

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was held on 9 April 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Higgins (Chair); Councillors: Hellaoui, McGee, McGloin, Uddin and J Walker (substitute for Councillor Walters).

OFFICERS: A Brown and J Dixon.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Coupe, Storey and Walters.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 12 March 2019 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

UPDATE – PREVIOUS REVIEW – FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE DRAFT FINAL REPORT - EARLY HELP AND PREVENTION SERVICES

A Brown, Director of Children's Care, was in attendance to provide an update on a previous review – Family and Friends Care (Kinship Care) – undertaken by the previous Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel in 2017.

A copy of the Action Plan, containing the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations, proposed action and an update on progress had been circulated to the Panel prior to the meeting.

The Director of Children's Care provided the Panel with an update in relation to each of the recommendations, as follows:-

- Recommendation a) – Update: On 12 June 2018, the Executive agreed a revised Friends and Family policy which introduced a standardised means-tested model for financial support for family and friends carers, connected persons and special guardians.
- Recommendation b) – Update: A letter was sent to Her Honour Judge Matthews regarding the recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel.
- Recommendation c) – Update: The action was implemented as a direct result of the findings of the scrutiny investigation.
- Recommendation d) – Update: It was confirmed that following the review of social care legal delivery model, a Court Liaison Officer post was not created.
- Recommendation e) – Update: A letter was sent to the Secretary of State for Education on 4 September 2017, outlining concerns regarding conflicting legislation when applying care planning and fostering regulations to family and friends care and to request that the Government revise current legislation and develops regulations specifically for family and friends care.
- Recommendation f) – Update: Placements were assessed, tested and reviewed by Social Workers before application is made for final court orders. Inevitably placements sometimes needed to be made in an emergency during court proceedings.
- Recommendation g) – Update: On 12 June 2018, the Executive agreed a revised Friends and Family Policy which introduced a standardised means-tested model for financial support for family and friends carers, connected persons and special guardians. This includes information for family and friends carers to explain their options and the mechanisms for supporting them.

- Recommendation h) – Update: Detailed data analysis, including that of family and friends carers, has been undertaken to inform the sufficiency strategy for local authority both in terms of sufficiency of placements and the support needed to enable those placements to succeed.
- Recommendation i) – Update: Grandparents Plus is an advocacy group. Children's Services intended to use evidence from Grandparents Plus, and other agencies, to inform its training and briefings for members and officers. Responsibility for delivery rested with the Council's professional staff.

It was highlighted that the department delivered training to front line staff, social workers and partners, where appropriate, for example, Councillors received a briefing on connected persons from the Director of Children's Care.

The department already delivered training to family and friends carers through the foster care training programme. This was available to all connected persons carers who were encouraged to attend.

- Recommendation j) – Update: On 12 June 2018, the Executive agreed a revised Friends and Family Policy which introduced a standardised means-tested model for financial support for family and friends carers, connected persons and special guardians. This includes information for family and friends carers to explain their options and the mechanisms for supporting them.
- Recommendation k) – Update: The local authority continued to input into training development in the region as well as invest in more local training of Social Workers through the step up and front line programmes. This enabled Middlesbrough to have increased influence in the experiences of Social Workers as they train as they are working in Middlesbrough Children's Services throughout their training experience.
- Recommendation l) – Update: Assessments were undertaken with all prospective carers and shared with them to ensure they understood the reasons for decisions. The assessment included reflective analysis of the risks to ensure the carer understood, and was able to manage, the risks appropriately. In some circumstances a child's parent may not wish certain information to be shared. Information regarding third parties may still be shared where appropriate to protect children and young people.
- Recommendation m) – Update: The department would not be looking to identify a group of dedicated officers. Working with family and friends regarding the care of a child was at the core of all social work with children and families and, as such, needed to be a skill for all social workers.
- Recommendation n) – Update: It is standard practice that all families with a Social Worker to be provided with a direct telephone number for the worker. Family and friends carers who did not have an allocated worker could make contact through the First Contact team.
- Recommendation o) – Update: On 12 June 2018, the Executive agreed a revised Friends and Family Policy which introduced a standardised means-tested model for financial support for family and friends carers, connected persons and special guardians. This included information for family and friends carers to explain their options and the mechanisms for supporting them.
- Recommendation p) – Update: Considerable progress had been made in ensuring the views and wishes of children were included in all assessments. An app, MOMO (Mind Of My Own) was introduced to enable children to contribute their views as and when they wanted to. The appointment of a Children's Participation Worker had driven the co-ordination of children's views and voices in all aspects of the Service's work.
- Recommendation q) – Update: Both Children's Care and Early Help continued to work with Grandparents Plus.
- Recommendation r) – Update: A Family Group Conference Team was established through the restructure of Children's Care. The model was based on the Service's work with a national leader in FGC and would enable the development of skills and practice across Children's Care.

- Recommendation s) – Update: The fostering project was in place to increase capacity and choice in fostering arrangements for the children of Middlesbrough. A targeted marketing campaign before Christmas 2018 saw an increase in applications and the project currently focussed on developing opportunities for different kinds of foster carers.
- Recommendation t) – Update: Tees discussions, supported by the Family Courts, had continued regarding the model, however, the financial commitment required to deliver the Mockingbird Family Model continued to be a barrier. This will be continually reviewed.

During the course of discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a query regarding potential confusion amongst some kinship carers in relation to eligibility for financial support from the local authority, the Panel was advised that the revised Friends and Family Policy clearly set out the statutory responsibilities of the local authority and the differences between arrangements for children living with kinship carers who were not looked after children and those who were looked after children. The Policy introduced a standardised means-tested model for financial support for Family and Friends Carers, Connected Persons and Special Guardians. The Policy also detailed the support, including financial support, available for Kinship Carers. It was also clarified that carers, or prospective carers, were made aware of the support available to them, including financial support eligibility, during their assessment by Social Workers. All connected persons carers caring for looked after children were provided with an information pack containing this information. It was suggested that this information be more widely publicised, however, it was confirmed that all connected persons carers were provided with a copy of the Friends and Family Policy and that this was accessible via the Council's website.
- In response to a query, the Director confirmed that any party involved in legal proceedings involving a looked after child, would have been provided with appropriate legal advice at the point when legal proceedings commenced. This information was also contained in the Friends and Family Policy. It was suggested that a copy of the Policy be circulated to all Councillors for information.

The Chair thanked the Director for her attendance and the update information provided.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the update information provided be noted.
2. That a copy of the Friends and Family Policy be circulated to all Councillors for information.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Vice Chair provided a verbal update to the Panel in relation to the business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 2 April 2019, namely:-

- Education Provision
- Executive Update
- Executive Forward Work Programme
- Scrutiny Panel Progress Reports

AGREED that the information provided be noted.