

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	4 July 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Kinship Care Service Planning
REPORT NUMBER	CFS/23/183
DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Isabel McDonnell
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform committee members of the plans to enhance multi agency support to kinship families and use of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to improve outcomes for children and young people living within a kinship arrangement.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee:

- 2.1 note the improvement planning in relation to supporting kinship carers is fully aligned to the Children's Services Plan and the development of our Family Support Model (agenda item 11.1 of Education and Children's Services Committee 4 July 2023); and
- 2.2 instruct the Interim Director Children and Family Services to report progress on the impact of delivering improved multi-agency support to Kinship Carers through the Children's Services Plan annual progress report.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 What is kinship care?

- 3.1.1 Kinship care is the term used to describe the placement of a child/young person with family members/family friends when the child/young person is unable to remain in the care of their birth parents. There are two forms of kinship placements.

- a) Formal kinship placements – In these circumstances the child is subject to a legal order (ie deemed a looked after child) via the children's hearing or is placed with the kinship carer with the consent of the parent(s), under Section 25 Children (Scotland) Act 1995, in recognition that they are not able to keep the child safe.

b) Informal kinship placements – In these circumstances, the child having been placed by the Local Authority via a) following which the kinship carers have been granted a Kinship Order by the Courts. This removes the child from the looked after system and empowers the family to normalise the care and upbringing of the child.

3.1.2 In both scenarios the local authority has a legal duty to provide support (financial, emotional and practical) to kinship carers. There are currently 225 kinship families who are caring for Aberdeen children, largely situated within Aberdeen City or Aberdeenshire.

3.1.3 The regulation of kinship care, reflecting the familial nature, is less than that of children placed within foster care or adoptive placements. However, the needs of the children and their carers have a broad alignment.

3.1.4 Our kinship families are great grandparents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles and connected persons. Some have children from birth to adulthood and some may have had previous social work involvement. The children and young people they care for have all experienced some form of loss and many have experienced trauma of varying degrees. All should expect to be loved and nurtured in a family network of carers, who are also nurtured and cared for. In consideration of this our service provision cannot be a “one size fits all approach”, we need a diverse multi agency approach which matches the diverse nature of our carers.

3.1.5 The support provided to kinship carers is within the continuum of Aberdeen City’s developing Family Support Model. It ensures effective early intervention support to kinship families mitigating the need for children to be cared for out with their family. This report should therefore be read alongside the report shared with members in relation to ‘Developing a Family Support Model and the Edge of Care Pilots’.

3.2 What does our data tell us?

3.2.1 Our data has told us that caring for a child within a kinship family is complex and challenging. The range of emotions involved mean that carers have to balance a range of competing practical and emotional demands;

- care and safeguarding the child;
- assuming a parental role often at a point in their life when such was not planned;
- concern for the birth parent(s) – a recalibration of relationships.

3.2.2 Locally the number of children living within a formal kinship arrangement is 133 while those living an informal arrangement is 154. Only those living in a formal arrangement feature within data in relation to looked after children. Analysis of our data indicates that the percentage of looked after children living in a kinship family (22.7%) is lower than that of comparable local authorities and the national figure (33.2%). Our data has broad alignment to the other North East local authority areas Aberdeenshire and Moray.

3.2.3 There are many reasons for this position. Local practice has strongly supported kinship carers to care for their kin out with the formal looked after system (this does not alter the financial, practical or emotional support provided by the local authority). It does however promote a sense of normality for a child and their family. Engagement at a national level indicates that our emphasis on this has been stronger than in other areas. Children cared for within an 'informal arrangement' are not reported within looked after data.

3.2.4 However, differential is also recognised due to evolution of kinship care over the last decade and the associated funding. The level of support provided to kinship carers compares less well to that provided to foster carers. To address this staff from the Kinship Team, in the initial months of 2023, undertook a series of engagement activities with kinship carers. The aim was to better understand their views on the support currently provided and where there were gaps or where improvements could be made.

3.3 Consultation with Kinship Carers

3.3.1 The Kinship Team in February 2023 undertook consultation with kinship carers, social work colleagues, and a range of third sector providers. The consultation of kinship carers was based on a survey. The aim of consultation was to increase the understanding of the varying agencies and teams that were providing support to carers, in addition to communicating with carers to ascertain what the overall experience of being a carer was like, and to identify where the gaps in provision were, to ensure there is a shared and understood appreciation of the range of support that is required and commonalities. The survey of carers resulted in the following themes, as illustrated below:



3.3.2 Feedback from carers unsurprisingly highlighted the joy and love they have for the role and ensuring their kin remained within their family. It also highlighted the following:

Most challenging aspects of being a Kinship Carer:

- Juggling work and caring duties
- Relationships with parents of child(ren)
- Supporting the child with their experiences
- Financial concerns

Most helpful support provided by the kinship team

- Having someone to talk to

- Emotional Support
- Signposting
- Financial Support

Identify gaps in support/where more support would be helpful

- Practical Support involved in the caring task
- Wellbeing/Emotional Support
- Self-help – (peer support/enhancing knowledge and skills etc)
- Financial Support

3.3.3 The learning from the engagement activity has been drawn together within an Improvement Plan. The aim of the plan is to address the gaps and challenges noted above but also to reduce the number of kinship placements that sadly breakdown while simultaneously reducing the number of children placed in Out of Authority Placements (foster care and residential care).

3.4 Alignment to The Promise and our Children’s Services Plan

3.4.1 In 2020 the Scottish Government made a commitment to thousands of care experienced children and adults to *#KeepThePromise*. This included ‘where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way’.

3.4.2 Scotland’s vision is for a society where children’s human rights are embedded, protected, and upheld, wholly and meaningfully, across every aspect of their lives. Every child has a right to respect for family life, including with siblings (Article 16 of the UNCRC). Children who are unable to live with their family have a right under Article 20 of the UNCRC to special protection and assistance, because of the additional support they require securing all their rights.

3.4.3 The Promise states “Whatever the mode of arrangement, Scotland must ensure that children living in kinship care get the support they need to thrive. Kinship must be actively explored as a positive place for children to be cared for.

3.4.4 Kinship carers must be supported to continue to care for the children they are looking after and this must include, but not be limited to, financial support. Too often, children have been placed with an ‘auntie’ or ‘granny’ or other relation with insufficient ongoing support to manage a complex set of circumstances. Finding a biological relation to place a child with is not enough to ensure that a child grows up in the context of love and kindness. These families are often managing the impact and pain of the biological parent not being able to care for their children. There must be no barriers for children to have regular, positive childhood experiences.

3.4.5 In addition to our Corporate Plan, our Corporate Parenting responsibilities are reflected in our Children’s Services and Local Outcome Improvement Plan where the following objectives are set for Corporate Parenting under stretch outcome 6: *“Stretch Outcome 6 Increase by 100% the number of partners supporting kinship carers by 2023”*.

3.5 The Whole Family Wellbeing Fund

3.5.1 The Scottish Government has committed to providing £500m, over the course of this Parliament, to support delivery of The Promise. The Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) is intended to help families overcome challenges before they reach crisis point. The Fund aims to significantly reduce the number of children and young people in care by 2030. More broadly the outcomes expected from the WFWF are:

- i. Improved family wellbeing
- ii. Reduction in gap in wellbeing outcomes for disadvantaged communities
- iii. Reduction in families requiring crisis intervention
- iv. Reduction in children and young people living away from families
- v. Increase in families taking up wider supports

3.5.2 To better meet the needs of kinship carers, £150,000 has been earmarked from the WFWF, for the next three years. This investment will support the team with a programme of activities to improve the multi-agency support offer to kinship carers. In developing support for kinship carers, service provision needs to be available to all families who need it and so a multi-agency, cohesive and trauma informed approach is needed to support our families. However, any development of service provision needs to hold kinship carers and the children they care for at the centre of any decision making for it to nurture meaningful change.

3.5.3 This investment will have three strands fully aligned to the principles of the Intensive Family Support noted in The Promise.

Strand 1 – Community Based and Non-Stigmatising Support.

Further developing relationships with the Family Learning Service, the Kinship Team will align a Community Development Officer worker to work with kinship families. This will further develop our preventative support offer and focus on building the capacities of kinship carers. The focus will be to:

- further develop self help and support groups for formal and informal support opportunities.
- identify carers who feel isolated in their caring role and build connections with them.
- enhance advocacy
- develop learning and development opportunities with a strong focus on trauma recovery, enhance the knowledge and skills of kinship carers to better meet the needs of the child in their care.

Strand 2 – Holistic and Relational Support

Kinship carers recognise that the relational dynamics around kinship families are frequently complex and conflictual. For kinship carers to navigate the grandparent (or other) relationship but deliver on the parenting task is challenging. Doing so whilst navigating the changing relationship with the child's mother and father can be experienced as conflictual.

Realigning resource from existing CSW services will add capacity to the Family Time Hub (supporting family time between children and their birth parents). This will provide additional support to help children and young people understand family relationships, support children to better understand the reasons for their

care arrangements as well as supporting parents and kinship carers to manage their relationships.

Strand 3 – Flexible, Responsiveness and Timely Support

Kinship carers identified the need for increased ‘flexibility’ and the ‘responsiveness and timely’ nature of support. To respond to this, a family resource worker will enhance the support offer from the Kinship Team.

Assuming responsibility for a child within a kinship arrangement can be daunting for many families. Kinship carers have highlighted the criticality of the support at the outset of any child moving. The enhanced support will ensure the service is able to meet all new kinship carers immediately following a child being placed in their care to:

- explore immediate support needs,
- ensure financial support is provided for in a timely manner
- explain the role and remit of the kinship team
- signpost and connect to other services
- supporting kinship carers to progress the various statutory checks

3.5.4 Kinship carers have told us that it can be overwhelming trying to navigate the legal context of having a child placed in their care whilst dealing with the emotional and practical upheaval such a placement can bring. Having a consistent person with whom they can build a relationship with is identified as important.

3.6 Multi-agency Support to Kinship carers

3.6.1 Separate to the improvement activity detailed in 3.5 the Kinship Team has actively engaged with partners (CAMHS, 3rd Sector) to develop opportunities for kinship families to access therapeutic support. Building the resilience of carers and enabling the child or young person to begin to recover from past trauma is critical to improving outcomes. Data would indicate that a significant percentage of children living within a kinship family have neurodiverse needs. The team is continuing to develop the knowledge and confidence of staff to support carers who are caring for children with this level of need.

3.6.2 This has recently been enhanced through a partnership with CAMHS who are supporting kinship carers and young people living within these placements by agreeing the placement of an Assistant Psychologist within the kinship team. The value of this placement will be evaluated and inform future support opportunities.

3.6.3 The service have actively engaged with local and community partners to raise awareness of the needs of kinship carers as well as children and young people in these placements. The interest from partners was very encouraging and will contribute to kinship carers being able to access a range of responsive supports without the stigma of having to be referred by Children’s Social Work or other agencies. Kinship carers require a timely and appropriate response to ensure that they are afforded a level of support appropriate to their identified needs enabling them to feel emotionally supported to care for the children in their care.

3.6.4 The increased accessibility and coordination of support will ultimately contribute to the stability of caring arrangements and mitigate against breakdowns that often result in children requiring to be accommodated in foster care including out of authority placements, at significant financial cost. Unfortunately, this can

also lead to children requiring to be separated from their siblings if they cannot be accommodated together because of a lack of provision. These placements are often not in the children's locality, which breaks links to family connection and existing supportive relationships in education and wider community.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendation of this report. The identified investment in the kinship service will come from the WFWF, enabling a realignment of staff on a cross cluster basis.
- 4.2 The Scottish Government have confirmed that Aberdeen City's share of the £32m is a multi-year commitment up to 2025/26. Aberdeen City's share of this funding is £1.025m per year. The funding is to be spent and delivered according to the collective agreement and direction of the local Children Services Planning Partnership with accountability resting with the Children's Services Board.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Corporate Parenting duties included in Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 are designed to ensure that the attention and resources of various organisations are explicitly focussed on the task of safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of looked after children and young people, and care leavers. This part extends the duties of corporate parents and the reporting responsibilities of local authorities.
- 5.2 The Promise and Plan 21-24 impacts on a range of statutory duties on the Council in relation to vulnerable and care experienced children, including those contained in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 and Children (Scotland) Act 2020.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Many of the requirements of Plan 21-24 are already built	The Children's Services Board and Community Planning Management Group have oversight of the delivery of the relevant	M	Yes

	into a variety of strategic plans. It is expected that gaps will emerge as the Council and partners scrutinise the requirements of Plan 21-24 in detail.	strategic plans in this respect. They are ensuring that the terms of Plan 21-24 are incorporated into current and future strategic planning.		
Compliance	No significant risks identified.	Services across all multi-agency partners identified are aware of legislative requirements and ensure compliance.	L	Yes
Operational	The aims of Plan 21-24 are ambitious and will require our people, equipment and buildings to change in order to drive on the plan. This may impact on morale as the change process is undertaken.	Leadership supports participation and planning across the multi-agency partnership in the delivery of Plan 21-24 to best ensure operational support for changes identified.	M	Yes
Financial	No significant risks identified.			Yes
Reputational	No significant risks identified.	The council and partners are committed to keeping The Promise and implementing Plan 21-24.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified.			Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2022-2023</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p style="text-align: center;">Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>Plan 21-24 has direct relevance to the delivery of the following policy statements contained within the Council Delivery Plan for People:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF Child Friendly City accreditation • Commit to closing the attainment gap in education while working with partners across the city • Continue to promote diversion activities for youths and adults in our city with enhanced focus on our three locality areas • Reduce fuel poverty across our most deprived communities through combined heat and power schemes, including the Energy from Waste Plant, and supporting community owned energy solutions
<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>Plan 21-24 has direct relevance to the following stretch outcomes in the LOIP and will help support delivery of these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026. • 90% of Children and young people will report that their experiences of mental health and wellbeing have been listened to by 2026. This is reflected in interactions, activities, supports and services. • As corporate parents we will ensure 95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, health and emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026. • 95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026. • Child friendly city where all decisions which impact on children and young people are informed by them by 2026. 9. 30% fewer young people (under 18) charged with an offence by 2026.
<p style="text-align: center;">Regional and City Strategies</p>	<p>Plan 21-24 is relevant to Aberdeen City Council Delivery Plan, the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, and the Children's Services Plan</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	This report does not require a full Integrated Impact Assessment to be completed.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Promise_v7.pdf

<https://thepromise.scot/plan-21-24-pdf-standard.pdf>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/statutory-guidance-part-9-corporate-parenting-children-young-people-scotland/documents/>

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Isabel McDonnell
Title	Service Manager
Email Address	IMcDonnell@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Tel	07795127128