisers which provides an opportunity to share practice, seek advice and learn from each other about any issues that do, and will, impact on fostering.

**Communication with agency**

This year there have been two meetings between the Panel Chair, Vice Chair, Panel Advisor, Practice Manager and ADM. These have been useful opportunities to discuss process and practice issues, changes within the service, feedback and learning, both for panel and the agency.

**Progress of previous Areas for development**

Continued efforts to ensure that Panel Members reflect the diversity of the community
As noted above, we have recruited two new panel members, both of whom bring a different and very valuable perspective to panel discussions. We would like to increase our ethnic diversity, as well as recruit a panel member with disabilities, and another Connected Persons carer, given the number of these type of Carers we are considering, so Panel will continue to focus recruitment accordingly.

More formally record whether an application to foster has been undertaken within expected timescales. Although we do this informally, we do not always record and track this formally, so need to establish a system for doing this.

Continue to track the effectiveness of Panel, by recording advice to agency, and noting when advice has or has not been taken up. This is now well established by the Panel Adviser, as a way of evidencing the Panel’s effectiveness in raising practice standards within the Local Authority.

Consider establishing meetings / discussion between the Panel Chair, Panel Adviser and Fostering Reviewing Officer, to share practice issues and areas for development within the quality assurance process as both are part of the same process. This has not been established.

**Future Areas for development**

We will continue to keep our practices and processes under review and develop best practice both in our own work and in that of Children’s Services.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all Panel Members, the Panel Adviser and the Panel Administrators for their commitment to ensuring that the most vulnerable children in our care are provided with the highest quality foster care.

Suzannah Robinson
April 2019
Recruitment and retention strategy

Fostering Service
1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020
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1) Introduction
The Ofsted Fostering in England 2017 – 18 report states that nationally, the slow decline in the total number of approved fostering households continued with a further 1% decrease from the previous year. The number of children in foster care increased meaning there were fewer places vacant for children who needed a foster placement. Recruitment of foster carers was also a national challenge with a decrease of approved foster carers by 1%.

Although this year has been challenging the service has continued to recruit a good, steady number of foster carers. Going forward the service will build on the robust recruitment strategy with creative ideas of how to recruit further foster carers to meet the current need of children being looked after by the Local Authority.

2) Needs analysis and evaluation

2.1) Current picture
Insights were gained using Experian Mosaic data in order to gain a picture of the characteristics of our current cohort of foster carers to aid the forthcoming years recruitment. The following is a brief outline of the findings:

2.1a) Where do foster carers live?
As with previous years, the data confirmed that foster carers continue to live across Central Bedfordshire, in all major towns as well as some of the more rural areas with a proportion of carers living outside of the boarders of Central Bedfordshire.

2.1.b) Characteristics of Central Bedfordshire foster carers
Using the Experian Mosaic data, the Service was able to look at the characteristics of foster carer households. The outcome of this area of research showed that Central Bedfordshire foster carers are from a range of households with a high percentage being:

- New families
- Established families
- Thriving families
- Mature suburban owners
- Rural value homeowners
• Those who are in comfortable retirement.

The two biggest groups were:
• Mature suburban owners
  18% are older families, some with adult children living at home. They are affluent and tend to have lived at their current address for a long time.

• New families
  16% are young couples and families living in new build households. This will include families with young children. This is the biggest household group in Central Bedfordshire.

As with the overall Central Bedfordshire population, the data showed that foster carers were more likely to come from the affluent groups, and less likely to come from more deprived groups.

2.2) Looked after children
At the end of the last strategy (31st March 2018) the percentage of in house foster placements compared to those with independent foster carers had decreased with 56% of children being placed with in house foster carers. It’s important to reflect that although the percentage has decreased, this is not because the fostering service are offering fewer placements but because the number of children coming into foster care increased from 211 in March 2017 to 232 by March 2019 (an increase of 21 children). As at 31st March 2019 the figures for looked after children in Central Bedfordshire were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of looked after children</th>
<th>320</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of foster care placements</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of in house foster placements</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of independent fostering agency placements</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To enable the service to recruit the foster carers required, a breakdown of referrals for placements for looked after children was analysed. The analysis focused on all placements including short term placements of children by the Emergency Duty Team and also includes children who have moved placements. The figures below do not include those children placed outside of their family and friends’ network and accordingly both family and friends and Regulation 24 placements were excluded from the below analysis.

New referrals placed with in house foster carers:
75 children were placed with in house foster carers which were:
- 27 x aged between 0 – 2 years (White British, White/Black British, White British/Indian Ghanaian, White Romany)
- 9 x aged between 3 – 5 years (White British, White Romany)
- 13 x aged between 6 – 10 years (White British, White Romany)
- 5 x 11 – 15 years (White British, Ethiopian, Afghani)
- 7 x 16 years plus (White British, Ethiopian, Sudanese)
- 2 x parent and child (White British, Romanian).
From the total figure of children placed with in house carers, a proportion of children were those who were placed with in house foster carers in an emergency by the Emergency Duty Team, they were:

- 1 x aged 0 – 2 years (Black British)
- 1 x aged 3 – 5 years (White British)
- 3 x aged 6 – 10 years (Black British, Ugandan)
- 6 x aged between 11 – 15 years (Black African, Romanian, Eritrean, some ethnicities were unknown as the children were placed from another Local Authority)
- 1 x 16 years plus (Black African).

New referrals placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA):
22 children were placed with IFA carers, they were:

- 1 x aged 0 – 2 years (White British)
- 1 x aged 3 – 5 years (White Irish)
- 2 x aged 6 – 10 years (White British)
- 10 x aged 11 – 15 years (White British, Sudanese)
- 2 x aged 16 years plus (White British, Eritrean)
- 3 x parent and child (White British).

From the total figure of children placed with IFA carers, a proportion of children were those who were placed with IFA carers in an emergency by the Emergency Duty Team, they were:

- 2 x aged 0 – 2 years (White Irish)
- 1 x aged 3 – 5 years (White Irish).

The reasons for the above external placements were:

- Placed with siblings
- No in-house options available
- Young person placed in remand.

During this time, 16 placements were brought back in house to Central Bedfordshire from an IFA through planned moves to Central Bedfordshire foster carers, being placed with family and friends or Regulation 24 carers or where independent foster carers transferred to Central Bedfordshire with Central Bedfordshire children in placement.

Another important factor to consider is the number of regular respite placements during this time. Regular respite placements were provided on 179 occasions, compared to 102 in the previous year. This is a significant increase of 75%. In addition, adhoc respite was provided on 78 occasions, compared to 79 in the previous year.

From our findings, it is evident that the following areas are in need of active recruitment this year (further information on our current need can be found in section four of this report).

- Fostering households for sibling groups
- Fostering households for older children (10 years plus)
- Fostering households for Parent and child
- Fostering households for respite
- Fostering households for intensive support fostering.
2.3) Evaluation of recruitment activity in 2018 – 2019

2.3a) Recruitment target

The service’s recruitment target for career carers was increased by 50% from 10 to 15 approvals for 2018 - 2019. This target was challenging, particularly given the national shortage of foster carers. The service did not reach this target however, successfully recruited 11 households which were:
   - 9 career foster carers offering a range of short term, long term and respite
   - 2 PACE (police and criminal evidence act) foster carers.

There was also an additional approval of 2 supported lodgings households.

2.3b) Conversion

The following shows the progress of this year’s cohort of initial contacts so far (as we progress through their applications these figures may change as some are still in the early stages of their enquiry).

The results show that there was an 18% increase in the number of people contacting the service to find out more about fostering, an 18% increase in the number of initial visits, but shows a 7% decrease in the number of application forms returned and those who went forward to assessment. The decrease in the number of those who went forward to assessment reflects the findings of the Ofsted Fostering in England 2017 – 18 report regarding a national concern of the reduction in the number of approved foster carers. The service will work to further review the findings and improve the customer journey from enquiry to application, ensuring that the information provided at enquiry stage is consistent and applicants are responded to in a timely manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April 2018 – March 2019</th>
<th>Comparison; figures for 2017 - 18</th>
<th>Comparison; increase / decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial contact for information regarding fostering</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of the initial enquiry form</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went forward for initial visit</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application forms sent to prospective foster carers</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application forms returned</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number that went forward to assessment</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of assessments that cancelled out</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons why those assessments were cancelled out:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Medical reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work commitments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applicant withdrew as felt it was not the right time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changed mind due to distance of Central Bedfordshire in relation to where they reside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No reply from applicant to correspondence and attempted contact form the Service to begin the assessment
- Financial reasons
- Applicant withdrew as they did not agree with the findings of the initial visit report
- Applicant concerned about allegations
- Service concerns re: applicants’ response regarding their dogs, requirements regarding paperwork and the number of visits required
- Applicant withdrew as they would like to be more financially secure before proceeding to assessment
- Applicant requested to be put on hold as son was due to move out shortly
- Applicant decided to stay with their current IFA as they had a new placement.

Conversion of enquiries remained stable with good conversion rates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversion for 2018 - 2019</th>
<th>Comparison; figures for 2017 - 18</th>
<th>Comparison; increase / decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial contact to enquiry</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiry to initial visit</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiry form to return of application form</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiry form to being allocated a social worker and beginning the fostering assessment</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the last strategy (31st March 2018) the average journey time of a prospective foster carer to approval was 176 days. The service saw an improvement with the journey time this year as at 31st March 2019 the average journey time was 172 days, this remains under the national average of 180 days.

2.3c) Evaluation of activities in 2018 – 2019

The Experian Mosaic data (used as part of the foster carer characteristics) also provided information about how our current cohort of foster carers prefer to receive information. In general email is preferred by about 60% of people, and a similar proportion access Facebook every day. Just 15% of people prefer traditional post and 23% of people prefer Twitter. Around 70% of people access the internet several times a day.
The table below shows the communication preferences for the groups identified in our current cohort of foster carers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experian Mosaic group</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Internet use</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average usage</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well off rural homeowners</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established families</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thriving families</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature suburban owners</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable retirement</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural value homeowners</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New families</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value homeowners</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting families</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged urban renters</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above research was reflected in our evaluation of marketing activity that took place and in forward planning for the year ahead.

2.3d) Enquiries and marketing activities

Last year there were a total of 462 initial contacts for information regarding fostering. Compared with the previous year’s figure of 393 which means there was an 18% increase in initial contacts.

As in previous years, there was a large range of marketing activity that encouraged members of the public to get in touch to find out more about fostering which is shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enquiry source</th>
<th>Total enquiries</th>
<th>Enquiry source</th>
<th>Total enquiries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net Natives Facebook advert</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>Website through word of mouth; foster carer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Website through school they work in</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook advert; PACE</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Website through gov.uk website</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website through google search</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Website; works for CBC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook advert; Stacey’s video</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Website through internet search</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFA transfer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Google dynamic words</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email; no marketing stated</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Instagram; Central Beds re: parent and child</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website through word of mouth</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lamppost banners; Leighton Buzzard</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamppost banners; Biggleswade</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lamppost banners; Dunstable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook advert; teenagers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Word of mouth; staff</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook advert; respite</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Word of mouth; friends who foster</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No marketing stated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Word of mouth; relative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google search</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Word of mouth CBC housing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Word of mouth; Bedford Borough</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth; foster carer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Word of mouth; Hertfordshire Council</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website through Facebook</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Word of mouth; Rainbow Fostering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online search; site not specified</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>LA transfer; Luton</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook advert; parent and child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>LA transfer; Milton Keynes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebulletin; parent and child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ebulletin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster; location not stated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Newsletter; Central Essentials</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information stand; Bletsoe Village Fete</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sign in town; location not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook advert; siblings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Poster in town; location not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart radio advert</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Poster in Bedford; location not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio advert</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leaflet drop to home</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus advert</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Advert; The Oracle</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roundabout signs in Flitwick</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Advert re parent and child; location not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamppost banner; location not specified</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Local paper; publication not stated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth; not stated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Telephone call; no marketing stated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA transfer; authority not stated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Email re parent and child; no marketing stated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email article re respite; sent to CBC school staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Works for Central Bedfordshire Council</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website re: PACE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3) Developments, success and areas of celebration within the service

#### 3.1) Looked after children’s savings

The service successfully implemented the procedure of looked after children’s savings being taken from source from 1st April 2018. Taking looked after children’s savings directly from source will mean that all Central Bedfordshire children have savings made for them so that when they leave care, they have a lump sum to support them to independence.

#### 3.2) Introduction of loan scheme

The service set the objectives to increase the number of Central Bedfordshire foster carers vs independent fostering agencies and to increase Central Bedfordshire’s ability to place looked after children with in house foster carers.
Part of this included the introduction of an interest free loan to Central Bedfordshire foster carers to support the cost of building works to extend their properties and extend their fostering placement offer. The scheme was approved by Executives on 5th February 2019 with an initial budget of £100,000. The service will work to promote and implement the scheme this year.

3.3) Parent and child fostering scheme
The parent and child fostering scheme was launched in April 2018 by:

- Production of new literature including two leaflets
  - Parent and child fostering (a guide for prospective foster carers including information for approved foster carers on how they can register their interest in the scheme)
  - Parent and child fostering; a guide for parents
- Information sharing of new scheme and leaflet to existing foster carers
- Website amendments to include a new page regarding parent and child fostering
- Press
  - Press release to local media and community groups
  - Ebulletin to residents who have signed up to the Central Bedfordshire email alerts (sent to 12,972 recipients)
  - Internal messaging to staff through the newsletter, Staff Central
- Social media and various advertising such as
  - Posts on both fostering Facebook and the Central Bedfordshire social media channels
  - Rolling tweets on the Central Bedfordshire Twitter
  - Facebook advert.

Further work will continue to promote the scheme in 2019 – 20.

3.4) Foster carer awards
During the last year a number of foster carers were nominated for various awards such as The Fostering Network Excellence Awards, Royal Garden Parties and The BBC Three Counties People Awards. The following were successful in receiving an award:

3.4a) BBC Three Counties People Awards
This was the first year that the service had put forward nominations for the BBC Three Counties People Awards which saw the foster carers awarded the gold category of the foster carer category. A partner of a foster carer also nominated his wife who received two awards, one for her commitment to Scouting and also the bronze award in the foster carer category.
Sandra and Tim who were awarded the gold category, have looked after teenagers and larger sibling groups for 32 years, ensuring brothers and sisters stay together and they were recognised at the awards at The Grove Theatre in Dunstable on 26th September 2019. On receiving the award, they said:

"We were very surprised to get the award and collected it on behalf of all the foster carers. We had a lovely time and it was really nice to see the other award winners, the silent volunteers who do amazing things, like the lady who takes youngsters off the street back to her own home, gives them a bed and meal for the night. Breakfast in the morning and then points them in the right direction. Really amazing!"

Sandra and Tim’s film that was shown at the awards can be viewed here.

3.4b) Celebration of fostering

The inspirational commitment that foster carers show to young people in Central Bedfordshire is the focus of the annual event, Celebration of Fostering. This year saw 62 adults and 53 children in attendance at the event held at Woburn Safari Park where families come together for a luxury BBQ, entertainment, games and an awards ceremony.

Collectively the award winners celebrated 115 years of service to fostering with an additional six families being nominated for an award for going above and beyond for the children they care for.
The event continues to be valued by both foster carers and their children and receives extremely positive feedback, such as:

“I would just like to say thank you for such a lovely day today. Myself and the boys had a lovely time. I think this was the best one we’ve been to so far. We appreciate all the hard work that was put into the day and we all thoroughly enjoyed it.”

Sue B, foster carer

“Just wanted to say thank you so much for all your hard work putting together the Fostering awards. The event was lovely and we really enjoyed it. Z particularly looks forward to this event each year. In talking to him yesterday I have just found out he thinks you put the event on just for him! The point from that is how special and valued these events make our children feel. Feeding the animals worked well and as always the venue and food were high quality. Thank you for all your hard work.”

Sharon D, foster carer

“I had supervision with Alison yesterday and she was very proud to show me her gifts from the Celebration of Fostering and loved them all, especially the personalised chalk board and make up. I asked her for her feedback and she said ‘the day was brilliant and K and C loved it and said it was really good as well’.”

Aetheria H, social worker and Alison L, foster carer

“Was a lovely day for us and was great to have been recognised for the commitment that we make to do the best for the children in our care.”

Stacey and Simon, foster carers

3.4c) Royal Garden Party
Following the Celebration of Fostering, five foster carers were nominated for an invitation to attend a Royal Garden Party and the service was delighted to report that all were successfully selected at the initial stage. At the time of writing this strategy four carers had informed the service of their acceptance of the invitation and are due to attend a Royal Garden Party in May 2019.

“I’m not quite sure how we got here but Carl and I are very proud to announce that we have been officially invited to the Queen’s Garden Party on 15th May. I want to thank whoever it was who put our names forward as it’s a great honour to be recognised for what we love doing.”

Tina and Carl R, foster carers
“I'm not sure who in Fostering nominated me for the Queens Garden Party but I wanted to say a big thank you and what a great honour it will be. I got a letter today inviting me to go on 15th May. Very excited, not so much about wearing a hat but hey I guess I could for a couple of hours for the Queen!”

Sharon D, foster carer

3.5) Fostering Network project; exit interviews
Within the last strategy the service recognised the importance of the consideration of reinstating exit interviews with foster carers. This year the service was successfully selected to work on an associate basis as part of the wider project community on an exciting project being facilitated by The Fostering Network. The Foster Carer Retention Project had two research aspects, best practice in completion of exit interviews and secondly to understand the themes and reasons why foster carers leave and how fostering services can learn from this.

Part of the project included testing of the new toolkit by an independent person from the Fostering Network with Central Bedfordshire foster carers, who had de-registered within three months of the project timescale. Two Central Bedfordshire foster carers were contacted and at the time of writing this strategy the service was awaiting the findings (due in May 2019). Further work will be completed this year to analyse the results of the exit interviews, consider a way forward with implementation of exit interviews and possible use of the Fostering Network’s toolkit.

3.6) Increase of foster carer allowances
Foster carer allowances have remained at the same level for a number of years. To recognise increasing costs and the dedicated and valuable work of foster carers, the allowances were increased by 2% on 1st April 2019.

3.7) Improvements to enquiry and duty process
Within the last strategy the importance of responding to enquiries in a timely manner was recognised. With this in mind the process and timescales of prospective foster carer enquiries was reviewed with improvements to the enquiry form made in July 2018 to improve the flow of the form and the customer experience whilst ensuring the correct information is collated. A further meeting was held with fostering management to improve the timescales and process for allocation of initial visits, sending application forms and the timescales for the duty worker, social workers and managers.

3.8) Peer review
In December 2018 the service received feedback following the Peer Review that took place between 27th and 29th November 2018. They observed strong governance, strong management and a strong frontline in Central Bedfordshire. One area that stood out from the review was the impressive, articulate, informed and engaging group of young people from the Children in Care Council who shared their thoughts on the service they receive:

“They spoke positively about their foster carers, social workers, independent reviewing officers, senior managers and members. It was apparent that they felt respected by senior managers and valued for the contribution they make to service design.”
The review gave the service valuable feedback and areas for improvement to work towards a ‘great’ outcome at the next inspection.

3.9) Ofsted focussed visit
In February 2019 the service received feedback from Ofsted following the focussed visit to Central Bedfordshire’s Children’s Services. The feedback was extremely positive with notes to excellent direct work with children and families, appropriate and timely planning, good management oversight and placement stability:

“Children’s placements are stable, and children are less likely to experience frequent moves because of the support they and their carers receive.”

3.10) Placement stability
Placement stability figures have continued to improve which is a significant achievement, meaning more children are in stable placements with less moves. As at March 2019 the percentage of children who had been in care for two and a half years and in the same placement for two years had increased to 84.8%, this is a 9% increase on the previous year and is well above statistical neighbours at 70.2% and the national average of 69.8%.

The percentage of children who had three or more placements in the last year was 6.2% which was well below the target of 8%, below statistical neighbours at 12.1% and the national average of 10.5%.

This is a fantastic achievement for Central Bedfordshire and the service will work to continue the great work of placement stability for Central Bedfordshire children.

4) Target and current need for the year ahead
The target for the year ahead is to:
- Recruit 11 career households.

The focus for recruitment of fostering households will be for:
- Sibling groups
- Older children (10 years plus)
- Parent and child
- Respite
- Children with additional or complex needs and challenging behaviour through the intensive support fostering scheme.

5) Recommended marketing and recruitment plan for the year ahead
5.1) Fostering transformation
Having a robust recruitment strategy remains a priority for the service to promote fostering and recruit foster carers.
In order to support the fostering service to compete with Independent Fostering Agencies and improve the offer to foster carers, a two-year fostering transformation plan has been drafted and is currently in consultation with management for approval to consider implementation during this and the next strategy. The work of the transformation looks to introduce various initiatives to help increase Central Bedfordshire’s pool of foster carers and retain the experienced foster carers that are already approved.

5.2) Website
During 2018 – 19, areas of the fostering website were reviewed, and pages added to reflect new schemes and current need, such as:

- Parent and child fostering
- Respite
- Intensive support respite
- An updated version of the Foster Carers Charter.

Last year saw a significant increase of page views on the fostering website pages from a total of 11,363 views between April 2017 – March 2018 to 16,111 views between April 2018 – March 2019. This is a 42% increase which reflects the strategy moving from traditional advertising to more digital advertising.

The top five pages that were viewed were:

- Fostering – what is foster care for children? – 4242 views
- Fostering babies, newborns, toddlers and infants – 2078 views
- Fostering – is becoming a foster carer/foster parent for you? – 1758 views
- Foster carers support and allowances – 1643 views
- Fostering a child or fostering children -brothers and sisters – 1027 views.

This shows areas of public interest in specific areas of fostering that can be used to shape future advertising campaigns. It also shows us that there is still a large number of people interested in fostering babies and young children rather than teenagers which only had 836 views compared to the page regarding babies, toddlers and infants at 2078 views.

There was a peak in website traffic during the following months which is expected as they are popular times for people considering fostering and when a high level of marketing has taken place:

- September – 13%
- January – 12%
- May – 10%
- October – 9%.

Interestingly, when we further breakdown particular days in which there were peaks in website traffic, it is noticeable that social media posts, ebulletins, Facebook adverts and electronic newsletters have a positive impact on the number of views and are continuing to encourage people to the fostering website pages:

- 26th April 2018 – 276 views
  Social media posts re: launch of parent and child fostering
- 10th January 2019 – 156 views
  Ebulletin and Facebook share of fostering video
• 19th September 2018 – 130 views
  Article in various electronic newsletters, Facebook advert and a popular time for empty nesters to consider fostering
• 11th September 2018 – 123 views
  As above.
• 20th September 2018 – 109 views
  As above
• 6th August – 102 views
  Facebook advert re: parent and child
• 7th August – 100 views
  As above.

An important part of the website work was the use of marketing pages for various digital campaigns. The pages are used to promote particular subjects and are bespoke to each advertising campaign. This improves the enquirers journey to finding out the information they require. They are shorter and precise with the information regarding the particular scheme being advertised with an ‘enquire now’ button that asks for their name, email and telephone number. This enables the service to have direct contact with the enquirer, provide them with information quickly and to be able to keep in touch.

In 2019 -20 the service will continue to work closely with the website team to:
• Ensure the website content is up to date, relevant and engaging
• Produce marketing pages to use during national campaigns and to promote particular areas of fostering
• Direct those interested in fostering to the relevant website pages, marketing pages and enquiry forms to encourage those interested to get in touch to find out more about fostering.

5.3) Net Natives – digital marketing
The contract for digital marketing is now in its second year with the digital advertising company Net Natives, a digital marketing company with extensive and proven experience of successful digital marketing campaigns. During the last year Facebook has remained a vital advertising tool and the service will continue to use Google Dynamic Words to drive further traffic to the fostering website.
• Facebook advertising
  Four separate, four-week campaigns will be produced for Facebook. The adverts will run during proven successful times of the year – April/May, June/July, September and January.
• Google Dynamic Words
  Two separate, four week campaigns will take place in September/October and January/February.

5.4) Lamp post banners
Lamppost banners were installed last year in four locations across Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Biggleswade. The lampposts were extremely successful and brought a number of enquiries to the service. This year a number of the banners will be relocated in new locations with some banners remaining in well responded areas but with amended artwork to reengage residents in the area. Areas will be chosen depending on footfall of residents, slow moving traffic or where they are located close to supermarkets, town centres and market towns.
5.5) Costa drop ins
Research regarding successful fostering campaigns led the service to contacting the local Costa Coffee Area Manager. This was due to a Local Authority having success recruiting foster carers by having drop ins in their local Costa coffee shops. The service will be looking to attend Costa coffee shops at least once a month to facilitate a drop in with a supporting social media campaign to promote them.

5.6) Fostering Ambassadors
Fostering Ambassadors were considered within the last strategy but unfortunately the funding from a National Charity that was allocated to launching the scheme was pulled by the Charity due to unforeseen costs within the project and therefore the scheme was put on hold.

This year the service will look to recruit existing, experienced foster carers to support the service with recruitment by becoming Fostering Ambassadors.

5.7) Star Parties (start thinking about recruitment parties)
As above, Star Parties were considered within the last strategy but unfortunately the funding from a National Charity that was allocated to launching this scheme was pulled by the Charity due to unforeseen costs within the project and therefore the scheme was put on hold.

Star Parties were set up by Rotherham Fostering Service as a recruitment tool as part of their recruitment strategy. The parties are proving to work well in recruitment within foster carer community groups and could be a good opportunity for Central Bedfordshire to recruit further foster carers within Central Bedfordshire.

Existing foster carers are encouraged to host a Star Party and invite a minimum of five people who they think may be interested in fostering. The parties are a relaxed atmosphere in the foster carer’s home with food encouraged to help with networking and a member of the fostering team in attendance to support.

The costings for the scheme will need to be reviewed and the hope is that the following will be considered:
- £100 paid to foster carer to host a party, purchase food and keep a proportion as payment.

If a foster carer is then approved following a party, there would be a referral fee of:
- £1000 to the newly approved carer on approval
- £1000 to the foster carer who hosted the party on prospective foster carer approval if attended a star party hosted by the foster carer.

5.8) Press, newsletters and information sharing
With local press in decline it is becoming more challenging to gain interest from the local media. The service will continue to keep in touch with local media to promote the incredible work of foster carers but will need to be creative in its approach e.g. the use of video, real life stories. In order to create content that is of interest to the media the service will continue to work closely with the Communications Officer within the Communications team to produce:
- Internal messaging to Central Bedfordshire staff through Staff Central
- Internal messaging to Central Bedfordshire Councillors through Members Information Bulletin
• Films and testimonies regarding young people foster carers stories and experiences
• External messaging through press releases and the Central Bedfordshire social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

5.9) Re-engagement
The service has worked to update and improve the number of recipients (people who have engaged with the service regarding fostering) within GDPR guidelines this year. Those people who have previously enquired about fostering but did not proceed with their enquiry have been added to a distribution list within an email newsletter system. This allows the service to send messaging and updates on fostering and to re-engage people who may return when the time is right for them. The system has other routes such as a text messaging service which the service will look into this year.

5.10) Social media
Social media continues to grow with both the fostering and Central Bedfordshire Channels seeing a year on year rise in their number of followers and page likes:
  • Fostering Facebook 664 page likes and 688 followers (an increase of 160 likes compared to 504 in April 2018)
  • Central Bedfordshire Council Facebook 12,066 page likes and 12,836 followers (an increase of 1493 likes compared to 10573 in April 2018)
  • Central Bedfordshire Twitter 12,200 followers (an increase of 1100 followers compared to 11,100 in April 2018)
  • Central Bedfordshire Instagram 1398 followers (an increase of 660 followers compared to 738 in April 2018).

An area of consideration will be promotion of the social media page including an idea from Buckinghamshire Fostering Team – click for a cake. Events are held in Council buildings whereby staff are given a free cake in return for liking the fostering Facebook page and sharing a recent post to their friends and followers. This is an extremely cost-effective way to encourage a higher following on the Facebook page of people who will engage and share messages via their own social media.

The service will continue to produce creative and engaging social media posts, focusing on areas of interest to prospective foster carers to promote engagement and where possible, leads to enquire about fostering.

5.11) Housing options
With the foster carer loan scheme in place for those who own their own homes, the service is keen to work with the Housing Team to review if there are any possibilities to support those who rent their homes and wish to move to a larger property in order to expand their fostering offer. Currently there is a quota for fostering to have three nominations for foster carers for two+ bed properties. At the time of writing this strategy a meeting was arranged (with the lead and support of Councillor Dixon) for the service to meet with the Housing Team to discuss possible ways forward and further work will be completed this year.

5.12) Councillor support
Continued Councillor support to fostering remains a high priority and the service will work closely this year with Central Bedfordshire Councillors to seek their support in the marketing and recruitment of foster carers following elections in 2019.
6) Retention and support plan for the year ahead

6.1) Change of culture
Culture within the organisation regarding fostering and foster carers and how we can best work with other departments within the council is an ongoing consideration. The service will think creatively of ways to achieve this further this year.

6.2) Therapeutic fostering model
The service researched possible therapeutic models for practices around fostering, their benefits and suitability with a proposal to introduce a model of therapeutic working for Central Bedfordshire. From this and the positive feedback of previous training sessions, the service will look to consider PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) as a working model for fostering and those working with directly with children and foster carers. The model works towards a way of connecting, thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving in a way that helps children to feel safe. Training will be considered this year in PACE for staff and further work to consider the model.

6.3) Training
Last year was another successful year for training with foster carer attendance at training remaining high to build their skills and knowledge to support children in their care. Training attendance was excellent with 742 delegates (foster carers, SGO carers and adopters) attending training, compared to 484 delegates in 2017-18 which was an impressive 53% increase. The service also continued to work closely with neighbouring Local Authorities to either share training where appropriate or sell spaces which enabled the department to put on additional specialist courses and also to run courses where they may had been a small amount of Central Bedfordshire foster carers attending and may have been cancelled. This enabled the service to accrue a total income of £14,380 from external applicants attending training.

This year will see a significant change in foster carers training with the implementation of a new training website. The existing training website will cease in August 2019 with all adopter and foster carer training transferring to a new website and learning management system hosted on an external version of Success Factors. The change will bring many benefits as well as some challenges which will be managed by careful forward planning and project management by the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Support Officer. The change will not affect the level of training and a comprehensive training package will continue to be provided to adopters and foster carers and is hoped to provide further opportunities to generate income with neighbouring Local Authorities.

6.4) Celebration of fostering
Details of last year’s event can be found in section three of this report.

The last event was held in June 2018 which unfortunately meant a number of foster carers were unable to attend due to commitments with young people’s exams and other commitments. It also affected the media coverage received due to other areas of interest being in the press. Due to this the event will be held in September 2019 and following positive feedback regarding the location, will continue to be held at Woburn Safari Park.
6.5) Awards for foster carers
Recognition of foster carers dedication to their role and the children in their care continues to be a high priority for the service to aid retention of foster carers. This year the service will look to nominate foster carers, young people and their sons and daughters for:

- Queens Honour
- Royal Garden Party nominations
- The Fostering Network Excellence Awards
- BBC Three Counties People’s Awards
- The Alex Timpson Trust foster family free holiday.

6.6) Support groups
Support groups continue to be well attended and have this year seen newly approved foster carers attend to gain valuable peer support. One change that was made this year was the relocation of the south group. The venue in Dunstable was no longer fit for purpose for various reasons and in turn the number of attendees decreased. A new venue was found on the borders of Houghton Regis and Dunstable and was successfully launched in March 2019 with a good attendance of eight carers. Following positive feedback, the new venue will be continued alongside the existing Millbrook and Cardington locations to ensure a group is available in three locations across the County.

Evening social groups provide the opportunity for those who are working or unable to attend the daytime groups a chance to meet other foster carers and access peer support. This year there will be an evening group in June and another in November. The events will be family friendly with food provided and a theme to encourage engagement from the foster carers and the children e.g. bake off, fancy dress for the children and movie nights.

6.7) Consultation with foster carers
Consultation with foster carers is key to foster carer retention and producing a service that is reacting positively to foster carers needs as well as the young people they look after. Foster Carers Talk Time is a well-attended open forum where many of the key developments have originated from or have been shaped with foster carers input.

The service will continue to communicate openly to foster carers by email on a regular basis, at the Foster Carers Talk Time and via the Foster Carers Newsletter every quarter. Those who are unable to attend the Talk Time are actively encouraged to share their views with their supervising social worker or via phone and email directly to the team.

6.8) Consultation with young people
The Children in Care Council (CiCC) are an active group of young people who work together to improve the lives and share the thoughts and views of young people in care. The service is keen to gain their valuable input and to consult with the group in various areas this year such as:

- Involvement in training of foster carers including preparation training of prospective foster carers
- Focus groups regarding policies, procedures, forms and paperwork
- Involvement in the recruitment of foster carers e.g. production of new film using children’s voices.
6.9) Foster Care Association
The Foster Care Association is an independent voice for foster carers and provides a vital service to foster carers within Bedfordshire, including those fostering for other Local Authorities and agencies. The service will continue to support the association financially and in terms of consultation and advertising events on behalf of the Foster Care Association.

6.10) Mentoring
The mentoring service remains an important area of support to foster carers, both newly approved and existing. The mentoring service provides an additional support to foster carers with mentors who have specialisms such as long-term care, experience of caring for young people with challenging behaviour, caring for broad age range of children and working with family and friends foster carers. The service will continue to allocate a mentor to newly approved foster carers as well as those more experienced foster carers who may need additional support.

6.11) Fostering Network membership
Individual household membership for foster carers are provided to each household and the service will continue to be corporate members of the Fostering Network. Advice and mediation services will continue to be spot purchased as and when required.

6.12) Discounts for foster carers
Max cards have and will continue to be provided to all foster carers once they are approved. This enables them to gain discounts to family days out and activities nationally and within Central Bedfordshire. Foster carers are also able to access KAARP benefits which enables them to access deals and discounts for various days out and services. Both will continue to be advertised regularly in the foster carers’ newsletter.

Another area of consideration this year will be:
- Leisure Centre discounts – the service will contact the local leisure teams to gain information on the possibility of providing discounts for foster carers in their local Leisure Centres.
- Foster carer friendly business - Brent Council have successfully set up a discount scheme with local businesses linked to the foster carer ID card. The scheme is designed to make a positive contribution in improving the lives of carers in their area whereby local businesses that join the scheme, and provide foster carers with discounts, are awarded a ‘we are a Brent carer friendly business’ with certificates to display to the public and their staff. Central Bedfordshire will consider the possibility of setting up a similar scheme this year.

6.13) CAMH support
CAMHS continue to support the Corporate Parenting Service and the for the year ahead the following support will be provided:
- A support group for foster carers whose children have CAMH involvement
- Office based support to foster carers and staff whereby they are able to book slots with CAMHS to discuss any concerns they may have
- Involvement in complex case discussions.
6.14) Family and friends foster carers
Family and friends foster carers are able to access all support groups and training as career foster carers. The service also ensure that they receive all communications as any other foster carers.

An area of consideration last year was the possibility of reinstating the family and friends and SGO support group. A questionnaire was sent to all family and friends foster carers and SGO carers asking for their views on suitability of time, location and venue of a group. The feedback was positive with a number of carers requesting for a group to be held. Following this work contact was made with the Early Help Team to discuss a possible way of working together to facilitate a group. The kinship families meet up was an existing meeting being held by the Early Help team and it was agreed that the fostering team would support in advertising information regarding the group to all family and friends and SGO carers. The group is currently held in Dunstable and the service will review the need for a further group in an alternative area of Bedfordshire if the need arises.

7) Other areas of consideration
7.1) Back up carers
The service will look to set up a backup carer scheme this year in order to identify people from foster carers own support networks who are able to support the carer and provide them with a break. A back up carer is someone from a foster carers network of friends or family who is assessed and set up to provide backup care and respite for a young person placed with an approved foster carer. This includes respite, overnight care or longer periods of up to four weeks. The service will work this year to set up the scheme and identify back up carers for those existing foster carers requiring additional support.

8) Review of strategy
As the needs of the service change throughout this financial year the service will regularly review and adapt the strategy and monthly working plan to meet any challenges or needs of Looked after children.
Statement of purpose
Fostering Team, Central Bedfordshire Council
1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020

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

A great place to live and work.
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1. **Introduction**

1.1. Standard 1b of the National Minimum Standards and Regulation 3 and 4 of the Fostering Regulations 2011, require all fostering services to produce a statement of purpose detailing its aims and objectives, the services and facilities provided and to keep this under review.

1.2. In determining its aims and objectives, Central Bedfordshire Council has adhered to the following legislations and guidance:

- The Children Act 1989
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010
- Family & Friends Care Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities.

1.3. This statement of purpose has been produced in accordance with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Fostering services National Minimum Standards 2011.

1.4. It sets out the core aims and objectives of Central Bedfordshire Council’s Fostering Service and the range of services provided.

1.5. It is intended as a useful source of information for Foster Carers, Fostering Social Workers, Child Care Social Workers, children, young people and any person with parental responsibilities.

1.6. Detailed information about Central Bedfordshire’s Fostering procedures can be found via [http://centralbedfordshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com](http://centralbedfordshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com).

1.7. The Fostering Service is an integral part of the Corporate Parenting Service in Central Bedfordshire Council.
2. **Aims and objectives**

2.1. Recruit, assess and support a range of high quality foster carers to improve outcomes for looked after children and to make children and young people’s stay in foster care a positive experience.

2.2. Services are offered for children on the principle that their needs and welfare are best met within a caring and nurturing environment.

2.3. To provide a high quality Fostering Service to children, their birth parents, Foster Carers and social work colleagues.

2.4. To provide foster placements that meet the needs of children requiring such a placement.

2.5. To ensure safe, stable and consistent care for every child placed in foster care.

2.6. To ensure equality of service is promoted for all individuals who apply to foster or are approved as Central Bedfordshire foster carers. We will also ensure that children in care have their ethnic, cultural, religious, heritage and language promoted and that they are not discriminated against based on their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

2.7. To increase the number of Central Bedfordshire approved and trained foster carers while decreasing the number of external placements so that the majority of the Council’s looked after children continue to be placed with Central Bedfordshire approved foster carers including family and friends carers.

2.8. To provide support services that promote and enable the retention of Foster Carers.

2.9. To ensure, that at all times, effective services are provided and that practices are clear, open, honest and fair to all services users.

2.10. To ensure that Foster Carers are supported in promoting positive outcomes for children placed with them.

2.11. To actively promote and support training opportunities for all Foster Carers.

2.12. To ensure that the Fostering Service meets Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards and best practice.
3. Management and staff structure

Director of Children’s Services

Assistant Director Safeguarding, Children’s Services

Head of Corporate Parenting

Practice Manager Court & Permanency
Resource & Placement Team

Practice Manager Fostering
Fostering Panel Adviser

Practice Manager Adoption
Adoption Team
Fostering Team One
Fostering Team Two

Marketing, Recruitment & Training Officer
Marketing, Recruitment & Training Support Officer

Adoption Panel Adviser

Marketing, Recruitment & Training Officer
3.1. The ultimate responsibility for the Fostering Service rests with Elected Members.

3.2. The Assistant Director then gives strategic leadership to Children’s Services (Responsible Person).

3.3. The Head of Corporate Parenting Service co-ordinates the activities of the Fostering Service along with the Adoption Service, Resource Team and Children in Care Teams, and promotes partnership working across Children’s Services and partner agencies.

3.4. The Practice Manager for Fostering (Registered Manager) provides operational management, quality assurance, performance and budget management and co-ordinates the work of the two Fostering Teams. In addition to supervising the work of the two Fostering Team Managers, the Practice Manager also supervises/manages the work of the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer, whose work covers both Fostering and Adoption as well as the Panel Adviser for the Fostering and Permanence Panel. The Practice Manager also reports to senior managers on service activities and issues of concern.

3.5. Team Managers are responsible for the day to day management of Social Workers, recruiting, assessing and supervising Foster Carers, matching of children to available carers, dealing with complaints and representations and producing activity reports and statistical returns.

3.6. Both Team Managers provide regular supervision to their respective team of Social Workers/Social Work Assistant. As part of the Corporate Parenting Service, they work closely with the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer, Marketing, Recruitment and Training Support officer and other teams within the Corporate Parenting Service as well as liaising with the Children with Disability Team/Early Intervention Teams and partner agencies.

3.7. The Practice Managers, Team Managers and all Social Workers are professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience. Staff have an annual Personal Development Review (Your Year) and Central Bedfordshire Council’s Learning and Development Team provides bespoke training that meets the identified training needs of staff as well as providing more general corporate training. In addition to the Social Workers and Social Work Assistant the team is supported by two Business Support Officers who are supervised by the
Team managers. Psychologists and other professionals are also commissioned, when needed, and are available to support children, foster carers and staff.

4. **Our services to children**

4.1. The primary purpose of the Fostering Service is to provide high quality, safe, secure and caring foster families for children who are unable to live at home. Where ever possible and where safe to do so, children will be placed with someone from their extended family or a close family friend. These arrangements are recognised in legislation as ‘family and friends’ foster placements. When this is not possible, placements will be found with one of our approved Foster Carers or a suitable agency. We aim to clearly identify the particular emotional, physical, cultural and religious needs of a child and find a foster family who can meet their needs.

4.2. Except in emergencies, we plan introductory meetings between the child and the Foster Carer in an effort to lesson the anxiety for the child of moving to a new family. Where a child is placed in an emergency, the Child’s Social Worker or the Foster Carer’s Supervising Social Worker will give the child as much information about the Foster Carers and their household as possible. Profiles are kept on all Foster Carers and they can be used to help provide children with relevant information about the fostering household/area etc., even in an emergency situation.

4.3. Children will be visited in placement by both their own Social Worker and the Foster Carer’s Supervising Social Worker, children will be encouraged to express their wishes and view about their foster placement and will be invited to provide written feedback about their placement for the Foster Carer’s Annual Review. The children of Foster Carers are invited to provide written feedback regarding their parents Foster Carer’s Annual Review.

5. **Matching process**

5.1. Central Bedfordshire Resource and Placement Team identify Foster Carers who have vacancies and work with the Fostering Teams to assess if this is the most appropriate placement for the child. If agreed the match is proposed to the Foster Carer(s) and the Child’s Social Worker who will further consider the strengths and vulnerabilities of the placement, involving the child as appropriate, and makes the arrangements for the placement, if agreed.
6. **Children’s guide**

6.1. A children’s guide is provided to all children in care, when placed, when they are of sufficient understanding to be able to benefit from the information contained in the guide.

6.2. The aim is to provide information about what it means to be fostered, what Social Workers do and what children can do if they are not happy in their foster home or if they have any worries or concerns. The guides are given to children when placed, by their social worker. Foster carers are also provided with the children’s guide which they can use to support the child during the settling in process. The guides are reviewed annually and a copy is sent to Ofsted and all the service’s Foster Carers.

Children’s guide to fostering: [https://centralbedfordshire.box.com/s/3ly22nx5vpheg05bklq3h06ebcnesc0r](https://centralbedfordshire.box.com/s/3ly22nx5vpheg05bklq3h06ebcnesc0r)

Young people’s guide to fostering: [https://centralbedfordshire.box.com/s/5ecdd85ykdq521djqdqbobxxhnveyg3z](https://centralbedfordshire.box.com/s/5ecdd85ykdq521djqdqbobxxhnveyg3z)

CICC (Children in Care Council) information pack: [https://centralbedfordshire.box.com/s/w7pf5v0wqrhf5tmam3uhwbwemcv67m10](https://centralbedfordshire.box.com/s/w7pf5v0wqrhf5tmam3uhwbwemcv67m10)

7. **Recruitment and assessment of prospective Foster Carers**

7.1. The Fostering Service works to a Recruitment and Retention Strategy which is updated annually. The Strategy recognises the need to recruit local Foster Carers who will be able to meet the diverse needs of the children requiring foster homes.

7.2. Central Bedfordshire Council recruit and assess a diverse range of Foster Carers who are able to meet the needs of children in care.

7.3. All members of the public who make an initial enquiry by phone, email, letter or online at [http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/children/fostering/foster.aspx](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/children/fostering/foster.aspx) in relation to becoming a Foster Carer are referred to the Fostering Service. All enquiries are treated as a potential resource and given a prompt response. They are contacted to gather further information and for a general discussion about fostering.

7.4. An initial enquiry form is completed gathering basic information about the applicant/household in addition a check will be carried out in relation to applicants and all members of their household on Children’s Services records.
7.5. All applicants are sent an information pack and letter. Where the applicant or a member of the household is known to Childrens Services, the enquiry is passed to the manager for a decision on how to proceed. At this early stage it may be appropriate to advise the applicants against pursuing fostering if they clearly do not meet the basic criteria to foster. The manager’s decision is then communicated to the person concerned with reasons given and the decision recorded.

7.6. Where the decision is to proceed the applicant is invited to any planned information events and an initial visit to the applicant’s home will be arranged. The purpose of this visit is to discuss fostering in more depth and to allow the Social Worker to assess the suitability of their accommodation. An application form is left with the applicant to complete and once returned the assessment process will commence.

7.7. The two stage assessment process is fully explained to applicants and will be thorough and fair. The Fostering Service will work in partnership with applicants at all stages. Checks and references are undertaken in Stage 1, these include:

- Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks (DBS) on applicants and all members of the household aged 18 and over
- Written personal references
- Employment references
- Local Authority checks
- Medical checks
- School references (for children already with family)
- Pet assessment.

7.8. Preparation training (Skills to Foster) is provided and all applicants are expected to complete the required training programme.
Fostering Service came to a view that an application will not succeed at stage 1 applicants will be given reasons. Some information for the assessment is provided in confidence therefore there may be some occasion where it may not be possible for reasons to be fully explained.

7.10. If the Fostering Manager decides that the prospective Foster Carers can proceed to stage 2, the case will be allocated to a Social Worker to complete the assessment and consider the suitability to foster. The report and the decision as to the applicant’s suitability to foster should be completed within four months.

7.11. Once the assessment is completed this will be presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel for a recommendation.

8. **The Fostering and Permanence Panel**

8.1. The Fostering Service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulations 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The Service maintains a ‘central list’ of panel members. The Panel Chair and Vice Chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering.

8.2 Other panel members on the ‘central list’ include a Social Worker with more than three years relevant post-qualifying experience, a Central Bedfordshire Councillor, independent members and the Agency Medical Advisor. The panel generally meets twice a month and detailed minutes are kept of all panel meetings.

8.3 The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:

- Each application and recommended whether or not a person is suitable to be a Foster Carer and the terms of their approval
- The first Annual Review of each approved carer and any other review or requested by the Fostering Service
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer.

8.4 New applicants and existing Foster Carers are invited and encouraged to attend panel when their application or review is presented to panel.
8.5 The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and feeds back any issues or concerns to the Registered Manager. The panel makes recommendations to the Fostering Service and these recommendations are referred to the ‘Agency Decision Maker’ for a decision.

8.6 If the panel or Agency Decision Maker is minded not to recommend approval, applicants are advised that they can request their case is reconsidered by the panel or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for a review of their case.

9 **The Foster Carer Charter**

9.1 Central Bedfordshire Foster Carer Charter ‘Children Come First’ is available at this link: http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/Images/foster-carer-charter_tcm3-2359.pdf

9.2 The Fostering Service is committed to providing and promoting safe, stable and nurturing placements where the outcomes and life chances for looked after children are positive. In order to achieve this it is important to have a working relationship which is based on trust and respect between all those involved in the care of the child.

9.3 The Service has worked in partnership with Foster Carers to achieve the Charter, which explains what the roles and responsibilities of the Service and the carers are towards each other and the children they care for.

10 **Support and supervision of Foster Carers**

10.1 Once a Foster Carer has been approved by Panel, they will be allocated their own Supervising Social Worker who will provide regular supervision and support. On approval and at any time during their fostering career when Foster Carers require additional support a ‘mentor’ can be allocated. Foster Carers can also access telephone support out of office hours from the Fostering Duty Worker who is on call from 5.20pm until 10pm weekdays and throughout the weekends and bank holidays.

10.2 The Service holds quarterly Foster Carer Forums (Talk Time) where Foster Carers have the opportunity to meet and exchange views with senior managers, in addition the Fostering Service provides periodic social events for Foster Carers and their children.
10.3 An annual Celebration of Fostering Awards ceremony is held to recognise the dedication and commitment of Foster Carers. Awards are given for foster carers’ long service. Carers are also nominated for various awards.

10.4 Central Bedfordshire Council also pay for all its Foster Carers to have individual membership with Fostering Network, allowing them access to an unlimited and extensive range of independent support services. Central Bedfordshire Council will spot purchase Fostering Network’s Advice and Mediation Service to provide additional independent support to foster carers when required.

10.5 Foster Carers are currently provided with Max Cards which provide discounts on a range of attractions and family activities both nationally and locally.

10.6 Foster Carers have access to the Foster Carers Handbook which contains useful information for Foster Carers in relation to fostering issues.

10.7 A regular newsletter is also provided for Foster Carers keeping them up to date on current issues, forthcoming training/events, new policies, etc.

10.8 The Fostering Service arranges various monthly support groups for Foster Carers and regular events for children of Foster Carers.

10.9 Foster Carers also run their own Foster Care Association which is supported by Central Bedfordshire Council.

11 Reviewing the approval of Foster Carers

11.1 The approved status of all Foster Carers is reviewed annually or whenever there is a change of circumstances or concern about the standard of care. First Annual Reviews and those where there is a change in carers’ ‘terms of approval’ or where there has been a complaint or allegation are presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel for consideration. Foster Carers are invited and encouraged to attend panel for their Review.

11.2 All other Reviews are presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision about ongoing approval.

11.3 The Foster Carer Review Officer sits within the Professional Standards Service providing independent scrutiny and challenges to the Service.
12 Training for Foster Carers

12.1 As part of the assessment process, Foster Carers are expected to attend the ‘Skills to Foster’ preparation training and complete safeguarding and First Aid Training before approval.

12.2 Once approved all Foster Carers are expected to undertake a range of training to update their skills. The national Training, Support and Development Standards provide a framework for training for the first year of a foster care role and set out what Foster Carers should know, understand and be able to do. All Foster Carers are required to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards workbook within 12 months of approval (18 months for family & friends/connected persons). The standards include:

- Standard 1: understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
- Standard 2: understand your role as a Foster Carer.
- Standard 3: understand health and safety and healthy caring.
- Standard 4: know how to communicate effectively.
- Standard 5: understand the development of children and young people.
- Standard 6: safeguard children and young people (keep them safe from harm).
- Standard 7: develop yourself.

12.3 Approved Foster Carers’ eligibility for tier fees is linked to training attendance and the core training modules are outlined in the Foster Training Policy. This includes pre approval training, an induction and training expectations to be completed within their first, second and subsequent years of their fostering career.
12.4 To enable Foster Carers to complete the core training they have access to a broad range of training which includes classroom based courses as well as e-learning. The classroom based courses are available during the daytime, evenings and weekends meaning those carers in employment can also attend. Foster Carers can access training from different streams within Central Bedfordshire Council including Multi-agency, Early Years, Local Safeguarding Board and the Domestic Violence Team via the CPD on-line training website. By having access to many specialist courses, Foster Carers can tailor their training to suit any specific requirements based on the needs of the child they have in placement, as well as attending the core training courses required by the national Minimum Standards for Foster Carers.

13 Complaints

13.1 All local authorities are required to ensure a complaints process is provided under the Children Act 1989.

13.2 All complaints and queries will be dealt with in accordance with Central Bedfordshire policies/procedures.

13.3 Complaints by children are dealt with under the Children’s Services complaints procedure, which specifies a shorter time for responding to children’s complaints and the provision of independent advocacy for complainants.

13.4 The complaints procedure has several stages; stage 1 applies to local resolution, but if this is not achieved, there are two more stages. Information on these further stages is available from the Fostering Service or from Central Bedfordshire’s Customer Relations Department.

14 Allegations

14.1 Allegations against foster carers are dealt with in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB) procedures for managing allegations/concerns about foster carers. All foster carers subject to any allegation are offered independent support from the Fostering Network’s Advice and Mediation Service.

15 Quality monitoring

15.1 The Service is subject to inspection by Ofsted.
15.2 Regular quarterly reports are provided to the Corporate Parenting Panel providing the executive of the Council with information/data in relation to the activities of the fostering service. This information along with audits and customer feedback is constantly scrutinised/evaluated by the managers of the fostering service to judge its ongoing effectiveness and make changes where necessary.

15.3 The Panel Agency Advisor provides scrutiny and feedback as does the Fostering Panel Chair person. Team Managers monitor data about incidents of concern in foster care including: complaints or allegations made against foster carers or any unattended absences or restraints made regarding children in their care. The Registered Manager (Practice Manager) monitors the schedule 6 and 7 requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

15.4 The quality of the work of the Fostering Service is monitored through Staff Supervision which is linked to an appraisal system, monthly recorded visits to Foster Carers including unannounced visits, annual reviews, feedback from training sessions, case recording and peer/management audits.

16 Arrangements for the revision and circulation of the statement of purpose

16.1 The Registered Manager will keep under review, and where appropriate, revise, the statement of purpose and will notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. Staff and Foster Carers will be consulted on proposed revisions as appropriate.

16.2 The statement of purpose will be available to all staff via the Council’s intranet and to members of the public via Central Bedfordshire Council’s website: http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/

17 The Registration Authority

The Registration Authority is:
Ofsted,
Ofsted National Business Unit,
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester,
M1 2WD
Telephone: 0300 123 1231
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.
18 Contacts

For more information about Fostering in Central Bedfordshire please contact:

Fostering Service,
Corporate Parenting Service,
Central Bedfordshire Council,
First Central, Priory House,
Monks Walk, Chicksands,
Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5TQ

Telephone: 0300 300 8090

For copies of the complaints procedure or further copies of this statement of purpose, please contact the Fostering Service on the contact details above.
If you wish to comment on this statement of purpose on the Fostering Service or make a complaint, please contact the Head of Corporate Parenting Service on the contact details above.

This report can be provided in large print and other languages.
11. Leaving Care

To receive a report outlining the new approach to offering support to our young people leaving care.
Leaving Care Offer and Financial Policy

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

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

Purpose of this report

1. The report outlines a new approach to offering support to our young people leaving care. This approach recognises achievements and engagement of young people leaving care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel is asked to:

Endorse for onward consideration by Executive, the proposals for Central Bedfordshire’s Care Leavers, in particular:

1. **Leaving Care Offer** outlining Central Bedfordshire Council’s commitments to care leavers.

2. **Leaving Care Financial policy** outlining the allowances and payments to which care leavers are entitled under the Leaving Care Offer.

Issues

1. Leaving care support is a key statutory service to Looked After Children between the ages of 16 and 25. The efficient and effective delivery of this service is aligned with the Council’s priorities to offer great resident services, to improve education and skills of young people leaving care, to protect the vulnerable; improving wellbeing whilst at the same time creating stronger communities and being a more efficient and responsive Council. To meet our commitments 2 appendices are presented.
2. **Appendix A: Leaving Care Offer** - details the way in which Central Bedfordshire Council proposes to meet its statutory requirements to support young people leaving the care of this local authority. This offer recognises their achievements. It must also include financial support to which they are entitled.

3. **Appendix B: Leaving Care Financial Policy** outlines the proposed allowances.

**Corporate Implications**

**Risk Management**

4. Regulatory Risks: The provision of suitable support for Care Leavers is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspections, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked after Children.

5. Child Protection Risks: Failure to effectively support young people is a child protection risk.

6. Reputational Risk: Good support and good outcomes for young people leaving care has a positive impact in the way the council delivers its statutory duties as Corporate Parent for looked after children.

7. Financial Risk: there is a financial implication to delivering support to young people leaving care. Should young people not have access to timely support and their issues escalate then there is a far greater financial risk for example if a young person enters the criminal justice system.

**Legal Implications**

8. National regulations and legislation outline the way in which the council delivers statutory duties for young people leaving care.

9. Specific legal advice has been sought in relation to these proposals. In light of this advice, these documents are based on the important social work principles of:

   a. Continuing to maintain our duties to care leavers which have not been altered by recent legislation

   b. Ensuring each care leaver has their needs assessed and is supported according to those assessed needs.

   c. Offering incentives to achieve an agreed set of individual targets, these will be tailored to the care leaver taking into account their characteristics and circumstances.

   d. Ensuring the best outcomes for each care leaver

   e. Continuing to take significant note of the expressed wishes and feelings of each care leaver
Financial and Risk Implications

10. Leaving Care Offer. This is a statement of services and support to be offered to Care Leavers. There is an increased commitment to support care leavers to the age of 25yrs old. This has already been addressed to the Corporate Parenting Panel in a separate submission.

11. Leaving Care Financial policy

- **Sections under the subheading “Entitlements and Allowances”**: These outline the allowances and payments to which care leavers are entitled under the Leaving Care Offer. It is a rationalisation, clarification and confirmation of existing practice. It does not make any significant or major new commitments. The production and publication of our offer and financial policy may lead to increased take up in the group of care leavers aged 18 to 25yrs old, who were not previously eligible. The majority of the financial demands in this group will not be long term but one off or short-term payments.

- **Sections under the subheading “Incentives for Positive Achievements”**: These sections require additional budget. On 29 04 2019, the Leaving Care Service was working with 71 16/17yr old care leavers and 157 aged 18yrs plus. An average incentive payment to all of these young people of £500 in the next year would require a budget of £114k.

- **A more detailed analysis of the likely cost of this Policy must be included in any subsequent Executive paper seeking approval in order to determine the correct route to authority (Executive or Full Council) in accordance with the Constitution.**

Equalities Implications

12. 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.

13. Looked After Children are not considered a protected group under the Equality Act, however it needs to be recognised that children with disabilities are considered protected and can also be looked, additionally 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
14. The proposals in this report will increase support for young people when they leave care and help to promote their equality of opportunity.

**Conclusion and next Steps**

15. The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note, review and support the recommendations of this report.

**Appendices**

**Appendix A:** Leaving Care Offer (See attached)

**Appendix B:** Updated Financial Policy (See Attached)

**Report author(s):**

Shabana Farooq, Practice Manger, Corporate Parenting Service

Shabana Farooq@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Nigel Stock, Head of Service – Corporate Parenting Service
APPENDIX 1

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1) Legislative Context
2) Content of Offer
3) Co-Production
4) Time Line
5) Action Plan
6) Being Healthy and knowing how to access support
7) Education, Training and Employment
8) Community and society
9) Accommodation
10) Being prepared to live independently
11) Accessing advocacy and social care records
1) Legislative Context

**Children and Social Work Act 2017**

**Section 1** outlines 7 Corporate Parenting Principles local authorities must have regard to in their work with these children and young people. They are:

1. to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
2. to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
3. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
4. to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
5. to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
6. for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
7. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

**Section 2** requires local authorities to publish information about the services it offers to care leavers which may assist them in preparing for adulthood and independent living. These services may include health and wellbeing, education and training, employment, accommodation, and
participation in society. It is distinct from the special educational needs and disability (SEND) local offer stipulated by the Children and Families Act 2014.

Section 3 requires local authorities to appoint a personal adviser for care leavers who request one up until the age of 25, regardless of whether the young person intends to pursue education or training. The local authority also has a duty to carry out an assessment of the young person's needs and to provide the necessary advice and support.

2) Content of Offer

The legislation outlines what information should be contained in the Local Offer:

a) services which the local authority offers for care leavers as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989;

b) other services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living.

Services which may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living include services relating to:

i. health and well-being;

ii. relationships;

iii. education and training;

iv. employment;

v. accommodation;

vi. participation in society.
The legislation also refers to services offered to care leavers offered by others, that the information should be known our “local offer for care leavers”. The offer must be updated and the product of consultation (see next section, “Co-Production)

The content of the offer should reflect the 7 corporate parenting principles and the recommendations in legislation about what information it should contain.

3) Co-Production

Before publishing its local offer for care leavers (or any updated version) a local authority must consult relevant persons about which of the services offered by the local authority may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living.

The content of the local offer is the product of consultation with

Children in Care Council and Ambassadors
Looked After Children/Young People
Care Leavers
Young people who have received or been entitled to receive support as care leavers and
Those who now qualify for support under the extension of the entitlement to an allocated Personal Adviser.
4) Action Plan

Who will deliver the Offer?

The CBC offer is to ensure all of our children and young people in Central Bedfordshire are happy, safe and healthy.

Our teams make sure all of our children and young people are safeguarded and their welfare is being promoted whilst keeping in accordance with the governments Regulations and Guidance. The Leaving Care Team also works in accordance with supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children under the legislation and regulations regarding this.


The priorities of the team are based on developing meaningful relationships with young people and on core values of good parenting to give all children and young people a positive journey through care.

The teams have a variety of responsibilities to provide a good service to Care Leavers aged 16-25.

These responsibilities are:

- Working with young people, families and other professionals to achieve positive outcomes
- Helping to provide accommodation to give children and young people stability and to keep safe
- Supporting looked after young people to remain living with their foster placement if happy after they turn 18 (This scheme is called ‘Staying Put’)
- Ensuring young people are given opportunities to develop independence skills ready for them living independently
- Give information to young people regarding health services available in the community
- Promoting and supporting with education, training and employment opportunities for care leavers
• Safeguarding young people by looking out for risks that could compromise personal safety and support the young person by involving support services which provide information around healthier lifestyles and emotional wellbeing
• Working closely with a range of agencies and services to develop and improve service requirements to care leavers
• Working with key partners to have a range of safe and appropriate accommodation which meets the diverse needs of young people
• Maintaining a team that promotes advocacy and children’s rights, this can also include encouragement in participation in the Children In Care Council
• Working well with adult services in planning placements for care leavers

When a Looked after Child is 15 (just before their 16th birthday) a social worker from the Leaving Care Team takes over the responsibility of being their key worker. The young person’s social worker will work up to the 18th birthday. At 17½ a personal advisor will be introduced to the young person and for 6 months both the social worker and personal advisor will be supporting the young person. Young people will have the opportunity to access a personal advisor up until they reach 25.

The main role of a social worker and personal advisor is to undertake assessments, complete and review pathway plans which help to identify needs and areas of support for the young person. This can include short and long term plans, goals are normally set on a 6 monthly basis between worker and young person.

When children turn 16 a Pathway Plan is completed. The information in these is similar to the Care Plans but includes extra support such as:

• Identifying any problems relating to preparing and transitioning into independent living
• Support with accessing education, training and employment opportunities
• Access to services offering support for substance misuse and sexual health are promoted
• Young people’s entitlement to financial support by the Local Authority
The Leaving Care App

The App, which is available to download helps and supports our care leavers, providing a resource of useful information, advice and guidance on their smartphone or tablet device which will be available to them 24/7.

There will be:
- Useful information around topics important to care leavers such as Housing, Managing Money, Health and Wellbeing, Education and Employment,
- A list of events and activities that care leavers can get involved with, helping to reduce social isolation,
- A searchable directory of local services, support groups and organisations that can offer further help to our young people,
- The ability to add VIPs and build a mini-address book of important contacts,

The App has been co-produced with care leavers, who have had significant input into the way the App ‘looks’, the way it works, and the content included on it. For example, care leavers said they wanted an App that worked without needing an internet / wifi connection or using up valuable phone data. App users can also easily change the language used throughout the App, and for Central Bedfordshire six languages have been implemented including Turkish, Vietnamese and Amharic.
Care Leavers Covenant App

This connects Care Leaver’s with special offers from a range of nationwide providers. The app includes an overview of all available offers with more information about how to apply.
Being healthy and knowing how to access support

The health and wellbeing of young people matter to us. This doesn’t just mean exercising and eating vegetables (although this is an important part of staying healthy!), it also covers mental wellbeing, how young people manage emotions, good sexual health and signposting on where to go for support if young people are struggling.

There are different services available to care leavers in Central Bedfordshire, some are provided through the leaving care team and others are accessed through GP’s.

The Health Passport is a universal offer to all looked after children around their 18th birthday. This ensures that young people have as much information about their health and treatment history as possible and promotes continuity of care for young people into adulthood. The Health Passport also includes helpful information which signposts Care Leavers in relation to local health services and national support networks and helplines.

• Health passport – is available in printed form at present with a plan to make it accessible online
• Access to health leisure activities – Free swimming and support with Gym membership
• Leaving Care Personal Advisors support young people accessing emotional support and can arrange
• Support with sexual health and contraception

All children and young people in care are required have a health assessment once a year, up until their 18th birthday. This is to ensure that young people are getting all the health care that they need. It is also a chance for young people to ask questions around their health or to talk about any health worries they might have.

We have a LAC nurse who specifically sees young people about to leave care and can offer support up to the age of 25. The nurse is able to talk about all areas of a young persons health, including sexual health, smoking and the use of any substances.
Young people leaving care are also provided with a Health Passport which includes details of immunisation history, dental history and other medical appointments.

**Education, training and employment**

The **Virtual School Team** is a small multi-disciplinary team working to raise the educational attainment and attendance of children and young people. It works in close collaboration with colleagues across the authority, and also in partnership with the third sector. It tracks educational progress, while supporting and monitoring work with children and young people in care. It works to help young people achieve their full potential and offers support and advice to those who care and work with them.

The **Youth Support Team** are “A team of experienced career professionals with diverse and complimentary skills, committed to improving the outcomes of young people who are looked after or who have left care by empowering and enabling them to overcome barriers to education, employment and training”

The Youth Support Service (YSS) manages the delivery of a ‘Youth Offer’ in Central Bedfordshire. As part of this offer, the YSS directly provides intervention and support for young people aged 13-19 years (up to 25 in some circumstances). This intervention and support aims to;

- Engage and support young people into Education, Employment and Training who are isolated through their experience of internal and external barriers to personal, social and economic progression.
- Identify and track the progress of young people to ensure active participation in Education, Employment and Training
- Promote the ‘Youth Voice’ to raise the profile, representation and support of all young people across Central Bedfordshire
- Engage the most disadvantaged young people in a range of informal learning opportunities through targeted youth work provision
- Work in close partnership with schools and providers to ensure they are actively engaged in the consideration of career pathways for young people.
Community and society

Lifelong Links

Lifelong Links helps to find and bring together people who care about individual young people. The programme builds positive lasting support networks for children in care. Central Bedfordshire is part of a national trial which is being led by the Family Rights Group. The Lifelong Links approach draws upon a family finding model, which originated in the United States. Research shows that these relationships can offer young people ongoing support, provide a connection to family history, reinforce their identity, provide a sense of belonging and be a positive influence for their future in to adulthood.

Young people can:

- reconnect with family members and other trusted adults in a safe way. This could be people they already know, people they haven't seen for a while, or relatives they have never met.
- learn about family history.

It can provide young people with supportive, stable relationships during their time in care and beyond.

The approach uses detailed search strategies to find family members and other people who are important to the young person. These people are then contacted and with agreement, brought together through a family group conference.

Family Meeting Services

This is a meeting for family members, carers and close friends to talk about what is happening. This could be to find support, find out feelings and to look at how things can be changed to work better.
These meetings provide the opportunity to share what everyone knows. Everyone has the opportunity to talk and ask questions. Then the co-ordinator will leave the room to give the family time to create a plan of support and then the co-ordinator re-enters and creates a plan with the family.

Family meetings happen at any time when the family or professional feels it will be a good time to talk about what is going on and to help support the child to help things change for them.

Accommodation and where young people live

There are different housing options available in Central Bedfordshire, some with support included and some without. Ultimately, the young person will decide what accommodation to accept but with professional support to consider needs and the level of independent living skills of the young person. This ensures the accommodation offered is suitable and appropriate. The Leaving Care team will also liaise with housing to ensure that the young person’s views are listened to and accounted for throughout the process.

Staying with foster carers after young people have turned 18 is called ‘Staying Put’. Young people can stay with their foster carers until they are 25 if this is agreed. This does not affect their entitlement to housing when they leave ‘Staying Put’ as they are still considered a priority.

There are lots of different types of supported housing options available to young people, depending on the level of need. The Leaving Care team ensure young people fully understand the options available to them and encourage them to accept housing which is believed to be in their best interests.

Support is also provided to young people who are at university and need help with the cost of accommodation during vacation time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of accommodation</th>
<th>Who is responsible for the accommodation?</th>
<th>What support is included, who is eligible and where to get further information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staying Put Arrangements</td>
<td>Leaving Care Team</td>
<td>Staying Put is available to any eligible young person approaching 18 who wishes to continue living with their foster carers. If a foster carer cannot offer Staying Put then we will look for another foster placement which can. Young people can stay within this arrangement until they are 21 years old. Staying Put can also be accessed whilst at university or engaging in another training programme that requires a young person to live away from home. This provides the security of the on-going relationship with a carer and their support to develop a young persons independent living skills. Choosing Staying Put has proved very successful for many young people; improving their employability, social resilience and life chances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Care Supported Lodgings</td>
<td>Leaving Care Team</td>
<td>Leaving Care Supported Lodgings are arrangements arranged on a case by case basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported Accommodation</td>
<td>Providers</td>
<td>A range of 24/7 staffed supported accommodation for single young people with either self-contained or shared facilities for up to 6 to 18 months. Young people have a support worker and access to activities to gain independent living skills and education employment &amp; training. From here a young person might move into the supported move on accommodation or full independent living.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OwnTenancy (Social Housing) through Housing options Team</td>
<td>Housing Associations or Local Authority Housing</td>
<td>Central Bedfordshire housing options - identified housing association properties or LA properties for rent. Available properties are advertised weekly and if a young person is eligible to qualify to join the housing register they can express an interest (bid) on up to 3 properties each week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privately Rented</td>
<td>Private Landlord</td>
<td>Renting a property from a private landlord. visit: <a href="https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/resources-and-tools/search-navigation-tools/Search/?c=HOME&amp;q=private+landlords">https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/resources-and-tools/search-navigation-tools/Search/?c=HOME&amp;q=private+landlords</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Being prepared to live independently (the Skills young people need) – the CBC commitment

We want young people to be as prepared as possible when they move to live independently for the first time. The Leaving Care team will start early assessment of skills, usually shortly after a young person turns 16, during their first pathway plan. Assessment includes self-care and other key skills such as cooking, shopping, laundry and ability to pay bills and manage a budget. The personal advisor will work with the young person and their residential or foster carers to help build skills in these key areas. This is undertaken in a safe environment to learn and build skills. This may be by facilitating a ‘staying put’ arrangement with foster carers or, for those young people in supported accommodation within their tenancy.

Support provided includes, but is not limited to:

- Buying enough food for the week and paying bills
- How to cook and make meals
- Guidance on healthy eating
- Guidance on taking care of a living space (being clean and tidy, washing clothes, not allowing other people to mess up a living space, getting on with neighbours and landlords, paying bills)

We want our young people to have the things they need to live independently so we discuss this with them and provide assistance to help them buy the right things at the right time.
Accessing advocacy & social care records

What is advocacy for children and young people?

Advocacy is about supporting children and young people to make sure that their rights are respected and their views and wishes are heard at all times.

The aim of advocacy is to make sure young people are protected and their rights are met by providing an opportunity for views to be listened to and properly considered.

What can an advocate do for children and young people?

An advocate is someone who is independent. This means they work directly for the child or young person, not the carers or social worker. The advocate will listen carefully to the child and help them make sure that people making decisions about their life are listening to what they say.

An advocate can support a young person to:

- express their wishes and feelings in meetings
- contribute to the plans and decisions being made about them
- understand their rights and make sure their rights are being respected
- make a complaint
- support them in meetings

The advocate will not tell anyone anything the child says without their permission, unless they are worried about the young person or someone else’s safety.
Why a child or young person might need an advocate

Children might use this service because they:

- need to make sure their voice is heard and listened to in the decisions adults are making
- do not feel safe
- are unhappy with where they are living
- are unhappy with having to move
- are having problems in school

The advocacy service is offered independently on our behalf.

Submitting a request for Access to Records

If children or young people require access to their records, in the first instance they will be encouraged to discuss this with their allocated Social Worker or Personal Advisor. Information in relation to a living individual is dealt with as Subject Access Requests under the Data Protection Act 2018. A response should be provided within 30 calendar days of receipt of request/confirmation of ID unless the request is complex or voluminous in which case legislation allows for an extension of up to a further two months if required. If an extension is required the young person will be informed of this.

Leaving Care Financial Policy
2018/19
Support and Entitlements
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Guidance notes

This policy provides guidance for practitioners working with care leavers on all aspects of eligibility for financial support available from Central Bedfordshire Council’s (CBC) Leaving Care Team. The policy sets out the type and amount of allowances that care leavers are entitled to receive based on their status and circumstances.

The figures given refer to the financial year 2018/19 and will be updated in line with National changes.

For the purpose of this document, entitlements to services are based on the following categories:

**Eligible young people**

Young people aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 (including their 16th birthday) and are still looked after. Services are designed to help them prepare for leaving care.

**Relevant young people**

Young people who have left care and are aged between 16 and 17 years old and were previously eligible.

**Former Relevant young people**

Young people aged between 18-25 years old, dependent on a need’s assessment.

Below is a chart to see whether a young person is eligible for Leaving Care Financial support.
Notes and Implementation Issues

All allowances should be based on an assessment of needs and the Care Leaver supported according to those assessed needs. Discussions should take place with the young person and set out in the young person’s Pathway Plan.

Care Leavers who are in receipt of benefits, will be assessed based on their overall weekly benefits and other income before any additional entitlements are given to them from CBC’s Leaving Care Team.

Care Leavers who are also unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are entitled to the same allowances as any other care leaver. However, allowances to this group of young people once they are over 18 may be affected as a result of their immigration status.

In addition to £2000 from the Leaving Care Grant, savings and possessions should be accumulated during time in care. These funds and items should be taken with care leavers when moving to help them set up their new home.

Social Workers and Personal Advisers should ensure that all young people have a bank account and where possible pay all allowances to young people through their account.

This policy has been produced following consultation with young care leavers, social care staff and finance staff.

The allowances set out in the following sections apply to all ‘Eligible’, ‘Relevant’, ‘Former Relevant’ and ‘Qualifying’ young people dependent on their legal/immigration status and an assessment of their needs.

In addition to the above the care leaver can request a set of targets which will be incentivized. The targets can be tailored to the care leaver to take into consideration the characteristics and circumstances of the individual.
Section 1

Eligible and Relevant Children Aged 16 & 17 who are living in Semi-Independent and Independent Placements (Section 31 or Section 20)

Categories marked with asterisk are not paid to young people in foster care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entitlement</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INCENTIVES FOR POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Care Leavers are entitled to receive incentives for meeting achievement targets in their pathway plans. The setting of these targets will be led by the care leaver and agreed in consultation with their Personal Adviser and the network supporting them. They include but are not confined to the following specific examples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Incentive/Traineeships/ Apprenticeships/ Volunteering Or Employment (If the Activity Does Not Attract A Bursary)</td>
<td>Determined on assessment of need</td>
<td>Care Leaver will be entitled to the 16 to 18 Learning Support Bursary, most colleges also have support funds that can help with costs specifically associated with courses (subject to assessment). Other costs with which Care Leavers may require support include: • Registration and examination fees • Text books • Essential activities to meet course requirements. • Public transport between accommodation and course centre, if the distance is over three miles and it is the nearest college to your home offering the course you want to do. • Transport costs to open days or college interviews • Specific clothing, including clothes for interviews, uniform such as steel toed boots or hairdressing kit start up equipment, including health and safety equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support to Care Leaver Parents to take up education, traineeship or employment</td>
<td>Determined on assessment of need</td>
<td>Lone parents, who wish to return to education, start a traineeship or take up employment opportunities, will be assisted to identify funds to cover or contribute to child-care costs. In the first instance, colleges, the Care to Learn Fund, E2E, Sure Start, the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Department of Work and Pensions (benefits agency) must be approached as sources of potential child-care funding as lone parents are a priority group for their support.

In addition, once all these applications have been made, Care Leaver Parents will receive an additional payment. The size of this will be dependent on assessment and include a calculation of appropriate incentive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continued Financial Support when Care Leavers are successful in application for Employment Or Training.</th>
<th>Determined on assessment of need</th>
<th>On taking up employment, Care Leavers will continue to receive their weekly living allowance of £57.90. (The practice of withdrawal of this allowance when Care Leavers achieve a net income of £87.35/week and withdrawal of incentive when they achieve a net income of £138 net will cease)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in recognized or structured voluntary/community work</td>
<td>Determined on assessment of need</td>
<td>Where it is a target for a Care Leaver to engage in these activities, engaging is structured or recognized voluntary/community work to receive additional weekly allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in structured or recognised cultural/art/sporting activity</td>
<td>Determined on assessment of need</td>
<td>Where it is a target for a Care Leaver to engage in these activities Care Leaver to receive incentive and costs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ENTITLEMENTS AND ALLOWANCES

**Looked after children and care leavers aged 16-17yrs old living in Independent and Semi Independent Accommodation** are entitled to the following payments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accommodation</strong></td>
<td>Placement &amp; accommodation costs to be met in full for young people up to the age of 18.</td>
<td>Where young people are moving into independent living the rent level must be within the local Housing Benefit Reference Rent, this can be ascertained via a pre-tenancy determination. Any requirement to provide a deposit and rent in advance must be clarified prior to the tenancy agreement being authorized. CBC’s Leaving Care Team may help with deposit and rent in advance. If the young person decides to rent accommodation higher than Local Housing Rate, they will need to discuss this with their PA to see if they can meet the shortfall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly Living Allowance (WLA)</strong></td>
<td>Equivalent to national government rate £57.90</td>
<td>This is provided to all young people aged 16-18 years. Young people who are undertaking paid training will get the equivalent or a higher allowance from their training provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clothing Allowance</strong></td>
<td>£20.00 per month Clothing Allowance Plus One off £120.00 Winter clothing allowance £50.00</td>
<td>This is a £20 per month clothing allowance, which can be paid weekly, monthly or quarterly and can be paid directly to the young person or be spent by the Leaving Care Social Worker in the company of the young person. The arrangements for providing and spending the clothing allowance should be set out in the young person’s pathway plan. Young people must produce receipts for clothing purchases. A one off £100.00 for winter clothing allowance from September until the end of February, via the Social Worker. The £100.00 winter clothing allowance is paid to young people who are under the age of 18 before 30th Sept of that year. £50.00 one off payment for job interviews. Proof will be required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birthday Money</strong></td>
<td><strong>17th £50.00</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>18th £100.00</strong></td>
<td>Birthday money should be given as a gift either by present or by gift voucher to the young person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christmas/Festivals Allowance</strong></td>
<td><strong>£50.00</strong></td>
<td>Young people who do not celebrate Christmas will be given a choice as to when their festival allowance is to be provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social activities &amp; Leisure</strong></td>
<td><strong>£20 per month up to 18th Birthday</strong></td>
<td>Young people should be encouraged and assisted to explore the local leisure facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driving lessons</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 Provisional License</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>1 Theory Test</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>10 Driving Lessons</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>1 Practical Test.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Or</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Motor Cycle</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Or</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Scooter test</strong></td>
<td>CBC’s Leaving Care Team will provide the funding for a provisional driving license, one theory test and the cost of 10 (1 hour) lessons to introduce young people to driving. This is available to young people aged 17-21 years old and is conditional on the young person matching the cost of the 10 driving lessons provided by the CBC’s Leaving Care Team. This will enable the young person to have 20 [20 hours total] trial lessons. Young people must pay the cost of the 10 lessons to their social worker, PA, foster carer/keyworker who will then book the 20, one-hour lessons. In general, by paying for lessons in a block, driving schools may provide extra lessons. Additionally, CBC’s Leaving Care Team will pay for one practical driving test. This is dependent on an approved driving school recommending that the young person is ready to take the test. Depending on an assessment of need the ‘Introduction to Driving’ equivalent funding can be transferred to a Certificate in basic Training/Forklift Truck Driving course if it does not attract funding from elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fares</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public transport weekly ticket or pass</strong></td>
<td>Young people will be given a public transport ticket or pass if they are in education, training or employment. Additionally, the pass or ticket will assist with family contact, leisure &amp; cultural needs. For young people placed outside of CBC, the Social Worker will purchase a Public Transport Pass or ticket. This support will be provided up to 18 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Equipment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dependent on assessment of need</strong></td>
<td>Young person will need to apply to the Learning Support Fund during the 1st week of enrolment on courses for equipment costs. Late applications should be made to the college administrators.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **16-18 Years Vulnerable Learners Bursary** | **Up to £1,200.00 Per Year Dependent On Attendance** | If funding is refused on evidence of this, then CBC will consider supporting with equipment costs for education.

Young people who are undertaking a full-time education course or unpaid training courses (12 hours study/training and contact time) are eligible to apply for a Bursary Fund via college or training provider. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) with refugee status or DLR are eligible to apply. Young people will be paid weekly, dependent on their attendance at college.

These funds will pay for all essential course costs, any travel costs required and a healthy meal on each day of attendance.

| **Personal Luggage** | **£40.00 (one off)** | All young people moving to independence or between placements must have at least 2 items of appropriate personal luggage.

| **Initial benefit claim** | **£57.90 x 6 weeks** | CBC’s Leaving Care Team will provide up to 6 weeks subsistence payments to assist young people whilst they wait for their initial benefit claim to be processed. Young people must sign the ‘Agreement to Share Information Form’ so that Social Workers can liaise with the Department of Work and Pensions regarding the progress of their claim. If a young person has not complied with the requirements of the Department of Work and Pensions the subsistence payment may be reduced or food parcels will be provided.

| **Emergency Payments/Food Vouchers/Exceptional Circumstances** | **£10.00** | CBC’s Leaving Care Team will in exceptional circumstances provide emergency payments or food vouchers. These payments will be dependent on an assessment of need and will not exceed £10.00 per payment. Food vouchers and emergency payments will only be given on 3 consecutive occasions and only 6 times in one year.

| **Family contact or contact with significant others** | **Public Transport Ticket or Pass** | Where young people have family members or significant contacts that live outside of Bedfordshire costs may be provided following an assessment of need.

| **Key Documents** | **£100.00** | CBC’s Leaving Care Team will purchase a passport & 1 birth certificate for each young person.

CBC’s Leaving Care Team will meet the full cost of the nationality and citizenship process, if the young person meets the application criteria before their 18th Birthday.
Counselling, Health & Therapeutic Needs  | Dependent on assessment of need  | CBC’s Leaving Care Team will assist young people to access services to meet their health and development needs via the ‘looked after’ children health provision and via universal health services. Where appropriate and dependent on the assessment of need, CBC’s Leaving Care Team may provide funds to secure additional health services via the CBC Resource Panel.

Specific Needs i.e. Religious, Cultural or other Special needs  | Dependent on assessment of need  | CBC's Leaving Care Team will assist young people to access services to meet their special needs. Where appropriate and dependent on the assessment of need, CBC's Leaving Care Team may provide funds to secure additional services i.e. skin and hair care and dietary requirements.

Emergency financial support taking up employment  | Sum equal to equivalent benefit.  | To assist a young person with making a successful transition to Full Time Employment. A bridging grant of Universal Credit equivalent per week for a maximum of 6 weeks to be paid whilst waiting for their first salary payment. (This is for Full time only employment)

**All the payments outlined above are to be paid directly into the bank accounts of the Care Leavers.**

In exceptional circumstances (eg newly arrived unaccompanied asylum seeking children/young people) payments are made onto pre-payments cards issued to young people. Even more exceptionally Cash Payments can be made.

Some supported accommodation providers make these payments on behalf of CBC.

**Looked after children and care leavers aged 16-17yrs old living in Foster Placements Accommodation are entitled to the following payments:**

16 and 17yr old Looked after Children/Young People living in foster placements receive the equivalent support outlined above through allowances paid to foster carers.

These are outlined in the document “Foster Carers Financial Guidance”

Foster Carers, The Young Person and their Social worker agree how much is paid directly to the young person and how much is administered by the foster carer.
## Section 2

**Former Relevant children aged 18 to 25 years who are living in Semi-Independent, Independent Placements or Staying Put Arrangements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entitlement</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INCENTIVES FOR POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Care Leavers are entitled to receive incentives for meeting achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>targets in their pathway plans. The setting of these targets will be led by</td>
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<tr>
<td>the Care Leaver and agreed in consultation with their Personal Adviser and</td>
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<tr>
<td>the network supporting them. They include but are not confined to the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>following specific examples</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained Periods in Education/Training Eg 1st Term, 1st year</td>
<td>One off</td>
<td>Care Leaver Parents, who wish to return to education, start a traineeship or take up employment opportunities, will be offered an incentive. The size of this will be dependent on assessment of need and include a calculation of appropriate incentive and child care costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Education/Training</td>
<td></td>
<td>As outlined above, targets to be set in Pathway Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful application for employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained period in employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eg 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion of Counselling/Therapy/Treatment Programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support to Care Leaver Parents to take up education, traineeship or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participaiton in recognized or structured voluntary/community work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dependent on assessment of need</td>
<td>Where it is a target for a Care Leaver to engage in these activities Care Leaver to receive incentive and costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in structured or recognised cultural/art/sporting activity</td>
<td>Determined on assessment of need</td>
<td>Where it is a target for a care leaver to engage in these activities Care Leaver to receive incentive and costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENTITLEMENTS AND ALLOWANCES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Accommodation** | Via Universal Credit  
Rent paid by young person if working  
If UASC and not eligible to apply for Universal Credit, then CBC’s Leaving Care Team will pay for accommodation | Young persons over 18 are eligible to claim Universal Credit. They will need to use their Universal credit to pay for their accommodation.  
If young person decides to rent accommodation higher than Local Housing Rate, they will need to assess this with their Personal Adviser to see if the young person can meet the shortfall.  
Young people who remain in foster care placements/ Staying Put agreements are also eligible to claim housing benefits up to the level of the Local Housing Rate. This is dependent on the circumstances of the foster carers’. Further information can be found in the Staying Put policy.  
If the young people are not eligible to apply for welfare benefits, CBC’s Leaving Care Team will pay for accommodation costs until the young person is eligible to apply for Universal Credit.  
Accommodation costs for ARE (All Right’s Exhausted) young people will be covered by the LA until UKBA/Home Office take over responsibility for the young person. |
| **Weekly Living allowance** | Via Universal credit  
Employment  
If UASC and not eligible to apply for Universal Credit, then CBC’s Leaving Care Team will pay for WLA at the same rate as Universal credit | Young people are eligible to claim Universal Credit.  
Young people who remain in a foster care placement post 18 are eligible to claim Universal Credit as they are defined as ‘Independent in their own right’.  
Initial Benefit Claim bridging payment  
Leaving Care Service will provide up to 6 weeks Subsistence payments to assist young people whilst they wait for their initial benefit claim to be processed. Young people must sign the ‘Agreement to Share Information Form’ so that Social Workers can liaise with the Department of Work and Pensions regarding the progress of their claim.  
If the young people are not eligible to apply for welfare benefits, they will be given £57.90 until they can apply for benefits  
ARE young people will be given £35.15 per week, for their food and expenses.  
If a young person has not complied with the requirements of the Department of Work and |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pensions</td>
<td>Subsistence payment can be provided of £35.15 for up to 3 weeks. LA can also provide up to 3 food vouchers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Heating Allowance</td>
<td>£10 per month of 1st Winter of Independent Living – total of £60. Young people living in independent accommodation who are responsible for and pay variable utility and heating costs will be provided with a £60.00 winter fuel allowance. The allowance is available for Oct, Nov, Dec, Jan, Feb &amp; March of the first winter they are living independently, (unless it is included in the overall placements costs). This could be provided as two payments of £30 one in September and one in December.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthday Money</td>
<td>19th &amp; 20th £50.00 21st £100.00 22nd-25th £50.00 Birthday allowance will only be paid to young people who engage in regular face to face contact with CBC’s Leaving Care Team. Birthday money should be given as a gift, either by present or by gift voucher to the young person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas/Festivals Allowance</td>
<td>£50.00 Young people who do not celebrate Christmas will be given a choice as to when their festival allowance is to be provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving lessons</td>
<td>1 Provisional License 1 Theory Test 10 Driving Lessons 1 Practical Test. Or Motor Cycle Or Scooter test CBC’s Leaving Care Team will provide the funding for a provisional driving license, one theory test and the cost of 10 (1 hour) lessons to introduce young people to driving. This is available to young people aged 17-21 years old and is conditional on the young person matching the cost of the 10 driving lessons provided by the CBC’s Leaving Care Team. This will enable the young person to have 20 [20 hours total] trial lessons. Young people must pay the cost of the 10 lessons to their Social Worker, PA, foster carer/keyworker who will then book the 20, one-hour lessons. In general, by paying for lessons in a block, driving schools may provide extra lessons. Additionally, the CBC’s Leaving Care Team will pay for one practical driving test. This is dependent on an approved driving school recommending that the young person is ready to take the test. Depending on an assessment of need the ‘Introduction to Driving’ equivalent funding can be transferred to a Certificate in basic Training/Forklift Truck Driving course if it does not attract funding from elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fares</td>
<td>Public Transport Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Equipment and Enrolment fees</td>
<td>Dependent on assessment of need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Grant</td>
<td>£4,500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Grant</td>
<td>Up to £500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial benefit claim</td>
<td>£57.90 x 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Payments/Food Vouchers/Exceptional Circumstances</td>
<td>£20.00 (£10.00 for food and £10.00 for gas and electric if living independently)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Documents</td>
<td>£100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Costs</td>
<td>Dependent on assessment of need</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further Education (Non-advanced Courses i.e. GCSE, A levels & BTEC)

From the age of 18 to 20, young people who are studying full time (12 hours or more of ‘guided learning’) can claim Income Support and Housing Benefit on the grounds of being in ‘Relevant Education’.

Dependent on an assessment of need, CBC’s Leaving Care Team may provide assistance for specific grants and one off payments to young people, who are studying, for items such as books and equipment, if funding from the Learning Support Fund has been refused.

For 2018/19, there is a discretionary fund available from CBC Youth Support Service, to support raising the academic attainment and access to Education, Employment and Training of looked after children/care leavers, where other funding is not available. The funds must be used to:

Support young people to access education, employment or training that will lead to a long-term outcome i.e. short-term course once completed will lead onto further education, employment or training.

Have identified and measurable outcomes that are monitored

Cannot be funded through any other funding stream.

The funding will not pay young person’s weekly allowance so please make sure that the young person will not be excluded from claiming benefits

If a young person is entitled to Universal Credit (Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Housing Benefit and Child Benefit/Child Tax Credits) he/she is not eligible for CBC’s further education support as this is intended to replicate family and/or welfare benefit support.

Care leavers are a ‘priority group’ in terms of college ‘Access Funds’ which are sometimes called Learner Support Funds. Many colleges also have bursaries and specific welfare grants which care leavers may be able to apply for. The students’ support service should be able to provide information on both the practical and financial support that may be available.

SEE ALSO SECTIONS OF THIS DOCUMENT HEADED “Incentives for positive achievements”
## Higher Education (Advanced Course’s i.e. Degree level)

The level of fees, loans, grants, and bursaries for higher education student’s change each academic year. The most accurate and up to date information is available via the following links: [http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/student-finance/undergraduate-student-finance#maintenanceloans](http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/student-finance/undergraduate-student-finance#maintenanceloans).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Finance England</th>
<th>CBC Leaving Care Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Finance England will offer loans to help you financially. Usually Care leavers are offered the highest amount of loan available for students. This varies from year to year. Please see above link for most accurate information.</td>
<td>Central Bedfordshire CBC’s Leaving Care Team will offer a grant to help you financially.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The loan has 2 components</td>
<td>The grant consists of 3 components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maintenance loan</td>
<td>- Maintenance grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to £11,354 if going to a Uni in London</td>
<td>£4250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to £8,700 if going to a Uni out of London</td>
<td>- Equipment &amp; Books grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tuition loan</td>
<td>£450.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to £9,250.00</td>
<td>- Computer Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maintenance Loan</strong></td>
<td>£500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The maintenance loan is provided by Student Finance England and is paid directly to the student, normally in three instalments and is provided to help with living costs such as rent, food, bills, recreational/leisure activities, equipment and books.</td>
<td><strong>Maintenance Grant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tuition Fee Loan</strong></td>
<td>The Maintenance grant is provided by CBC’s Leaving Care Team and paid directly into the young person’s account to cover accommodation, including vacation accommodation, food, bills, recreational/leisure costs. You will be paid this in 3 instalments per year Sept, Jan, April.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your university or college sets your tuition fee, and the loan is paid directly to them. You have to pay it back.</td>
<td><strong>Equipment/Books Grant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to £450.00 (This grant is not transferable and will only be paid if the young person is not successful in securing funding from the University’s Access to Hardship Funding). Young people will need to submit a list of books, equipment and</td>
<td>Up to £450.00 (This grant is not transferable and will only be paid if the young person is not successful in securing funding from the University’s Access to Hardship Funding). Young people will need to submit a list of books, equipment and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Loan Repayment
Graduates repay the combined tuition fee and maintenance loan when they have finished studying and are earning over £21,000.00 per year. After that, you'll pay back 9% of anything you earn over £21,000.

Support from Individual Universities
In addition to the financial support provided by Student Finance England, most Higher Education Institutions will offer their own financial support. Each university will have its own eligibility criteria and any awards may only be available to a limited number of students.

Access To Learning Fund
Most universities also have an ‘Access to Learning Fund’ which is available to students who are experiencing financial hardship. Some universities offer care leavers priority access to Access to Learner Funds.

receipts to their Personal Adviser. In general students undertaking practical courses such as Art, Design and Technology type courses would only require the maximum allowance.

Computer Grant
Up to £500.00 (This grant is not transferable and only available following an assessment of need and the young person having previously not received the grant) young people may top-up this amount to purchase a higher specification machine.

Corporate Parenting Services will provide financial assistance to foster carers to cover the cost of a young person’s initial move to university. Part of the CBC’s Leaving Care Team Higher Education Grant should be used to fund vacation accommodation and moving expenses to and from university.

Grant Repayment
You will not be expected to pay back the support grant to Central Bedfordshire Council. But you will need to pay back the Student Finance England Loan

Universal Credit
The majority of young people who undertake higher education courses are ineligible for welfare benefits such as Income Support and Housing Benefit. Certain limited groups of young people who undertake higher education courses such as lone parents and sick and disabled young people may remain/be eligible for welfare benefits while studying.

Immigration status and eligibility of student loan application will need to be confirmed prior to any agreement of funding from CBC’s Leaving Care Team (see section 9)
Section 5

ENTITLEMENTS AND ALLOWANCES

Eligible And Relevant Children Who Are 'Detained' Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
Section 23A (3) Paragraph (2)

Where a young person is ‘detained’ in hospital or custody or on ‘remand’, the majority of their financial allowances will be suspended. Where appropriate, and dependent on an assessment of need, young people will receive a pocket money allowance of £10 per week, which is commensurate with the rules of the particular institution.

On release young people will have access to their ‘Leaving Care Grant’ and, where a young person has been ‘detained’ for more than six months, and dependent on an assessment of need, a Miscellaneous Payment for clothing etc. will be considered. The maximum clothing payment for 16 and 17 year old who are being released from detention is linked to the Clothing Allowance of £100.00.

The Pathway Plan for young people who are detained should set out the provision of all financial allowances. Financial support for young people who are detained in Young Offenders Institutes is governed by the rules of the particular establishment they are detained in. In general, young people are expected to undertake education or training and are provided with pocket money for engaging in these activities. Additionally, they will often be provided with clothing, or are able to bring clothing with them. As such they will not be provided with any allowances while detained.

Former Relevant Children Who Are 'Detained'

Whilst ‘detained’ in hospital or custody or on remand, young person can receive up to £20 per month.

On release young people will have access to their ‘Leaving Care Grant’ and will need to apply for Universal Credit, whilst looking for a job or applying for suitable educational course.
Section 6

ENTITLEMENTS AND ALLOWANCES

Eligible And Relevant Children Living At ‘Home’ With Family

Young people who return home as part of a planned reconciliation process and, are Eligible or Relevant Children will be given financial assistance that takes account of their family circumstances. In general, young people will be working, undertaking a traineeship, or a modern apprenticeship, or receiving an education maintenance allowance and/or, will be supported by their family who may also be receiving Child Benefit, Child Tax Credits and other welfare benefits. Where specific difficulties arise, and dependent on an assessment of need, young people may be provided with an allowance commensurate with the Job Seekers Allowance/Income Support – Usual Rate for 16 and 17 year old – Benefit rate.

In essence Eligible and Relevant young people living at home on a long-term basis should be supported by their family and do not receive leaving care financial support. The majority of Eligible young people are only eligible due to Section 31 Care Orders not being discharged. Financial support for this group of young people should come from education, training and employment opportunities as well as their families. Supporting this group of young people, as ‘Standard Care Leavers’ is not appropriate as it creates disparities within families, particularly in relation to siblings who are not, or have not been looked after.

Young people who return home on a short-term emergency basis will continue to receive the standard Eligible and Relevant young person entitlements.

If a Relevant young person returns home and remains at home for 6 months their status under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 is changed to that of a Qualifying Child and Young Person over 16. If an Eligible young person is placed at home, or lives at home as part of a planned reconciliation process for six months or more and his or her Care Order is discharged, their status is changed to that of a Qualifying Child and Young Person over 16.

If the young person becomes a Qualifying Child and Young Person over 16 and his or her situation at ‘home’ breaks down prior to his or her eighteenth birthday they become a Relevant young person.

If an Eligible young person is placed at home, or lives at home as part of a planned reconciliation process for six months or more and he or she reaches the age of eighteen he or she becomes a Qualifying Child and Young Person.

The young person and their family must be informed of any changes in entitlements which may arise, should the young person’s status change to that of a Qualifying Child and Young Person over 16.
Section 7

ENTITLEMENTS AND ALLOWANCES

Qualifying Children And Young People Over 16 Section 24 (Advice And Assistance) Of The Children Act 1989 As Amended By The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Where appropriate, and depending on an assessment of need, Children and Families Social Care have a power to provide financial assistance to Qualifying Children and Young People over 16. Individual young people may be given financial assistance in “exceptional circumstances” (Children Act 1989 (Section 24A (5)) and Section 24B) with priority being given to support relating to education, training and employment opportunities. The presumption should be that such assistance should be provided where this is necessary to protect the young person’s welfare and it cannot be made available by any other agency. The Personal Advisers will assist to maximise financial support available from the employment opportunities, the benefits and tax system, college and university access funds etc.
ENTITLEMENTS AND ALLOWANCES

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Eligible & Relevant Children

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are covered by the Children Act 1989 and the new provisions introduced by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 in exactly the same way as other children in this country. However, they will also have an immigration status, one of:

- Applying for asylum
- Accepted as a refugee
- Granted exceptional leave to remain based on
  a) Humanitarian Protection
  b) Discretionary Leave
- Indefinite leave to remain
- Refused leave to remain

Most Eligible and Relevant unaccompanied asylum-seeking children will receive the same entitlements as any other young person. However, there may be some differences in entitlement, which will need to be acknowledged in their Pathway Plan.

Lone parents who have an immigration decision pending and have no recourse to public funds cannot apply for Universal Credit. In these situations, CBC’s Leaving Care Team will provide the same level of assistance.

When developing Pathway Plans with Eligible and Relevant Children (UASC), particular attention must be paid to their immigration status and contingency plans developed which take account of their possible status options at the of age eighteen.

Unaccompanied Asylum–Seeking Children (UASC) Former Relevant Children

Where young people have an immigration status that permits them to work and access public funds they will be expected to work or claim benefits like other Former Relevant Children.

Where young people do not have indefinite leave to remain, they are only eligible for a CBC 16+ Higher Education grant for higher education courses that finish in the academic year prior to their status expiring.

Where young people have exhausted all rights to appeal an adverse asylum decision and/or are unable to extend exceptional leave to remain (ARE) the CBC’s Leaving Care Team social worker will carry out a Human Rights Assessment to determine further support.
An allowance of £35.15 (at this point the young person will usually receive a removal directions notice) can be paid until removal date or the young person’s 21st Birthday. This allowance can continue to be paid until the date of removal is reached. The Personal Adviser should address with the young person issues relating to their removal and voluntary return. This should be detailed in the pathway plan.

**Access To Public Funds And Universal Credit**

Young people must apply to extend their leave to remain at least two months before their immigration leave status expires. If this task is completed by a young person’s eighteenth birthday and they have proof that the Home Office has received their application the young person is eligible to apply for benefits. Personal Advisers should obtain a letter from the young person’s solicitor that includes details of the young person’s immigration status; the date of the application to extend the leave to remain was submitted. The solicitor submits the renewal/extension by recorded post. The recorded post item will have a tracking number that can be used to verify that the Home Office received the application. The letter from the solicitor and a print out of the Post Office tracking statement should be submitted with the young person’s benefit claim.
Section 9

ENTITLEMENTS AND ALLOWANCES

Post Eighteen Placements – Staying Put

CBC’s Leaving Care Team recognise that there will be circumstances where young people will need to remain in their current foster placement once they turn 18. This section outlines the group of young people who have been assessed as needing a period of time to remain in their current foster placement beyond their 18th birthday.

From the age of 18, young people are no longer legally in ‘care’ and therefore fostering arrangements no longer apply. However, placements where young people were looked after under fostering regulations up to their 18th birthday may be able to transfer to the National Association of Adults Placement Scheme [NAAPS].

Young people who remain in placement after their 18th birthday and fit within the NAAPS regulations do so because they are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vulnerable Young people</td>
<td>Young people who remain in a foster care placement post 18 will be able to claim Universal Credit, including Housing benefits. From this income the young person will be expected to contribute £20 a week towards the cost of their food &amp; household costs. £64.05 (LHR) a week will be paid directly to the Carer by housing benefits (the carer needs to declare themselves as a landlord and arrange a tenancy agreement) Travel payments to attend college will be paid by CBC’s Leaving Care Team. If the young person is working, similar contributions will be expected from the young person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Young people remaining in placement whilst undertaking further or higher education</td>
<td>Young people who remain in a foster care placement post 18 who are in in a full time FE non-advance course, will be able to claim Universal Credit, including Housing benefits. If young person is enrolled on a full-time HE course They will get a student loan and/or CBC maintenance grant of £4250 per year From this income the young person will be expected to contribute £20 a week towards the cost of their food &amp; household costs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
support them in completing the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>£64.05 (LHR) a week will be paid directly to the carer by housing benefits (the carer needs to declare themselves as a landlord and arrange a tenancy agreement) If the young person is working, similar contributions will be expected from the young person.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. **Private arrangement between young people and foster carers where both parties wish to extend the placement.**

Where it is assessed that both the carer and young person wish to extend the arrangement, this will become a private lodgings arrangement. CBC’s Leaving Care Team will cease to fund the placement and the young person, and their carer/s will need to agree both the level of payment and practical arrangements.

| Young people who remain in a foster care placement post 18 who are in in a full time FE non-advance course, will be able to claim Universal Credit, including Housing benefits. If young person is enrolled on a full-time, HE course They will get a student loan and/or CBC maintenance grant of £4250 per year. From this income the young person will be expected to contribute £20 a week towards the cost of their food & household costs. £64.05 (LHR) a week will be paid directly to the Carer by housing benefits (the carer needs to declare themselves as a landlord and arrange a tenancy agreement) Travel payments to attend college will be paid by CBC’s Leaving Care Team The specific arrangements above can be varied in response to exceptional circumstances by agreement of the Assistant Director as Chair of the Resources Panel. |

4. **Young people remaining in supported lodging placement whilst undertaking a course of higher education or returning to a supported lodging placement during ‘vacation’ time or weekends.**

Where a young person (Former Relevant Children) wishes to remain in their supported lodging placement whilst studying at university or is studying away from the placement and wishes to return to the supported lodging placement during vacation time. The young person and the carer/s will need to negotiate a rent level.

| Young people who remain in a foster care placement post 18 who are in in a full time FE non-advance course, will be able to claim Universal Credit, including Housing benefits. If young person is enrolled on a full-time, HE course They will get a student loan and/or CBC maintenance grant of £4250 per year From this income the young person will be expected to contribute £20 a week towards the cost of their food & household costs. £64.05 (LHR) a week will be paid directly to the Carer by housing benefits (the carer needs to declare themselves as a landlord and arrange a tenancy agreement) Travel payments to attend college will be paid by CBC’s Leaving Care Team |
ENTITLEMENTS AND ALLOWANCES

Setting Up Home Allowance / Leaving Care Grant

This is a £2000 allowance that is available for 16+ care leavers to spend with the support of your Social worker/Personal Adviser in order to buy household equipment, purchase home content insurance and TV license in order to furnish their new home.

In addition to £2000 from the Leaving Care Grant, savings and possessions should be accumulated during time in care. These funds and items should be taken with Care Leavers when moving to help them set up their new home.

Should a Care Leaver want to access their Allowance whilst at a hostel, private rented accommodation, semi-supported accommodation, or at university they can access the grant to buy the basic equipment/ furnishings that they require and equipment which they can take with them once they leave that placement. This grant can and should be utilised at the time most useful to the young person up to their 25th Birthday or as long as they are open to CBC’s Leaving Care Team.

Items should be recorded on case notes and pathway plans so there is a clear record of what has been spent and what is available. Receipts should be scanned and uploaded onto the system and the young person should retain the original receipts for product guarantee purposes.

The following table offers examples of appropriate items on which the Leaving Care Grant could be spent and guide prices. These are not prescriptive. The Setting Up Home Allowance / Leaving Care Grant does not have to be spent on these items at these prices and there is not an entitlement to these items. The items purchased should be agreed between the young person and their Social Worker or Personal Adviser, the young person should lead this and the payments should reflect their needs.
Guidance on how to utilise Setting Up Home Allowance / Leaving Care Grant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Insurance</td>
<td>£40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV License</td>
<td>£150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV with aerial and free view</td>
<td>£150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal Costs</td>
<td>£100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooker &amp; Connection</td>
<td>£180.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing Machine</td>
<td>£170.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refrigerator</td>
<td>£150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedframe &amp; Mattress</td>
<td>£200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofa</td>
<td>£200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wardrobe and Chest of drawers</td>
<td>£120.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtains</td>
<td>£50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpet/ Flooring</td>
<td>£400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen Pots /Pans/ Starter Kit with Cutlery/Crockery</td>
<td>£50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kettle &amp; Toaster</td>
<td>£40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£2,000.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Central Bedfordshire in contact

Find us online: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
Call: 0300 300 6120
Email: customers@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
Write to: Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5TQ
12. Verbal update from the Director of Children's Service on matters of interest to the Panel
13. 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

Report author: Sharon Griffin
Committee Services Officer
Sharon.griffin@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of meeting</th>
<th>Agenda items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 29 July        | 1. Understanding our Looked After Children population  
                 2. CiCC updates  
                 3. Fostering Q1 report (Annie Craig)  
                 4. CiCC Participation Annual report (young people)  
                 5. Spotlight Report  
                     • LAC Transition to Adults’ Social Care (Ken Harvey & Ruth Coals)  
                     • Children with disabilities as LAC (Ken Harvey)  
                 6. Presentation on the overview of the process of a Health Passport (LAC Health Team)  
                 7. LAC annual report (Nigel Stock)  
                 8. Ofsted and Peer Review workplan (Ruth Coals)  
                 9. Verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services on matters of interest to the Panel |
| 24 October     | 1. Understanding our Looked After Children population  
                 2. CiCC updates  
                 3. Fostering Q2 report (Annie Craig)  
                 4. Adoption 6 months report (Nickie Philips)  
                 5. Looked After Children SW Stability update report (Ruth Coals)  
                 6. Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) annual report  
                 8. Walking Alongside You (WAY) project update (Tracie Collins)  
                 9. Supported Accommodation for 16-17 year olds  
                 10. Verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services on matters of interest to the Panel  
                 11. Interim Virtual School report (Jackie Edwards) |
| 19 December    | 1. Understanding our Looked After Children population  
                 2. CiCC updates  
                 3. Looked After Children SW Stability update report (Ruth Coals)  
                 4. Verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services on matters of interest to the Panel |

**Unscheduled reports**
14. 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 Item
15. Children in Care Council update

To receive a presentation from the Children in Care Council in conjunction with Item 8.

Document is Restricted
16. Children in Care Council - Aspirations Wish List

To receive a report on the Children in Care Council Aspirations Wish List

Document is Restricted