

Report of Director of Children's Services

Report to Scrutiny Board

Date: 19/3/2105

Subject: Update on the development of services and support to kinship carers in Leeds



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

This report provides an update to the Scrutiny Board regarding the on-going developments to increase support for kinship carers in Leeds.

Recommendations

That the Scrutiny Board:

- a) Continues to support the work towards providing raising the profile of the kinship arrangements and support to kinship carers in Leeds.
- b) Supports the work being undertaken by the Kinship Care Reference group to take forward the new developments to improve the outcomes for children living in Kinship Care arrangements.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report seeks to update the Scrutiny Board on the implementation of the Corporate Offer to Leeds Kinship carers and to outline the new developments to support kinship families.

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:

2.1.1. A child who is not looked after- 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 or Child Arrangement Order for the child.

2.1.2. A child who is looked after– 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.

2.1.3. A privately fostered child -these are arrangements where the child is cared for by someone who is not a close relative and the arrangement is made directly between the parents without the involvement of the Local Authority, but where the Local Authority have a responsibility to assess and support the arrangement.

- 2.3 The majority of kinship arrangements where the child is not looked after 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 Family and Friends policy and strategy for supporting these types of 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 government requires all Local Authorities to publish its policy on Family and Friends Care. The Leeds' Kinship Care (Family and Friends) Policy has been fully updated with advice and guidance from the Family Rights Group, the Grandparents Association and Grandparents Plus. It is available on the Council's website and includes a link to the Kinship Care Guide for England which is published by Grandparents Plus.
- 2.9 The policy for those kinship carers whose children are not looked after by the Local authority ensures the following:
- 2.10 Through Targeted Services, support and advice will be offered to kinship carers to access support from universal services and welfare benefits.
- 2.11 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 completion of a Child and Family Assessment.
- 2.12 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 a "top up" allowance 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 kinship foster carers

- 3.1 There are 165 kinship foster carers in Leeds and at the last scrutiny board meeting the corporate offer to these carers was explained in detail. In summary this provides the following:-
- A great range of discounts at a range of Leeds based retail, food, entertainment and other outlets
 - The corporate offer through Sport & Active Lifestyles including 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 looked after children placed with kinship foster carers the children and young people can access an free Junior Swimming lessons; 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.
- 3.2 The development of the Corporate Offer has been taken up by the carers and the children and young people alike.
- 3.3 It is hoped that the offer could be extended to those kinship carers who have taken an alternative legal order such as adoption, special guardianship or child

arrangements 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.

- 3.4 In addition, the “Maxcard” provides foster carers and their family’s free access to a wide range of leisure activities both in Leeds and surrounding areas. Last year the offer was extended to all families who have taken out a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) on children so that the 500 children who are currently cared for under a SGO have the opportunity to take part in activities or visits places of interest in Yorkshire.

Service developments

- 3.5 In November 2013 the Kinship Fostering Service expanded from 1 to 2 Kinship Care teams. This has provided increased capacity to meet the demand for assessments of prospective kinship carers, which has increased significantly due to the work of the Family Group Conferencing Service and the drive from the Courts to place children wherever possible with family members.
- 3.5.1 By expanding the service, it has been possible to provide better support to kinship foster carers as well as beginning to develop more robust support for those families who move onto Special Guardianship. Special Guardians often need support in the early months of placement as well as later on, at transitional stages in the child’s life and particularly during teenage years.
- 3.6 Leeds’ Special Guardians have been involved with a research project undertaken by York University on Special Guardianship. The research findings were published in December 2014 and Children’s Services will need to give careful consideration to the findings recommendations and build these into our plans and services for Kinship Carers.
- 3.6.1 Leeds has also been invited by Grandparents Plus to take part in a research project entitled “Adolescent Transitions and Outcomes in Adulthood for Young People Growing up in Kinship”. Although only in its early stages it is hoped that the findings will give valuable insights on how young people perceive their experience of growing up in kinship care.
- 3.7 The Leeds’ Kinship care policy acknowledges that most Kinship families are caring for children who are not looked after by the local Authority. With this in mind, Children’s Social Work Service wanted to explore more fully what support and services are available to families in Kinship Care arrangements with particular focus on ‘informal’ arrangements where the child is not looked after. A project worker was seconded to carry out this work with the objective, based on action planning
- To consider what support and guidance is available at cluster levels through universal and targeted services
 - To consider whether staff in cluster and targeted services are aware and able to support the vision for Kinship Carers
 - To arrange on Outcome Based Accountability event for this service area.

The report's findings can be found in Appendix 1A.

3.8 An Outcomes Based Accountability Event was held in December 2014 with a wide range of third sector organisations, universal and targeted services and service users attending. (Appendix 1B).

3.8.1 A significant outcome from this event was an agreement to form a reference group to carry forward the many thoughts and ideas generated from the OBA session. The purpose of the group is to provide a structured mechanism to facilitate joint working for those involved in developing and supporting Kinship Carers across Leeds and to raise awareness of these carers. The group was established in February 2015 to bring together Kinship Carers, third sector providers and the local authority to:-

- identify gaps in service provision for kinship families
- share our knowledge of kinship care from different perspectives
- Inform and educate professionals of the needs and requirements of children living in kinship families.
- seek funding for any additional resources required

3.8.2 It is hoped that the Scrutiny enquiry into Kinship Care will support and enhance the work of the reference group so that any new developments can be implemented in a timely way to ensure that children who are brought up in Kinship Families can achieve the good outcomes we aspire to for all our children growing up in this city.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

The scrutiny board requested an update on the developments to support kinship carers in Leeds. The Director of Children's Services, Nigel Richardson is chairing a cross party working group on Kinship Care and taking forward Kinship issues at a wider political level.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.2 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 may well require an increase in resources, but access to resources should be sourced through the cooperative approach of working with partners, the third sector and government agencies to meet the needs of kinship families.

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 ongoing development work to increase support 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 improving the outcomes for children placed in kinship arrangements and the corporate offer to kinship carers in Leeds.
- b) Takes into account the work already started on improving the support to kinship families and considers this information when making any recommendations.

7. Background documents¹

Annex A - A summary of different arrangements in Kinship Care

Appendix 1A –Project Development work in Kinship Care Leeds

Appendix 1B - Outcomes Based Accountability, summary of collated responses

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.