

Report of Director of Children's Services

Report to Scrutiny Board

Date: 12 December 2013

Subject: Update on the development of the offer to kinship carers in Leeds



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| Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-In? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number: | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

Summary of main issues

1. This report provides an update to the Scrutiny Board on the development of a corporate offer for kinship carers in Leeds, and progress on the revisions to our kinship care policies.
2. The report highlights the implementation of the 'Corporate Offer' from the whole Council for kinship carers who are approved as Leeds kinship foster carers.
3. Finally, the report will inform the Board of on-going developments to review policies and increase support for kinship carers in Leeds.

Recommendations

4. That the Scrutiny Board:
 - a) notes these developments and continues to support the work towards providing the offer to kinship carers in Leeds.
 - b) considers the draft Kinship Care Friends and Family Policy v15 (6 Nov 2013)

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report seeks to update the Scrutiny Board on the development of the Corporate Offer to Leeds Kinship carers and the review of the Kinship Care (Family and Friends) Policy

2 Background information

- 2.1 Kinship care can be used to describe a range of arrangements for children, young people and families. The distinctions between these different arrangements are important and reflect significant differences in the respective roles and responsibilities of parents, carers and the Local Authority. A summary of these different arrangements is included in Annex A.
- 2.2 For the purposes of this report, the key types of arrangement are:
- 2.2.1 *Informal Kinship Care* - these are arrangements that are initiated by the families themselves, the children are not in care and the Council has not placed them. However, their family may have a legal order such as a Special Guardianship Order in place for the child.
- 2.2.2 *Formal Kinship Care* – these arrangements are initiated by the Local Authority where the child is in care, and the alternative would be for the child to be placed in foster or residential care. These carers are often referred to as Kinship Foster Carers.
- 2.3 The majority of informal kinship arrangements work well and meet the needs of the child with the support of universal agencies. It is important, however, that any difficulties are responded to early. The review of the policy and strategy for supporting informal kinship arrangements has been undertaken with the following premise:
- 2.4 Families may need advice and assistance during the early stages of considering whether to care for a relative or a friend's child, in order to weigh up the options and to consider what support services they might require.
- 2.5 Partner agencies have a key role to play in identifying and supporting children who are living with family and friends carers.
- 2.6 Services need to be aware of and sensitive to the needs of these children and their families and give priority to access services such as housing, education and health (in the same way as looked after children).
- 2.7 Early intervention, underpinned by a Common Assessment Framework (CAF), may help prevent difficulties escalating to the point where specialist services are required.
- 2.8 The proposed policy regarding informal kinship carers ensures the following:
- 2.9 Through Targeted Services, support and advice will be offered to kinship carers to access support from universal services and welfare benefits.

- 2.10 Where a child is assessed as a child in need a range of support may be available to kinship carers including financial assistance in order to provide basic equipment. Support is identified through Child and Family Assessment.
- 2.11 Where the child is at serious risk of harm and longer term support is required to maintain the child in the informal kinship placement as an alternative to care, Children's services will, subject to a financial means test, support the carer financially. This will be based on the age-related fostering allowance payable to children who are 'looked after' as described earlier in this report.

3 Main issues

Corporate Offer to formal kinship carers

- 3.1 There are 180 kinship foster carers in Leeds. For these kinship carers the council has been improving the range of offers available to foster carers.
- 3.1.1 Discounts :
- The Council has negotiated a great range of discounts at a range of Leeds based retail, food, entertainment and other outlets including Spice Quarter; Browns; Leeds Wellbeing Centre; Kids Clubhouse and many more.
- 3.1.2 Corporate offer through Sport & Active Lifestyles. This includes the following:
- Leeds Card Extra: Discounts and exclusive offers across Leeds all year round in our sports and leisure facilities as well as museums, theatres, restaurants and shops.
 - Annual Bodyline Gym and Swim Card: this includes Peak and Off-Peak access to swimming pools and gyms in all our Leisure Centres.
 - For children placed with kinship foster carers the children and young people can access an Annual Junior Bodyline Card: Peak and Off-Peak access to swimming pools, gyms, fitness and squash, along with access to the climbing wall at Aireborough. For all children aged 8-18 in the kinship foster carers immediate family including your Looked after Children (Note: Terms and Conditions apply about age and access to gyms at certain times).
 - For children placed with kinship foster carers the children can access Free Junior Swimming Lessons: For children in your immediate family, including your Looked After Children.
- 3.2 The development of the Corporate Offer has been welcomed by the carers and the children and young people alike. It is also hoped that the offer could be extended to those kinship carers who have taken an alternative legal order such as adoption, special guardianship or residence order. Where carers take out these orders, the child is no longer looked after. However this is a good outcome for children as it provides them with permanence and security.

Kinship Care (Family and Friends) Policy – formal and informal carers

- 3.3 The Kinship Care (Family and Friends) Policy has been revised in recent months with advice and guidance from the Family Rights Group, the Grandparents Association and Grandparents Plus.
- 3.4 The policy is in the final stages of development and will be signed off subject to approval by the Director of Children’s Services and Executive Member for Children’s Services in late December 2013. A copy of the draft policy is appended to this report.
 - 3.4.1 Financial support to kinship carers and financial support to prevent children entering care (Section 17) has been reviewed as part of the revisions to the policy.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 The scrutiny board requested an update on the offer to kinship carers.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 There are no specific equality issues identified.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The need to safely and appropriately reduce the numbers of children looked after in Leeds is a key priority. The support to family members to care for children, who may otherwise enter care, is key in achieving this to outcome.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 Financial support to kinship to carers is not seen to require an increase in resources.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 No risks have been identified, other than the need to progress on the Corporate Offer in order to achieve the intended outcome.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Board has requested an update on the Corporate Offer to Kinship Carers and this report notes the developments to date and plans going forward.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 That the Scrutiny Board:

a) notes these developments and continues to support the work towards providing the offer to kinship carers in Leeds.

b) considers the draft Kinship Care Friends and Family Policy v15 (6 Nov 2013)

7 Background documents¹

None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.