At a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held in Room 14, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, SG17 5TQ on Thursday 30 May 2019, 10:00 AM – 12.40PM

Present:

Elected Members (voting)  Cllr A L Dodwell (Chair)
Cllr S Clark (Vice Chair)
Cllr S Collins
Cllr S Goodchild
Cllr G Mackey
Cllr G Sanders
Cllr T Stock

Members in Attendance:  Cllr S Dixon

Officers (voting):  Mrs S Harrison, Director of Children’s Service

Carers (non voting):  Mr P Albon

Children in Care Council Representative (Co Chair) (non-voting)

Officers in Attendance:  Ms R Coals, Principle Social Worker & Head of Professional Svcs
Mrs A Craig, Practice Manager Fostering
Ms S Griffin, Committee Services Officer
Mrs J Howard, Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer
Mrs S Keenan, Practice Manager, Conferencing and Review Professional Standards
Mrs K Mathu, Children and Young People’s Participation Officer
Mrs N Phillips, Practice Manager, CBC Adoption Service
Mrs S Rymell, Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Early Help
Mr N Stock, Interim Head of Service, Corporate Parenting
Mrs. G Wall, Voice of the Child & Family Strategic Manager

Others in attendance  Children in Care Council Representatives

Apologies:  Cllr C Hegley
Mr T Hoyle, Assistant Director of Strategic Commissioning
Mrs J Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health & Housing
Mrs M Short, Participation Officer, Professional Standards

Absent:  None
1. Election of Chair

RESOLVED

that the Deputy Executive Member for Families, Education and Children be elected as Chair for municipal year 2019/20.

2. Election of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED

that the Executive Member for Families, Education and Children be elected as Vice-Chair for the municipal year 2019/20.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on the 8 April 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. Members' Interests.

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

5. To receive any matters of communication from the Chairman.

The following announcements and communications were made:

- The Chairman advised that following the Annual Council in May 2019, Mrs S Clark was now the Lead Member Executive Member for Families, Education and Children.

- The Chairman explained that following the restructure of Children’s Services, Mrs R Coals, Principle Social Worker & Head of Professional Services would be attending future meetings of the Panel in place of Mr N. Stock, Interim Head of Service for Corporate Parenting. The Chairman thanked Mr Stock for his contribution to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
6. Understanding our Looked After Children Population

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

Points and comments included:

1. The Interim Head of Service, Corporate Parenting advised that the total number of Looked After Children in Central Bedfordshire had remained stable over the last few years. This however was not the same cohort as children came in and out of care due to factors such as returning home and adoption.

2. The age and gender of the children turning 18, ceasing to be Looked After and becoming care leavers was consistent with the report at the February meeting. A key point to note was that more than 7 out of 10 Looked After Children were in Foster Care at this point. Placement types were also consistent with the report given at the February meeting.

3. In terms of the consistency of foster carer placements, Members were advised that more than 8 out of 10 of the Looked After Children have been with the same foster carer for more than 2 years and that all of the children had been with the same foster carers two and a half years or longer.

4. Foster Carers placements are full a majority of the time. There are some periods when a foster carer might not have a child as a placement might have come to an end.

5. The Practice Manager, Conferencing and Review Professional Standards advised that Central Bedfordshire Council was performing well in terms of the placement stability statistics. Quarter 4 figures for 2019 show that 3 or more placement moves in a year (6.2%), in comparison with 10% for the Eastern region and 10% nationally. Children moved placement for a variety of reason. This was sometimes that the placement was not appropriate for them. Stability and continuity of care was very important, and the Corporate Parenting Service strived to make sure that this continues.

6. The Interim Head of Service, Corporate Parenting advised that in terms those children placed in house with friends and family and how this measured against placement Independent IFA or in house as being the right setting, national research suggests that placements with family and friends tends to be quite strong. There also tended to be fewer incidents of the children going missing as they are surrounded by their own family.

7. The Interim Head of Service, Corporate Parenting explained that Looked After Children/Young People involved with the youth offending service were a specific group in custody or who had a custodial sentence. Support would be provided to these young people in the same way it was for Looked After Children.

8. The Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Early Help explained that a range of outcomes such as returning to home is considered for those Looked After Children and Young People who are involved with YOS and Remand Services taking into account aspects such as the safety of the Young Person.

NOTED

the report on the Looked After Children and Young People population in Central Bedfordshire.
7. Children in Care Council update

The Panel received a presentation from the Children in Care Council in conjunction with exempt Minute Item 14.

Points and comments included:

1. The consultation event with the Independent Reviewing team gave the young people the opportunity to chair their own meeting. It was interesting to see how other local authorities run and deliver their meetings. Ideas were taken onboard. The information will be included in the IRO Report.

2. The visit to University of Bedfordshire included a visit to the accommodation and onsite facilities such as the library and canteen. Information was provided on the support available to care leavers and about a particular website giving different options about other career choices such as apprenticeship programmes. A visit to the Luton Campus has been requested.

3. During a bowling activity in Dunstable lunchtime, the Children and Young People’s Participation Officer shared a dictionary of terms created by an organisation called TACT. Language is a powerful tool for communication and can sometimes create barriers and stigma. The young people agreed that some of the words could be replaced with words that are positive and make them feel empowered. The TACT dictionary would be shared with members of the Panel.

4. A film showing the ‘Top Ten Tips for Social Workers’ made by all Children on Care Councils in the Eastern Region would be screened at the July meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

5. As part of the Young People’s Quality Assurance Assistant role, work was taking place with the Children’s Services Commissioning team to look at the provision of the highest quality 16+ supported accommodation services to care leavers.

6. The Director of Children’s Services advised that Central Bedfordshire Council ensured that university accommodation is available to young people in care 52 weeks a year and personal advisor is available until they are 25. There is a team available with expertise to help the young person choose their further education options. A Personal Advisor would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

NOTED

the presentation from the Children in Care Council.

8. Adoption Annual report

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

Points and comments included:

1. There is no minimum/maximum age for a child to be adopted. In general, a child must be between the ages of birth to 18 years. For step parent adoption, an adoption order
can still be made when a child is over 18 years of age if the application was made in time.

2. In terms of the provision of support to young person when they reach 18 from the local authority or adopter, the local authority would write to directly to the young person asking if they wish to continue with support. The local authority can continue to facilitate contact between the adoptive family and birth family, if the adoptive person consents. Young people living independently can be put in contact with the relevant services if they wish to move out of the accommodation.

3. Carousel evenings in Milton Keynes Council provide individuals who have made an initial enquiry about the adoption process the opportunity to meet with adoptive parents, share the experiences and the realities of adopting and to prepare to become adoptive parents by learning from others.

4. The Practice Manager, Conferencing and Review explained specialist training can be provided to prospective adopters for equipment, care needs etc for adoptive children with additional or more complex needs.

5. The Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer explained that in Central Bedfordshire there is a strong emphasis to place siblings together with an adoptive family, where this is appropriate, depending on the needs of the children. 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.

NOTED

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

9. Fostering Annual Report


Points and comments included:

- Central Bedfordshire Foster Carers had been made aware of the introduction of an interest free loan to support the cost of building works to extend/adapt their property in order to be able to offer permanence or care for more children. Social workers were discussing this initiative with those who are interested.
- The Supporting Lodging Scheme was progressing well. As at 31 March 2019 there were 4 Supported Lodgings Carers caring for 2 young people. The possibility of expanding the number of placements could be looked into if there was an increase. In demand.
- The Practice Manager Fostering explained that part of the assessment process to become a Foster Carer included a social worker meeting with the individual(s) at home to explore whether they have the potential to meet the needs of looked after children and to discuss how they feel fostering a child would fit in with their family. 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.

- The Practice Manager Fostering advised that in terms of the maintaining the wealth of expertise and diversity of Fostering and Adoption Panel Members and succession planning, the focus continued on recruitment accordingly.

**NOTED**

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

**10. Leaving Care**

The Panel received a report outlining the new approach to offering support to our young people leaving care.

Points and comments included:

- The Interim Head of Corporate Parenting explained that a sustained period of work had taken place on the Leaving Care Offer and Leaving Care Financial policy during which consultation had taken place with the relevant groups of young people about the content of both documents.
- The Interim Head, Corporate Parenting advised that benchmarking of the Leaving Care Offer and Leaving Care Financial policy for LAC in Central Bedfordshire with other Local Authorities has shown some similarity in most areas because of the remit.
- In response to a question raised about whether this was a new financial policy and that the last policy was produced in 2014/15 which is concerning for those young people in semi living independently accommodation managing their own money, the Interim Head, Corporate Parenting agreed that financial policies need to be updated every year. He advised that the aim was to have a policy in place which young people would refer to about their entitlements.

**RESOLVED**

1. that the Leaving Care Offer outlining Central Bedfordshire Council’s commitments to care leavers be endorsed for onward consideration by Executive.

2. that the Leaving Care Financial policy outlining the allowances and payments to which care leavers be endorsed for onward consideration by Executive subsequent to elements of the policy being amended to include index linking to the cost of living and clarification that the Maintenance Grant for University living costs was paid in three instalments throughout the year.
11. **Verbal update from the Director of Children’s Services on matters of interest to the Panel**

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

Points and comments included:

- Ministers visited Children’s Services on the 23 May to discuss the lobbying that had taken place about accommodation for young people aged 16+. It was felt that this visit during the time of the European elections was unusual and showed the level of commitment.
- During the visit, meetings took place with representatives from the Children in Care Council, Police and from Bedford Borough and Luton Council.
- Visits took place to geographic areas where private unregulated accommodation was located and to Central Bedfordshire Council house supported living accommodation. During the visit an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker shared his personal story about the service and the support he was receiving.
- An induction day had taken place for new elected members on the Children’s Services portfolio area. Three further inductions session were planned with each Assistant Director within Children’s Services.

12. **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 following amendments:

24 October 2019
- Walking Alongside You (WAY) project update be moved to the December meeting.

Unscheduled reports
- A representative from the Youth Offending Service to be invited to a future meeting.
- A Personal Adviser be invited to a future meeting to provide an update on the support given to LAC.

13. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**
14. **Children in Care Council update**

The Panel received a presentation on the work being undertaken by the Children in Care Council in conjunction with Minute Item 7.

**NOTED**

the exempt presentation from the Children in Care Council.

15. **Children in Care Council – Aspirations Wish List**

The Panel received an exempt report on the Children in Care Council Aspirations Wish List.

**NOTED**

the contents of the report.

**RESOLVED**

that the Children in Care Council Aspiration List to be shared with CMT for circulation to officers.