

# MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

## FINAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

# FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE (KINSHIP CARE)

Please note the changes to the previous final scrutiny report format.

Findings are not covered in detail in the content of the report. Minutes of scrutiny panel meetings are attached as appendices to provide an evidence base for conclusions and recommendations.

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## **AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

1. The aims of the investigation were:
  - To ensure that the Local Authority's work with family and friends carers is governed by consistent principles, regardless of the legal status of the carer or child.
  - To ensure that the Local Authority is being proactive in promoting and supporting family and friends carers, even if it is not legally obliged to.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

2. The terms of reference for the scrutiny panel's investigation were as follows:
  - a) To investigate the characteristics of family and friends care in Middlesbrough, including benefits, outcomes and challenges.
  - b) To examine the Local Authority's assessment and care planning processes for family and friends care.
  - c) To establish what information, advice and practical support is available for family and friends carers.
  - d) To examine what financial support is available for family and friends carers and how the Local Authority can deliver financial and support services within budget.
  - e) To identify the principles of good practice for local authority work with family and friends carers.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Family and friends care in the UK**

3. Family and friends care (kinship care) is the care, nurturing and protection of children who are separated from their parents or whose parents are unable to provide that care and support. Instead this care is provided by grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, or other relatives, god parents, step-grandparents, or other adults who have a relationship or connection with the child. This may be a permanent, temporary, formal or informal arrangement.
4. There are clear benefits for both children and their carers from keeping children within the family network. Carers often say the rewards are enormous and they would make no other choice but to step in when needed. Even so, many children who go to live with family and friends carers have had a very difficult start in life, and their behaviour is often greatly affected by past experiences<sup>1</sup> A growing body of research indicates that many of these children have experienced abuse, neglect and other severe difficulties with parents, have similar needs to 'looked after' children and would be in care of the state if their family member had not stepped in.<sup>2</sup>
5. The most common reasons for family and friends taking on the care of children are those related to parental factors such as domestic violence, alcohol or substance misuse, mental or physical illness or incapacity, separation or divorce, imprisonment, or death of a parent. Although, child related issues such as disability or challenging behaviour may also be reasons.

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<sup>1</sup>Written for Grandparents Plus by Doug Lawson and Jo Raine, The Kinship Care Guide for England (Second Edition) 2015

<sup>2</sup> S. Nancy, J Selwyn et al, University of Bristol, Spotlight on Kinship Care, 2011

6. The impact of becoming a family and friends carer is often considerable. Many family and friends carers are the child's grandparents and while this may cover a wide range of ages and characteristics, they are often older and in poorer health than the child's own parents or unrelated foster carers. They may also be less well off financially, either because they are in receipt of a pension and unable to increase their income to take account of additional expenditure, or because they have to give up work in order to take on the care of the child.<sup>3</sup>

## **The context of care by family and friends**

7. A series of court judgements have indicated that local authorities need to give greater regard to family members when looking at long-term placements for children who cannot live with their birth parents. This is despite Government policy that favours adoption over family and friends care for children who have no prospect of returning to birth parents.<sup>4</sup>
8. The majority of family and friends carers act informally by agreement with those holding parental responsibility for the children they care for. Most such arrangements remain entirely private without the need for the involvement of children's social care services, although where a child is assessed as being in need, support may be provided under section 17 of the 1989 Act. In other circumstances, family and friends care arrangements may be subject to the requirements of legislation such as that which governs private fostering, residence orders, special guardianship orders (SGOs) or children who are looked after by the local authority and placed with local authority foster carers who are relatives, friends or other persons connected with the child.
9. Currently, there are encouraging signs of growing recognition of the importance of supporting children with SGOs. For example, the Government has introduced support designed to improve educational outcomes for children under SGOs who were previously looked after.<sup>5</sup>
10. To enable them to care for a looked after child, relatives, friends or other persons who are connected with the child must be approved as foster carers under the 2011 Regulations or temporarily approved as foster carers under the 2010 Regulations. The National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering Services apply, and standard 30 relates specifically to family and friends foster carers. The Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services (2011) provides more detailed information about the assessment and approval of foster carers, and applies in relation to family and friends foster carers as it does for other foster carers.<sup>6</sup>
11. Whilst many of the issues that go with being a family and friends carer are likely to be the same whether or not the carers are approved as foster carers, being a foster carer brings with it additional responsibilities and obligations which have to be met.<sup>7</sup>

## **Supporting family and friends carers**

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<sup>3</sup> Department for Education, Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010

<sup>4</sup> Agnes Guatier, Sarah Wellard and Ryan Workman, Kinship Care: State of the Nation 2016

<sup>5</sup> Lord Nash opening of the second reading of the Children and Social Work Bill, 14th June 2016 [https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2016-06-14/debates/16061450000449/ChildrenAndSocialWorkBill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2016-06-14/debates/16061450000449/ChildrenAndSocialWorkBill(HL))

<sup>6</sup> Department for Education, Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010

<sup>7</sup> Regulation 9, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010; and Children Act 1989 Regulations and Guidance Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, DCSF 2010

12. Family and friends carers often struggle to obtain information which will assist them in their caring role, particularly when they have taken on the care of a child in an emergency. It is important that they should know what resources are available to support children in the local area, including information about universal services such as early years provision, day care and out of school services, schools and colleges, health services, leisure facilities and youth support services. Local authorities should work with partner agencies and the voluntary sector to find ways to encourage peer support, access to support groups and support services.
13. Whilst parents retain their responsibilities for the maintenance of their children placed with informal family and friends carers, those carers may experience significant financial difficulties as a result of taking on the care of a child or children. In some circumstances family and friends carers may still be struggling to cope financially even where they are in receipt of all appropriate benefits. They may need financial assistance for one-off expenditure, such as school clothing or bedroom furniture, or on a more regular basis either to enable them to make adjustments or to make it possible to continue to care for a child in the longer term. Local authorities have powers to make discretionary one-off or regular payments under section 17 of the 1989 Act.<sup>8</sup>

### **Good practice for local authorities**

14. Local authorities work with family and friends carers should be governed by consistent principles, regardless of the legal status of the carer or the child.<sup>9</sup> Each local authority with responsibility for children's services must have a policy setting out its approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of children living with family and friends carers. The policy must address the needs of children in family and friends care, whether or not they are looked after children. Policies should ensure that information about local services is provided and is easily accessible by family and friends carers. Policies should also highlight the availability of advice from independent organisations. The policy should be underpinned by the principle that support should be based on the needs of the child rather than the merely their legal status.
15. Policies should make clear that children are active participants and that their wishes and feelings should be taken into account in all relevant processes, when adults are trying to solve problems and make decisions about them. Local authorities must consult with children and young people, family and friends carers as appropriate when drawing up their policies, and set out how policies have been informed by their views.
16. There is a requirement for staff, who are responsible for implementing the policy, to receive appropriate training and understanding of the issues that family and friends carers face, and of their obligations, powers and responsibilities, including the contents of the local policy. Dedicated workers or teams may be an appropriate way of ensuring this. Social workers who are working with family and friends carers need a transparent and thorough policy framework, in order to ensure consistency of practice and informed decision-making.
17. The local policy must include the relevant legal framework and include the authority's powers and duties in relation to children in need and looked after children. Members of the public must have the necessary information to make informed choices about the most

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<sup>8</sup> Department for Education, Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010

<sup>9</sup> Family Rights Group, Family and Friends Care: A Guide to Good Practice for Local Authorities in England 2010

appropriate route for them to follow. Information should be provided about the different legal situations, the rights of carers and of the children's parents.

18. Local authorities should have a principle of assessing and meeting the needs of family and friends carers they are involved with, regardless of legal status.<sup>10</sup>
19. Carers need to be aware of their entitlement to any state benefits and allowances. Furthermore, the local policy must identify how family and friends carers are made aware of eligibility criteria and when means-testing applies, how to apply for any such financial help, and how and when decisions are made about eligibility. Where financial support is offered, a written agreement should be drawn up detailing the level and duration of the support that is to be provided, and the mechanism for review, to ensure that all parties remain clear about the arrangements.
20. When difficulties arise, families may need support to help them to identify resources available to them with the potential to enable children to remain within the extended family. Family Group Conferences (FGCs) should be considered as an effective method of engaging the support of wider family and friends at an early stage of concerns about a child who may not be able to live with their parents. They promote the involvement of the wider family in the decision-making process to achieve a resolution of difficulties, and offer a way of ensuring that all resources within the family's wider social networks have been engaged for the benefit of the child.
21. Local authorities should work with partner agencies and the voluntary sector to find ways to encourage peer support and access to support groups.<sup>11</sup>
22. For further information, in respect of the scrutiny panel's investigations and findings, please see **Appendices 1 to 4**.

## CONCLUSIONS

23. Based on the evidence, given throughout the investigation, the scrutiny panel concluded that:

### Characteristics of family and friends Care

- a) It is estimated that up to 300,000 children are cared for full-time by a relative, friend, or other person previously connected with the child. Arrangements are covered by a range of different legal statuses with differing financial packages, which include over 7,000 looked after children who have been placed with family members and friends who are approved as their foster carers. However, the majority of family and friends carers act informally by agreement with those holding parental responsibility for the child they care for. A recent study identified that around 2,290 children in the Teesside area are being raised by grandparents, other family members or friends. The prevalence across the North East is the highest in England and the number of children being cared for by family and friends is rising.
- b) Family and friends care involves caring, nurturing and protecting children and can maintain a child's sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. Children feel

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<sup>10</sup> Family Rights Group, Family and Friends Care: A Guide to Good Practice for Local Authorities in England 2010

<sup>11</sup> Department for Education, Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010

loved and are able to bond with their carers, enabling them to grow and develop as happy children. Research has demonstrated that family and friends placements tend to be more stable than unrelated foster care and they have beneficial effects on school progress and transitions into adulthood. Family and friends carers often start to care for a child because there is a crisis in the parental home. The children concerned are likely to have experienced trauma and possibly inadequate or inappropriate parenting as a result of being exposed to these circumstances. These children may or may not be looked after by the Local Authority, or even known to it. By keeping these children out of care system, family and friends carers are saving the state billions of pounds each year.

- c) Some relatives and friends who step in to care for a child in an emergency may be dealing with a situation that starts as a short-term arrangement but then becomes open-ended with no clear indication of how long it will continue. In a number of cases it eventually becomes clear that the children are with them indefinitely and many are left struggling to cope financially, emotionally and socially. The role of providing care within the family is often regarded as natural and is taken for granted. As a result, family and friends carers have low visibility in terms of public policy and social welfare provision.
- d) Approximately half of children in family and friends care have additional needs of some kind, the most common needs being emotional and behavioural difficulties. Family and friends carers themselves also experience multiple challenges, around half are grandparents, they tend to be older, have long-term health conditions and a significant number have multiple caring responsibilities. Despite the high needs of children in family and friends care and the financial, practical and emotional strain on their carers, family and friends carers often feel invisible, lonely, isolated and unsupported. Research has also indicated that there is a clear link between the prevalence of family and friends care and poverty. The lack of, inconsistent or low level financial payments or allowance results in family and friends carers risking hardship themselves in order to provide care and support for their families.

### **Assessment and care planning processes**

- e) The Local Authority does not have a duty to assess informal care arrangements, unless it appears that services may be necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child in need in its area. In other circumstances family and friends care arrangements may be subject to the requirements of legislation such as that which governs private fostering, residence orders, special guardianship orders or children who are looked after by the Local Authority and placed with the Local Authority foster carers who are relatives, friends or other persons connected with the child. The Local Authority has a robust assessment process, careful matching and effective support in place to ensure placements are in a child's best interests. However, further work is required to ensure that all assessments demonstrate a commitment to the long-term permanent care of the child, a thorough evaluation of support, full consideration of the complex and multifaceted issues of mediation and an in-depth exploration of realistic options and orders.
- f) Due to recent changes to legislation, the Local Authority is required, where possible, to place children within their own networks and has to clearly demonstrate that it has exhausted all options before it resorts to placing a child outside of their family. Removal of a child, from the family network, is now seen as a draconian option, namely it is seen as excessively harsh and severe. There is a need to ensure that the Local Authority's policies, practices and procedures recognise that family and friends care is a

permanence option for children and young people. As a result of a series of court judgements, the Local Authority has experienced an increase in the number of assessments required for family and friends carers and a new financial pressure, as family and friends carers seek to achieve status as foster carers. The increasing numbers of family and friends assessments are creating both capacity and financial issues in Children's Services. Measures and strategies need to be implemented to alleviate the increased pressure on the department.

- g) To enable a family and friends carer to care for a looked after child, they must be approved as foster carers under the 2011 regulations. Evidence suggests that although the Local Authority may consider that a family and friends care placement is promoting the welfare of a child, the outcome of the assessment process may conclude that the family and friends carer is not suitable to become a foster carer. In this instance, a decision of the Local Authority could be overturned by a care order granted by the local judiciary, resulting in a child being placed in an un-regulated placement. Both the Local Authority and the local judiciary agree that there is conflicting legislation in respect of the application of care planning and fostering regulations, for family and friends carers. Such issues could be resolved with the development of regulations specifically for family and friends carers.
- h) In the case of a child being subject to a care order, the local judiciary deems that other lesser options are not considered to be sufficiently protective and appropriate for the child. In granting a care order, if problems are encountered, the Local Authority will still maintain parental responsibility to step in and remove the child if that is required. A care order ensures added protection for the child, especially when placements have not been tested. For the local judiciary, the process for making placement decisions could be further enhanced by the testing of placements, receipt of Local Authority's policies and procedures and the appointment of a Court Liaison Officer to act as a conduit between the court and the Local Authority.

### **Information, advice, practical support**

- i) The level and nature of support provided to family and friends carers depends on the assessed needs of the child and the involvement of the Local Authority in making the arrangement. It is estimated that in 95% of cases, children in family and friends care are not classed as looked after children and whilst they have similar needs and difficulties to children who are, they may have no legal entitlement to any type of support. Many family and friends carers both want and need support to enable them to meet the needs of the children they care for.
- j) The Local Authority strives to provide all of the information necessary to ensure that family and friends carers are able to make an informed choice, whilst enabling them to consider capacity, responsibilities, rights and long-term impact. There is currently a range of support services for family and friends placements, whatever the legal status of the children and these include universal services, targeted services and specialist services. The Local Authority produces several leaflets and an advice pack that it shares with family and friends foster carers. This information is only provided to family and friends carers whereby the Local Authority has been involved with making arrangements for the child. An information pack/resource should be developed for all family and friends carers to provide clear and helpful advice and information on the different types of care arrangements and legal orders and the support (practical, financial and legal) available

from the Local Authority and local and national organisations. It would also be beneficial if the guidance includes information on pupil premium plus. This resource could then be utilised by practitioners, ward councillors and distributed to community hubs, libraries etc.

- k) Grandparents Plus, in partnership with Family Lives and the Family and Childcare Trust, supports families in the north east through the Relative Experience Project. The project is currently supporting 85 families in Teesside through one-to-one support from project workers and volunteer befrienders. The project has also supported family and friends carers to organise and develop local support groups across the Teesside area, such as Kinship Carers Middlesbrough and the Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley. These groups provide peer support; share knowledge; organise meetings, events and training sessions and regularly arrange trips, activities and holidays for family and friends carers and the children they care for. The Local Authority must work with partner agencies and the voluntary sector to create a culture of support, gather intelligence, raise awareness, encourage peer support and promote access to support services and groups. Awareness raising is of the utmost importance to ensure that families receive the appropriate advice and assistance, during the early stages of considering whether to care for a relative or a friend's child.
- l) Many family and friends carers are confused by the legalities of their caring arrangements and require clear advice and support as early as possible. Family and friends carers would benefit from receiving independent legal advice to ensure they are aware of the legal framework. This advice will enable them to make informed choices about the most appropriate route to follow. Furthermore, to assist with decision-making, family and friends carers would also benefit from receiving information on the multifaceted risk analysis that is undertaken, which evidences why a child is no longer able to live with their parents.

## **Financial Support**

- m) If a family and friends carer becomes a foster carer, although this arrangement guarantees financial support, it also involves social worker intervention, reviews and visits, which can be quite intrusive. There is also a requirement for family and friends foster carers to complete mandatory training to equip them with the knowledge and skills to provide an acceptable level of care to the children they look after. Family and friends foster carers are entitled to all the financial elements that mainstream foster carers are entitled to. The terms of payment and the ongoing supervision of foster care arrangements has resulted in a new financial pressure for the Local Authority. There is a risk that the Manchester ruling will further increase costs for the Local Authority as more family and friends carers seek to achieve status as foster carers.
- n) The Local Authority has discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section 17 of the 1989 Act and family and friends carers should be made aware of this. However, these payments are means-tested. In respect of special guardianship orders (SGOs), family and friends carers are entitled to an assessment for financial support, for a period of two years. It would be beneficial if the Local Authority reviewed its current practices and implemented an explicit eligibility criteria stating which family and friends carers, of children outside the care system, are eligible for financial support and at what rate. The Local Authority must ensure that family and friends carers are made aware of the eligibility criteria and when means-testing applies, how to apply for any such financial help, and how and when decisions are made about eligibility. Furthermore, where



financial support is offered, a written agreement should be drawn up detailing the level and duration of the support that is to be provided, and the mechanism for review, to ensure that all parties remain clear about the arrangements.

## **Principles of Good Practice**

- o) Leeds City Council demonstrates good practice in respect having clear policies and systems in place to ensure family and friends care arrangements are appropriately assessed and supported. Leeds has invested in its staffing structure and there are two large teams in place, one to cope with increased demands from court with regard to family and friends carers and the other focusses on supporting family and friends foster carers and special guardians. Evidence suggests that Middlesbrough would benefit from having designated officers for family and friends carers. The designated posts would influence the coherence of the Local Authority's approach to family and friends care.
- p) In respect of family and friends care, the Local Authority's processes and the policy to support family and friends carers have recently been updated. A new way of working will be rolled out across the service over the coming months. Further development of the Local Authority's procedures is required to ensure that work with family and friends carers is governed by consistent principles, regardless of the legal status of the carer or child. An explicit eligibility criteria needs to be implemented to ensure support for family and friends placements outside the care system. Family and friends care must be recognised as a permanence option for children and young people. It is important that the views of children in family and friends care, and their carers, are sought regularly and help inform policy and the Local Authority must set out how policies have been informed by their views.
- q) All services need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the needs of children in family and friends care and their carers and give priority access to services for housing, education and health. Joint work should be undertaken by the Local Authority and Grandparents Plus to ensure that all agencies in contact with children – including schools and health services – are aware of, and able to signpost family and friends carers to, available support.
- r) Evidence suggests that Family Group Conferences (FGCs) aim to help families develop their own solutions to the difficulties they are facing. The child is directly involved in the process. Implementation of this practice in Leeds has achieved a valuable reduction in the number of looked after children in the area. In Middlesbrough, the Local Authority is working to implement FGCs for cases. However, evidence suggests it would be beneficial if FGCs are supported by a FGCs coordinator, who is independent from the social work service or other services. The key element of FGCs is that they allow the family to make plans without professionals being involved in their decision-making. The Local Authority should apply for funding to facilitate and subsidise this practice. There is a need to ensure that the Local Authority's policies and procedures reflect the importance of this practice and measures must be put in place to ensure all children and families are entitled to FGCs, prior to care proceedings.
- s) The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is a model that has been developed by Washington State and is an alternative method of delivering foster care, which is based on the idea of an extended family. Evidence suggests that MFM improves placement stability, safety and permanency for children and young people in care and improves

support for, and retention of, foster carers. Leeds is part of the national pilot, led by the Fostering Network. MFM is an approach to supporting foster carers and children and young people placed with them, which brings together clusters of 'satellite homes', which are supported by a central hub. The central hub provides resources and support to the 'satellite homes'. The central hub and 'satellite homes' are supported by the fostering service. The Local Authority should apply for funding to develop this model in Middlesbrough.

## **Additional Evidence**

- t) The Pause project works with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeat removals of children from their care. It aims to break this cycle and give women the opportunity to develop new skills and responses that could help them create a more positive future. There is a requirement for the Local Authority to engage with the work of the project.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

24. The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive:

- a) That the Local Authority implements the necessary measures to ensure that all assessments demonstrate:
  - A full investigation of the commitment to the long-term permanent care of the child.
  - A thorough evaluation of support, both practical and financial, which determines short-term and long-term plans.
  - The complex and multifaceted issues of mediation and evidence that short-term and long-term contact arrangements have been considered and addressed.
  - A detailed account of the realistic options/orders that have been considered, and are appropriate, and the advantages and disadvantages associated with these options.
  - That the completion of the assessment is both fair and balanced.
- b) That Her Honour Judge Matthews QC undertakes work with fellow judges to ensure that assessments are only requested for those family and friends carers who are willing, and able, to provide suitable care for a child.
- c) That the local judiciary receives information on the Local Authority's policies, procedures and practices and is notified when these have been revised.
- d) That a Court Liaison Officer post be created to act as a conduit between the Court and the Local Authority.
- e) That the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel writes to the Secretary of State for Education:
  - To outline its concerns in respect of the conflicting legislation when applying care planning and fostering regulations to family and friends care.
  - To request that the Government revises current legislation and develops regulations specifically for family and friends care.
- f) That, when possible, the Local Authority tests family and friends care placements to provide an informed evidence-base for placement decisions.

- g) That an information pack/resource be developed for all family and friends carers to provide clear and helpful advice and information on the different types of care arrangements and legal orders and the support (practical, financial and legal) available from the Local Authority and local and national organisations and support groups. Furthermore, that the resource pack be utilised by practitioners and ward councillors and distributed to community hubs, libraries, GP Surgeries and other community facilities.
- h) That, with the assistance of Grandparents Plus and kinship care support groups, the Local Authority gathers data/intelligence on family and friends carers in Middlesbrough and conducts a detailed analysis of its findings to enable it to devise an informed plan for family and friends care.
- i) That the Local Authority works in partnership with Grandparents Plus to deliver training/briefing sessions:
- To ward councillors on the context of care by family and friends.
  - To the Local Authority's leaders and partners on the research, studies and work undertaken by Grandparents Plus and how this evidence can be utilised to inform/develop processes, policies and procedures.
  - To frontline staff and social workers to enable them to provide professional and specialist advice in respect of family and friends care.
  - To family and friends carers on relevant topics, such as safeguarding, contact, maintaining positive relationships and life story work.
- j) That a transparent and thorough policy framework is developed specifically for social workers, in order to ensure consistency of practice and informed decision-making in respect of family and friends care.
- k) In respect of the courses available for trainee social workers, that the Local Authority works with Teesside University to explore the possibility of including a core module on family and friends care.
- l) That, to assist with decision-making, family and friends carers receive information on the relevant multifaceted risk analysis, which evidences why a child is no longer able to live with their parents.
- m) That a group of designated officers be appointed to carry out family and friends care work.
- n) That the Local Authority has one central contact telephone number and email address for family and friends carers.
- o) That, to ensure the Local Authority's work is governed by consistent principles, an explicit eligibility criteria is implemented that states which family and friends carers, of children outside the care system, are eligible for financial assistance (including the level and duration of the support) and practical support (including universal, targeted and specialist services).
- p) That the views of children in family and friends care, and their carers, be sought regularly to inform practice and the delivery of support services. Furthermore, that the Local Authority identifies how policies have been informed by their views.

- q) That the Local Authority works with Grandparents Plus to develop and establish a town-wide family and friends care working group with key agencies in contact with children – including health services and schools – to create a culture of support and demonstrate a responsiveness to the needs of children in family and friends care.
- r) In respect of Family Group Conferences (FGCs):
- That the Local Authority's policies and procedures be revised to reflect the importance of this practice.
  - That measures be put in place to ensure all children and families are entitled to FGCs, prior to care proceedings.
  - That the Local Authority submits a bid for Innovation Funding to plan and implement Family Group Conference (FGC) services in Middlesbrough. This would include employing a number of independent FGC coordinators.
- s) That the Local Authority submits a bid for Innovation Funding to implement the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) in Middlesbrough.
- t) That the Local Authority engages with the work of the PAUSE Project.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

25. The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance with its work:

- S. Addison – Head of Assessment and Care Planning, Middlesbrough Council.
- A. Brown – The Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care, Middlesbrough Council
- M. Dilworth – Project Worker, Relative Experience Project, Grandparents Plus
- W. Gledhill – Project Lead for Kinship Care, Leeds City Council.
- D. Jenkins – Project Manager, Relative Experience Project, Grandparents Plus
- M. Lynch – Secretary, Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley
- Her Honour Judge Matthews QC – Family Judge for Cleveland and South Durham.
- W. Sanderson - Team Manager for the Kinship Care Support Team, Leeds City Council.
- C. Saunders – Chair, Kinship Carers Middlesbrough.
- F. Stanton – Vice-Chair, Kinship Carers Middlesbrough.
- D. Watson – Treasurer, Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley.
- L. Woodhouse – Family Placement Manager, Middlesbrough Council.

## **ACRONYMS**

26. A-Z listing of common acronyms used in the report:

- FGCs – Family Group Conferences
- MFM - Mockingbird Family Model
- NMS - National Minimum Standards
- SGO – Special Guardianship Orders

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Reports to, and minutes of, the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 5 October 2016, 9 November 2016, 7 December 2016 and 4 January 2017.

**COUNCILLOR JEANETTE WALKER**

**CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

**Membership**

**Councillors J Walker (Chair), M Walters (Vice-Chair), R Brady, D Davison, A Hellaoui, J McGee, L McGloin, G Purvis, B Taylor and Fr G Holland.**

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**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

**5 OCTOBER 2016**

**FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE (KINSHIP CARE) – AN INTRODUCTION**

The Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care submitted a report that provided the scrutiny panel with information on the responsibilities of the Local Authority to support family and friends carers. It was explained that family and friends care was also referred to as kinship care or connected persons arrangements.

Statutory guidance for local authorities stated that most children were brought up by one or more of their parents, but it had been estimated that up to 300,000 children were cared for full-time by a relative, friend, or other person previously connected with the child. Arrangements were covered by a range of different legal statuses with differing financial packages, which included over 7,000 looked after children who had been placed with family members and friends who were approved as their foster carers.

Members heard that family and friends carers played a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with people they know and trust if they could not, for whatever reason, live with their parents. These children may or may not be looked after by the local authority, or even known to it. The majority of the relatives who provided care were grandparents, aunts and uncles, but the group included others such as older siblings.

Many children who lived in family and friends care did well in life, but others were vulnerable to failing to achieve good outcomes. Many family and friends carers both wanted and needed support to enable them to meet the needs of the children they cared for.

A Member queried whether the Local Authority had an assessment and approval process to ensure care provided by family and friends carers was suitable. It was explained that the Local Authority had a robust assessment process, careful matching and effective support in place to ensure placements were in the child's best interests. However, there was not a requirement to assess all informal family and friends arrangements, unless it appeared that services would be necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child. It was commented that the assessment process was rigorous and that every child had to be considered on an individual basis, according to their needs.

Members heard that the government had set out a framework for local authorities and their partners to use to assess the need for, and provide, support. There were several options when caring for somebody else's child:

- Private fostering - a private arrangement whereby the child had been cared for, for 28 days or more, by someone who did not have parental responsibility, and who was not a close relative. The child was not a looked after child.
- Family care (informal) - the relative had chosen to take on the care of the child but did not have parental responsibility. The child was not a looked after child.
- Family and friends foster care - the child had been placed with the relative or friend by the Local Authority. The child was a looked after child.

- Unrelated foster care - the child was a looked after child who had been placed with a foster carer by the Local Authority.
- Residence order and special guardianship order (SGO) - the child may have been at risk of becoming 'looked after' or had been 'looked after'. In either case, an application could be made without the support of the parents or the Local Authority.
- Adoption - with looked after children the Local Authority could decide that the child should be placed for adoption.

Questions were raised in respect of whether the Local Authority offered advice to family and friends carers in respect of care arrangements. In terms of offering advice and information, the First Contact Team provided an initial single point of access for residents, schools, GPs, the police and community nurses etc. If the team was to receive a safeguarding alert, this would be responded to immediately and within 24 hours. It was explained that the Local Authority would provide all of the information necessary to ensure that family and friends carers were able to make an informed choice, whilst enabling them to consider capacity, responsibilities, rights and long-term impact. It was reported that there was a range of support services for family and friends placements, whatever the legal status of the children. Support included universal services, targeted services and specialist services. It was commented that the Local Authority also ensured that family and friends carers were provided with information on local services and how these could be accessed. Furthermore, early help workers had been placed in the First Contact Team, to assist in providing specialist advice on the support options available.

It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that the 2011 Fostering Services (England) Regulations brought the assessment and support of family and friends foster carers in line with unrelated (or traditional) foster carers. Members heard that the Manchester City Council ruled that all allowances paid to foster carers had to be the same, whether or not they were family and friends carers. This had resulted in the solicitors of family and friends carers increasingly advising families not to apply for Special Guardianship Orders as remaining as foster carers ensured their entitlement to financial support from the Local Authority. It was also advised that judicial reviews, linked with Manchester City Council, had resulted in claims against the Local Authority from family and friends carers who had not received foster care allowances.

The Assistant Director advised that approximately 25% of foster carers were family and friends carers. In deciding whether a relative, friend or other connected person should be approved as a foster carer, the decision maker had to take into account the needs, wishes and feelings of the child and the capacity of the carer to meet the child's needs. It was also highlighted if a family and friends carer was to become a foster carer, although this arrangement would guarantee financial support, it would also involve social worker intervention, reviews and visits, which could be quite intrusive. Furthermore, in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations, National Minimum Standards (NMS) and Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) standards, there was also a requirement for family and friends foster carers to complete mandatory training to equip them with the knowledge and skills to provide an acceptable level of care to the children they looked after. The scrutiny panel was also advised that family and friends foster carers would need to manage contact arrangements with the child's birth parents, which had been set by the court or the Local Authority. It was commented that the Local Authority would provide support to enable this.

A Member queried whether family and friends carers could claim child benefit and child tax credit. It was advised that family and friends carers could receive this financial support, if the entitlements were not being paid to the parent. It was also conveyed that the Local Authority

had discretion to make one-off or regular payments that were means-tested. It was commented that foster care allowances were not means-tested.

In some cases, tensions and difficulties that arise between family members could outweigh the benefits of making a placement within family networks. In instances such as these, the Local Authority would exercise its professional judgement. It was highlighted that although the Local Authority could decide that a placement with family and friends was not in the best interests of the child, the decision could be overturned by a care order granted by the local judiciary. In such cases, the Local Authority would have the opportunity to appeal against the decision. A Member commented that inviting a local Judge to a future meeting of the scrutiny panel, to provide an outline of the reasons for overturning a decision of the Local Authority, would add value to the scrutiny panel's review.

To conclude, the Assistant Director highlighted the following key issues:

- Many family and friends carers were confused by the legalities of their caring arrangements and required clear advice and support as early as possible.
- The increasing numbers of family and friends assessments were creating capacity issues in the Family Placement Team, which was impacting on the capacity to recruit, train and support foster carers.
- The terms of payment and the ongoing supervision of foster care arrangements had resulted in a new financial pressure. There was a risk that the Manchester ruling would further increase costs for the Local Authority as more family and friends carers seek to achieve status as foster carers.
- It was commented that there was a need to ensure that the Local Authority provided timely information and met demand within budget.

Following receipt of information at the meeting, the scrutiny panel discussed, considered and agreed its terms of reference for the review.

**AGREED** as follows:

- That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.
- That the terms of reference for the review be agreed as detailed:
  - a) To identify the principles of good practice for local authority work with family and friends carers.
  - b) To investigate the characteristics of family and friends care in Middlesbrough, including benefits, outcomes and challenges.
  - c) To examine the Local Authority's assessment and care planning processes for family and friends care.
  - d) To establish what information, advice, practical support is available for family and friends carers.
  - e) To examine what financial support is available for family and friends carers and how the Local Authority can deliver financial and support services within budget.
- That representatives from Grandparents Plus and kinship carers groups be invited to the scrutiny panel's next meeting.
- That a local Judge be invited to a future meeting of the scrutiny panel, to provide an outline of the reasons for overturning a decision of the Local Authority.



**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

**9 NOVEMBER 2016**

**FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE (KINSHIP CARE) - FURTHER INFORMATION**

Representatives from Grandparents Plus (the Relative Experience Project), Kinship Carers Middlesbrough and the Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley had been invited to the meeting to provide:

- Information on the characteristics of family and friends care in Middlesbrough, including benefits, outcomes and challenges.
- An outline of the support that was currently offered to family and friends carers.
- An overview of how the Local Authority's work with family and friends carers could be further improved and developed.

The Project Manager for Grandparents Plus (the Relative Experience Project) explained that family and friends care involved caring, nurturing and protecting children who were separated from their parents or whose parents were unable to provide care and support. Instead, care was provided by grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles or other relatives, godparents or step-grandparents or other adults who had a relationship or connection to the child. Members were advised that the role of providing care within the family was often regarded as natural and was taken for granted. As a result, family and friends care had low visibility in terms of public policy and social welfare provision.

Members heard that children in family and friends care could have experienced neglect, abuse, parental alcohol or drug misuse, domestic violence, parental mental or physical illness, parental disability and/or the imprisonment or death of a parent. It was highlighted that those children would be in local authority care if their family member had not stepped in. By keeping these children out of care system, family and friends carers were saving the state billions of pounds each year.

In around 95% of cases, children in family and friends care were not classed as looked after children and whilst they had similar needs and difficulties to children who were, they had no legal entitlement to any type of support.

Grandparents Plus was a national charity that championed the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives. As part of its work, the charity had undertaken numerous surveys, which identified that around half of children in family and friends care had additional needs of some kind. It was reported that that the most common needs were emotional and behavioural difficulties (36%). In many cases, difficulties arose from the children's traumatic early experiences, with birth parents being unable to provide the appropriate level of care and support.

It was also reported that family and friends carers themselves experienced multiple challenges. More than half were grandparents, they tended to be older, had long-term health conditions (42%) and a significant number had multiple caring responsibilities. Research had also indicated a clear link between the prevalence of family and friends care and poverty.

Members were advised that the complexities of care arrangements and issues within the family could lead to considerable strain on family and friends carers and their children. In addition, many family and friends carers experienced stigma, due to the reasons their children came to live with them, and many were reluctant to seek support from statutory services, due to fears that the children would be taken into care. Despite the high needs of children in family and friends care and the financial, practical and emotional strain on their carers, family and friends carers often felt invisible, isolated and unsupported.

As part of its work, Grandparents Plus also published research on issues affecting family and friends carers in the UK. The charity worked in partnership with renowned academics to produce high-quality research papers and articles. Past research demonstrated that family and friends placements tended to be more stable than unrelated foster care and children could more easily maintain a sense of family, cultural identity and contact with wider family members. It was added that children placed with family and friends carers felt loved and were able to bond with their carers. Family and friends carers could build on existing relationships with the child to help them feel loved and cared for, which enabled them to grow and develop as happy children. It was also highlighted that children placed with family and friends carers also tended to achieve better in respect of educational outcomes.

A recent research study conducted by the University of Bristol, identified that around 2,290 children in the Teesside area were being raised by grandparents, other family members or friends. It was added that the prevalence across the North East was the highest in England and the number of children being cared for by family and friends was rising.

Members were informed that Grandparents Plus was working in partnership with two leading family charities, Family Lives and the Family and Childcare Trust, to support family and friends carers in the North East England through the Relative Experience Project.

Funded by the Big Lottery Fund, the Relative Experience Project began as a pilot in Tyneside in 2012, and had been rolled out successfully to all local authority areas in the north east. The project had an established infrastructure and strong staff team in the region, which included ex social workers, youth workers, and community workers, all of whom had strong professional knowledge of family and friends care. Members heard that the project was specifically targeted at isolated and poorly supported family and friends carers, who were disproportionately likely to be raising children in disadvantaged areas and deprived households. To date, the project had supported 386 family and friends carers across the north east.

A Member asked how family and friends carers became aware of the project. The Project Worker for Grandparents Plus (the Relative Experience Project) explained that the charity had established close links with local authorities and Voluntary Community Sector (VCS), therefore, referrals were received from statutory services and voluntary and community groups. It was highlighted that that good working relationships had been developed with the Local Authority's Fostering Team. It was also commented that family and friends carers could refer themselves.

The Project Manager explained that the Relative Experience Project Team had worked actively in the Tees Valley area since January 2015. The team started work in the Middlesbrough area, then established support networks in Stockton-On-Tees and then in the Redcar and Cleveland area.

The project currently supported 85 families in Teesside through one-to-one support from project workers and volunteer befrienders. The volunteering befriending service comprised a team of

trained and dedicated volunteer befrienders, often family and friends carers themselves, who provided a listening ear. The volunteers would listen in a non-judgemental way to help family and friends carers find the confidence to cope with the problems they faced. On a practical level they also offered basic information, including the Kinship Care Guide for England, and referrals to the Grandparents Plus national advice service and other local and national sources of help.

The project supported family and friends carers to speak out, helped to raise awareness and challenged policy and practice both locally and nationally. The project also offered a grants service, whereby family and friends gained access to advice and information about grants from charities and benevolent funds and received assistance with completing grant application forms. Specific reference was made to Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation. The charity awarded small grants that could be used to purchase white goods, school uniforms etc.

The project worked with family and friends carers to organise local support groups so that members could share information and concerns, campaign for change or simply spend time together. Five family and friends carer support groups had been developed across the Teesside area, including Kinship Carers Middlesbrough. Middlesbrough's Project Worker had supported the other Teesside groups to come together as a new Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley, facilitating peer support, enabling sharing of knowledge and expertise and ensuring capacity building and future sustainability.

The interim independent evaluation by York Consulting reported the project's significant and positive impact on family and friends carers. Feedback received included:

- "The Relative Experience Project saved my life, in the beginning I was at the end of my stress level and was full of despair, I was crying out for help. If it wasn't for the project I may not have been here now"
- "I didn't realise that other people were going through what I was going through; it was so good to meet others who understood what I was feeling."

The Relative Experience Project was funded by the Big Lottery until March 2017. It was anticipated that a decision would be made in December, as to whether the funding would be extended. Future funding would help the project to continue work the Teesside area and reach isolated family and friends carers.

Kinship Carers Middlesbrough and the Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley were initiated by the Relative Experience Project and with support had been developed to become autonomous, with continued access to project support as required.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of Kinship Carers Middlesbrough explained that their group met weekly in the Thorntree and Grove Hill areas of Middlesbrough. The group operated at full capacity and it was currently unable to accept new members.

The Secretary and Treasurer of the Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley commented that the association continued to accept new members and the network of support groups in the Tees Valley area was vastly expanding. The work of the association involved peer support chat groups and meetings took place in Stockton, Whinney Banks, Linthorpe and Hemlington. It was added that new groups had been arranged for Billingham and Redcar. Members also heard that from 3 November 2016 a Kinship Family Support Centre would be open at The Methodist Church on Stainsby Road.

Kinship Carers Middlesbrough and the Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley provided family and friends carers with the opportunity to meet, discuss and learn from others in similar situations. The groups provided valued peer support; shared knowledge; organised meetings, events and training sessions and regularly arranged trips, activities and holidays for family and friends carers and the children they cared for. The groups financed their own work by actively fundraising and had been successful in securing a number of grants for activities and trips. It was commented that Kinship Carers Middlesbrough had encountered problems when attempting to hire a mini bus from the Local Authority's fleet. A Member explained that enquiries would be made in this respect.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of Kinship Carers Middlesbrough and the Secretary and Treasurer of the Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley provided the scrutiny panel with information in respect of their own experiences and the challenges they faced when taking on the caring role in difficult family circumstances. This information enabled the scrutiny panel to gain an awareness of the sacrifices and losses that family and friends carers incur when acting upon the love they have for their grandchildren and their wish to make their lives better.

It was explained that children usually found it easier to form and develop attachments to family and friends carers than someone they had not known previously. Members heard that a lot of satisfaction was gained from being a family and friends carer, but it was not always easy. For those cared for outside of the looked after system there was a lack of, inconsistent or low level financial payments or allowances. Grandparents or other family members stepping in to bring up a child often felt they had to give up work or reduce their hours. The scrutiny panel found that grandparents were risking hardship themselves in order to provide care and support for their families. The experiences outlined to Members demonstrated that family and friends carers sometimes felt lonely, isolated, unsupported and struggled to cope. Furthermore, some children in family and friends care had emotional or behavioural problems, special educational needs, illness or a disability.

Support from local authorities varied widely according to where children, placed in family and friends care, lived. Members heard it was essential that, at the first point of contact with local authorities, family and friends carers were helped to understand their rights and responsibilities. It needed to be ensured that family and friends carers were made aware of different legal statuses and associated levels of support, both practical and financial. This information would assist carers in making comparisons and inform their decision-making.

A Member commented that it was essential that family and friends carers were provided with advice and guidance on the key features of family and friends care, what the law said, the different types of care and legal orders, how to get help and what benefits, options and choices were available. Family and friends carers should be in a position to explore the options available, and should be made aware of the welfare benefits and other sources of financial support that they may be entitled to claim. The Project Worker advised that the Local Authority had discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section 17 Children Act and family and friends carers should be made aware of this. It was noted, however, that these payments were means-tested.

It was advised that the Relative Experience Project, Kinship Carers Middlesbrough and the Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley aspired to work in partnership with Middlesbrough Council to develop the Local Authority's services for family and friends carers, in order to create a culture of support. A discussion ensued in respect of the work that the Local Authority could

undertake to further develop and improve its practices to support family and friends carers and work in a more transparent and open way. The following comments were made:

- It was agreed that the Local Authority would benefit from developing an information pack/resource for family and friends carers to provide clear and helpful advice and information on the different types of care arrangements and legal orders and the support (practical, financial and legal) available from the Local Authority and local and national organisations. It was commented that guidance should also be included in respect of the pupil premium plus. This resource could then be utilised by practitioners and ward councillors.
- It would be beneficial if ward councillors received training to gain a greater awareness of family and friends care. Training would enable ward councillors to offer advice and signposting to appropriate organisations, charities and groups.
- Representatives from Grandparents Plus could deliver a briefing session to the Local Authority's leaders in respect of the research, studies and work undertaken by charity and this evidence could be utilised to inform/develop the Local Authority's processes, policies and procedures.
- Social workers required a transparent and thorough policy framework, in order to ensure consistency of practice and informed decision-making. Frontline staff and social workers would benefit from receiving training to enable them to provide professional and specialist advice in respect of family and friends care.
- Measures needed to be implemented to ensure that family and friends carers gained knowledge and awareness of the local support groups.
- There was a need for family and friends carers to be provided with opportunity to engage in training sessions and development workshops on relevant topics, such as safeguarding, contact, maintaining positive relationships and life story work. It was commented that it was vital that family and friends carers received access to the appropriate training, support and development opportunities, to enable them to develop new skills and gain knowledge on a variety of issues. It was explained that Grandparents Plus offered training and support specifically developed for family and friends carers.
- It would be beneficial if family and friends carers were provided with access to free, impartial and ongoing Local Authority support from a specific dedicated contact, as currently many families were left to deal with the complexities of family and friends care alone.
- It was of the utmost importance that children placed with family and friends carers, whose early experiences have led to developmental, emotional, behavioural or educational difficulties, received access to the appropriate support.
- Members were made aware that Leeds City Council demonstrated good practice in respect having clear policies and systems in place to ensure family and friends care arrangements were appropriately assessed and supported. A Member queried what work the Local Authority would need to undertake to aim for excellence. It was advised that a shift in policy would be required. The scrutiny panel was in agreement that it would be beneficial to hear from representatives at Leeds City Council to establish the principles of good practice for local authority work with family and friends carers.
- The Local Authority's work with family and friends carers needed to be governed by consistent principles, regardless of the legal status of the carer or child. It was commented that although entitlement to support by family and friends carers is detailed in statutory guidance, the Local Authority should endeavour to ensure that support was based on need, not legal status.

The representatives from Grandparents Plus explained that a Relative Experience Project Conference was scheduled to take place on 29 November 2016. The conference would deliver

a showcase of the Relative Experience Project and explore best practice and successful and sustainable approaches to supporting family and friends carers. An invite would be circulated, to the scrutiny panel, following the meeting.

**AGREED** as follows:

- That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.
- That the representatives from Grandparents Plus (Relative Experience Project), Kinship Carers Middlesbrough and the Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley be thanked for attending the meeting and providing information that would undoubtedly add value to the ongoing review.
- That the appropriate representative from Leeds City Council be invited to a future meeting of the scrutiny panel to provide Members with information on the policies that had been embedded in Leeds to ensure family and friends care arrangements were appropriately assessed and supported.

**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

**7 DECEMBER 2016**

**FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE (KINSHIP CARE) - FURTHER INFORMATION**

The Chair informed the scrutiny panel that unfortunately Her Honour Judge Matthews QC was unable to attend the meeting due to being listed in court. However, confirmation had been received that Her Honour would attend a future meeting to provide information on the evidence that informed placement decisions in respect of family and friends care.

The Local Authority's Head of Assessment and Care Planning and Family Placement Manager were in attendance to provide evidence in respect of:

- The Local Authority's assessment and care planning processes for family and friends care.
- The information, advice, practical support and financial support that the Local Authority currently provided to family and friends carers.

The scrutiny panel heard that in 2010 the Government reviewed the guidance attached to the Children Act 1989 and as a result in 2011 produced a new set of guidance documents that covered Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Volume 2) and Fostering Service Regulations (Volume 4). The scrutiny panel heard that within the updated guidance, the Government had introduced the concept of connected persons. A connected person was defined as an individual who was a relative, friend or other person connected with the child i.e. a family and friends carer. Guidance stipulated that if the child was a looked after child, the Local Authority had to approve the relative or friend as a Local Authority foster carer. Furthermore, revised regulations also imposed specific requirements that included provision enabling the temporary approval of a connected person so that a placement could be made before formal approval, as a Local Authority foster carer, had been granted.

The Local Authority did not have the duty to assess informal and family care arrangements unless it appeared that services could be necessary to safeguard or to promote the welfare of a child in need in the area.

As a result of the changes to legislation, the Local Authority was required, where possible, to place children within their own networks and had to clearly demonstrate that it had exhausted all options before it resorted to placing a child outside of their family. It was commented that most children benefited from living with relatives and friends or other connected people known to them because they were likely to provide more continuity than a placement with previously unknown carers. Such arrangements preserved a child's sense of belonging to a wider family network; a close attachment was more likely to exist already or to develop and there was also some evidence to suggest that relatives were less likely to reject a child if difficulties arose.

It was reported that parenting capacity and wider family and environmental factors had to be rigorously assessed before approval was granted. However, it was explained that not all family and friends carers wished to become foster carers or were able to safeguard and promote a child's welfare. Members heard that although the Local Authority could decide that a placement

with family and friends carers was not in the best interests of the child, the decision could be overturned by a care order granted by the local judiciary. It was commented that, in such an event, the Local Authority would need to approve family and friends carers as a Local Authority foster carers. In essence, this would mean that the Local Authority would ultimately have responsibility for the care of the child, even if its view was that the placement was not providing suitable care. It was commented that it would be beneficial if regulations were specifically developed for family and friends carers.

Furthermore, in line with care planning and fostering regulations, the Local Authority's expectation was that all foster carers had responsibilities and obligations, which had to be met. In contrast, the local judiciary recognised that the context of family and friends foster care differed from other types of foster care and expressed that there was a need for the Local Authority to take this into account to enable family and friends foster carers to work towards an amended set of standards.

The scrutiny panel was advised that the University of Bedfordshire had investigated the issues arising from conflicting legislation and regulations in respect of the application of care planning and fostering regulations for family and friends carers. Following the analysis of evidence received from Local Authorities throughout the UK, the university would publish its findings.

A Member commented that a change in the law and regulations had the potential to provide further clarification, flexibility and understanding. In response, it was agreed that from a fostering perspective, discrepancies could be resolved by the removal of the statement within care planning regulations that stated that children placed on a care order, with family and friends carers, had to be approved as Local Authority foster carers. If that aspect of the law was amended, the scope of the issues experienced would reduce significantly. It was agreed that it would be beneficial if the scrutiny panel was to write to the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families to request a revision of current legislation and regulations. Furthermore, potential solutions could be explored with Her Honour Judge Matthews QC.

The Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services (2011) provided detailed information about the assessment and approval of foster carers and applied in relation to family and friends foster carers, as it did for other foster carers. These regulations had to be taken into consideration in assessing the suitability of a person to become a foster carer. When the family and friends carer was approved as a family and friends foster carer they were entitled to all the financial elements that mainstream foster carers were entitled to i.e. allowance for the child plus Christmas, birthday and holiday allowance. They were also entitled to progress through the banding structure, if they had the skillset to do so.

It was highlighted that if a family and friends carer was to become a foster carer, although this arrangement would guarantee financial support, it would also involve social worker intervention, reviews and visits, which could be quite intrusive.

In respect of the assessment process, initially there was a slow uptake from family and friends carers and this did not impact significantly on caseloads. However, since approximately 2013, the impact on workloads had increased with courts preferring a plan of placement with family.

It was commented that the assessment stage was a very time consuming process, with tight/strict deadlines. Due to demands on staff time, undertaking assessments for family and friends carers was causing a negative impact on the number of mainstream in-house foster carers that the Local Authority was able to assess and approve.



On 30 September 2016, Children's Services was undertaking 44 fostering assessments in respect of family and friends carers. On 29 November 2016, the Local Authority had 26 temporary approval assessments underway and 14 full assessments - 40 in total. In the last 12 months 12 family and friends carers had been approved as Local Authority foster carers. The assessment process had brought additional financial and workload pressures upon the department. Furthermore, as mentioned, there was also a requirement to temporarily approve family and friends carers as foster carers if it was suitable to do so, there was then a period of 16 weeks to fully assess them as carers and present the case to the Family Placement Panel for consideration.

In respect of the assessment and care planning process when a looked after child was placed with a family and friends carer, the child would already have a social worker from the Assessment and Care Planning Team. In addition, upon notification that a child had been placed with a family and friends carer, the carer would be allocated a fostering social worker. Together, both social workers would complete the temporary approval part of the assessment process.

It was also commented that a number of assessments, for family and friends carers, were not progressed to the final stage of the approval process. This was mainly due to the Local Authority concluding that the family and friends carer was not able to provide a suitable level of care for the child, there had been a change in circumstances or the child had returned home. The assessments were extremely resource heavy but were required through legislation and care planning regulations.

A Member asked whether records were kept of those assessments that were not necessarily progressed through to that final stage of the approval process. In response, it was confirmed that the files were kept on the Liquidlogic Children's System (LCS). The system provided the ability to manage cases and keep records.

In respect of support from the Local Authority, it was advised that the level and nature of support provided would depend on the assessed needs of the child and the involvement of the Local Authority in making the arrangement.

With regard to the provision of support to family and friends carers, the scrutiny panel was informed that processes and paperwork had recently been updated and did require some final adjustments and testing. The updated documentation had been provided to Members prior to the meeting and included a copy of the Family and Friends Care Policy, good practice guidance, a process map for assessments, a report template for the temporary approval of immediate placements, regulations to extend assessment timescales and guidelines for requesting an 8 week extension. The new way of working was yet to be rolled out across the service as final legal advice was awaited, but it was hoped that over the coming months the process would be amended. It had been necessary to review the Local Authority's current way of working to ensure it was practicing within current guidelines and to provide a clearer process.

The Local Authority's Family and Friends Care Policy had recently been reviewed and was currently being overseen by a barrister to ensure that it was legally compliant. It was advised that the Local Authority's Family and Friends care Policy set out a framework for the provision of support to family and friends. The document also included the policy context and definitions that apply to family and friends carers.

The scrutiny panel heard that a leaflet was also available and provided basic advice and information on Family and Friends Foster Care. The document contained information on the assessment process, placements and the practical and financial support that was available. It was explained that advice was given to the family and friends carers upon placement of the child in their care and upon notification to the Fostering Team. Once notification was received, the Fostering Team made an immediate home visit to advise and support the carer and explain the requirements of the assessment process.

The Local Authority produced several leaflets and an advice pack that it shared with family and friends foster carers. It was explained that this information was only provided to family and friends carers whereby the Local Authority had been involved with making arrangements for the child. The information was distributed by social workers.

A Member commented that it would be beneficial if information was made available to all family and friends carers and distributed to community hubs, libraries, GP Surgeries etc. It was commented that it was important that family and friends carers had an awareness of the law in England, their rights and responsibilities and support that was available.

A Member queried what training was provided to foster carers. It was conveyed that family and friends carers, who were approved as foster carers, would be expected to complete the Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for foster care. It was explained that family and friends foster carers gained support for their caring role by accessing specific training and meeting with other foster carers to share experiences. Where it was assessed that a family and friends carer could meet the needs of the child, but would require some assistance or services to be able to do so, packages of support were developed.

The scrutiny panel heard that where a relative, friend or other connected person proposed to make a long-term commitment to caring for a child, they could apply for a child arrangement order or a special guardianship order. These arrangements did not require the approval of those carers as Local Authority foster carers. In respect of these arrangements, family and friends carers had a right to receive an assessment by the Local Authority for support services, which could include financial support. It was commented that there was a need to think innovatively in respect of providing financial support to family and friends carers. Financial assessments were considered by the Family Placement Panel.

A Member provided those in attendance with an outline of the evidence that was previously received from Kinship Carers Middlesbrough and the Association of Kinship Carers Tees Valley. The challenges and difficulties faced by family and friends carers were explained.

A Member queried how information, in respect of family and friends carers, was accessed and understood by those who had differing levels of ability. Members heard that social workers explained the detail to family and friends carers to ensure awareness. Furthermore, for those who spoke different languages, Google Translate was used to translate documents into many different languages.

A Member had attended the Relative Experience Project Conference on 29 November 2016. The conference explored best practice and successful and sustainable approaches to supporting family and friends carers.

At the conference, information was provided on the early findings from a research study undertaken by Grandparents Plus and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation - Young People

Growing Up in Kinship Care: Adolescent Transitions and Outcomes in Young Adulthood. It was commented that around 200,000 children were growing up with family and friends carers in the UK. Preliminary findings were in line with other studies, which showed that family and friends care delivered stability and had beneficial effects on school progress and transitions into adulthood.

Furthermore, the conference had outlined the positive work of the Pause project. The project worked with women who had experienced, or were at risk of, repeat removals of children from their care. It aimed to break this cycle and give women the opportunity to develop new skills and responses that could help them create a more positive future. It was commented that every Local Authority within the UK had women with complex and challenging needs to whom multiple children were born and subsequently removed into the care system under child protection proceedings. These women were typically young, disadvantaged and living with intersecting and numerous social, emotional, environmental and health related challenges. It was agreed that it would be beneficial for the Local Authority to engage with the work of the project.

At the scrutiny panel's next meeting, representatives from Leeds City Council would be in attendance to outline the principles of good practice for Local Authority work with family and friends carers. Leeds City Council demonstrated good practice in respect having clear policies and systems in place to ensure family and friends care arrangements were appropriately assessed and supported.

**AGREED** as follows:

- That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.
- That the following recommendation be included in the scrutiny panel's final report: That a letter be sent, on behalf of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel, requesting that the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families revised the current care planning and fostering regulations pertaining to family and friends carers.
- That Her Honour Judge Matthews QC be invited to attend a future meeting of the scrutiny panel.

**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

**4 JANUARY 2017**

**FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE (KINSHIP CARE) – PLACEMENT DECISIONS**

Her Honour Judge Matthews QC was in attendance to provide the scrutiny panel with information on the evidence that informed placement decisions in respect of family and friends care.

Her Honour was the designated family judge for Cleveland and South Durham and subsequently managed all of the children's case work in the area.

Her Honour advised that when considering a case, there was a requirement for the court to have particular regard to the impact of the timetable on the welfare of the child and proceedings should be disposed of within 26 weeks. The timescales associated with court decisions were a primary consideration, as delays in court proceedings could potentially have a negative impact on the welfare of the child. Furthermore, performance of the courts was monitored and recorded in respect of adhering to deadlines. It was conveyed that in the north east performance was very good and on average cases were being dealt with within 22/23 weeks. However, Her Honour's court had recently experienced an increase of 64% in public law work. Furthermore, that increase had undoubtedly impacted on the Local Authority's social workers.

The scrutiny panel heard that in 2013 the President of the Family Court, Sir James Munby, made a ruling that had resulted in a decline in placing children for adoption. The judge said that six-month targets for adoptions should not be allowed to break up families unnecessarily and that grandparents and other extended family members should be considered before placing children for adoption. Her Honour commented that in light of that ruling, she required a high degree of justification in order to make an adoption order. Adoption was now seen as a last resort. The ruling had undoubtedly caused an increase in the number of assessments required for family and friends carers.

It was of the utmost important that evidence submitted by the Local Authority, for Her Honour's consideration, included detailed information in respect of the realistic options for a child and the advantages and disadvantages associated with those options. A global holistic evaluation was required. Removal from the family was now seen as a draconian option, namely it was seen as excessively harsh and severe. The court must not sanction removal from the family unless it was satisfied that it was both necessary and proportionate and no other less rightful form of order would achieve the essential end of promoting the welfare of that child.

There was a requirement for the Local Authority and Her Honour to always fully explore the options of placing a child with family and friends carers. It was commented that family and friends carers played a unique role in providing a secure environment that enabled children and young people to remain with people they knew and trusted if they could not, for whatever reason, live with their parents. Placement with family and friends carers could maintain a child's a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. The willingness of family members was a key factor in considering these options. Her Honour explained the importance of making such life-changing decisions for a child.

Her Honour would always strive to make a permanent placement for a child within the 26 week timescale. That involved undertaking an assessment of the child's welfare needs and the options put before the court. The scrutiny panel heard that there would always be cases which were highly complex for which 26 weeks was not a realistic timeframe for completing the case. In those cases the court had the discretion to extend the timetable where it was 'necessary to enable the court to resolve the proceedings justly'.

The vital evidence that the court required, in respect of assessments, was as follows:

- A comprehensive thorough assessment of the commitment to the long-term permanent care of the child. A child's need for stability and security remained a priority.
- A full and thorough assessment of all of the practical and financial support issues for placements. It was commented that, on occasion, support was considered in a rushed fashion and not until the end of the assessment. It was advised that it was vital to ensure that support was effective in helping family and friends carers to meet the needs of children in placement.
- That the complex and multifaceted issues of mediation and both short-term and long-term contact arrangements had been considered.
- A detailed account of the options/orders that had been considered and were appropriate.
- That the completion of the assessment was both fair and balanced.

Her Honour stated that family and friends carers would benefit from independent legal advice to ensure they were aware of the legal framework. That advice would ensure that members of the public had the necessary information to make informed choices about the most appropriate route for them to follow. Family and friends carers would also benefit from receiving information on the multifaceted risk analysis that was undertaken, which evidenced why a child was no longer able to live with their parents. There was a need for family and friends carers to understand all of the issues pertaining to a child's case. Furthermore, it was essential that they were aware that the impact of becoming a family and friends carer was often considerable and a life-long commitment. There was also a requirement for family and friends carers to be fully aware of their responsibilities when caring for a child.

Her Honour commented that it would be beneficial if placements could be tested. Testing would enable the Local Authority to evidence that a placement was suitable and met the child's needs and this could then be brought before the court. This would require an application of temporary approval for immediate placement for a child.

At the scrutiny panel's previous meeting, Members heard that although the Local Authority could decide that a placement with family and friends carers was not in the best interests of the child, the decision could be overturned by a care order granted by the local judiciary. It was also commented that, in such an event, the Local Authority would need to approve family and friends carers as a Local Authority foster carers. In essence, this would mean that the Local Authority would ultimately have responsibility for the care of the child, even if its view was that the placement was not providing suitable care.

Her Honour explained that in the case of a child being subject to a care order, the child would continue to be looked after until the order was discharged or the foster carer was granted an order which gave them parental responsibility for the child. The care order was granted for a short time, on the basis that the application to discharge would come later (after six months) and then would be downgraded potentially to a special guardianship order (SGO). It was

commented that other lesser options were not considered to be sufficiently protective and appropriate for the child.

A Member asked if a decision of the Local Authority was overturned by a care order granted by the local judiciary, and the child was later subjected to abuse or neglect, who would be accountable. Her Honour advised that she was ultimately responsible for any decision she made. Her Honour explained that where a care order was granted, it was highly likely that both the Judge and Local Authority were in agreement that the placement was suitable to promote the welfare of the child. However, the Local Authority was unwilling to approve the family and friends carer as a foster carer. Her Honour commented that the reasoning for that decision could be due to historical issues, which had later been resolved. The Family Placement Manager commented that decisions not to approve family and friends carers as foster carers were made mainly due to health and safety issues within the family.

Her Honour shared the concerns of the Local Authority and agreed that there was conflicting legislation and regulations in respect of the application of care planning and fostering regulations for family and friends carers. Her Honour agreed that it would be beneficial if guidance and regulations were revisited and specifically developed for family and friends carers. It was advised that these issues were experienced nationally.

Her Honour advised that in granting a care order, if problems were encountered, the Local Authority would still maintain parental responsibility to step in and remove the child if that was required. Granting a care order ensured added protection for the child, especially when placements had not been tested.

Her Honour explained that the channels of communication, between the local judiciary and the Local Authority, could be further developed/enhanced. Members heard that although Her Honour did attend meetings with Local Authority officers, the local judiciary would benefit from receiving information about the Local Authority's practices and procedures.

The Team Manager for the Kinship Care, from Leeds City Council, explained that in West Yorkshire there was a Court Liaison Officer who acted as a conduit between the court and the Local Authority. It was commented that Court Liaison Officer undertook valuable work to ensure cases were resolved in a timely manner.

A discussion ensued in respect of the financial support for family and friends carers. Her Honour commented that consideration of support, both practical and financial, was a vital element of the assessment process and short-term and long-term plans needed to be determined.

Her Honour informed the scrutiny panel that work would be undertaken to advise fellow judges that assessments should only be required for those family and friends carers who were willing and able to provide suitable care for a child. It was hoped that raising awareness would assist in alleviating some of the pressure that was currently placed on social workers to undertake assessments.

A final comment from Her Honour was that she would welcome the implementation of PAUSE project in Middlesbrough.

**AGREED** as follows:

That the information presented be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.

## **FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE (KINSHIP CARE) - PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE**

The Team Manager for the Kinship Care Support Team and the Project Lead for Kinship Care, from Leeds City Council, were in attendance to present evidence in respect of:

- The principles of good practice for local authority work with family and friends carers.
- The steps Leeds City Council had taken to establish structures and systems to ensure family and friends carers received adequate practical and financial support

The scrutiny panel viewed a video entitled 'Kinship Care in Leeds - Rebecca's Story'. The video encapsulated the benefits and challenges of becoming a family and friends carer. It demonstrated:

- That the decision to become a family and friends carer was life-changing
- That a child's behaviour and ability to form relationships could be affected by past experiences.
- That there were clear benefits to both children and their carers from keeping children within the family network.
- The complexities of caring for another family member's child.
- The need for family and friends carers to receive adequate support.

Members were informed that, in 2011, Nancy and Selwyn (2011) reported that 1 in 77 children were living with family and friends carers across the country.

The scrutiny panel heard that support for family and friends care arrangements in Leeds was based on the needs of the child rather than the child's legal status. It was added that Leeds City Council recognised that family and friends care was a permanence option for children and young people.

Members were informed that in 1996 UNICEF launched the International Child Friendly Cities Initiative in support of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The initiative encouraged cities to become more liveable places for children and young people, guaranteeing their rights to essential services, and empowering them to have their voice heard and influence decisions being made that affect them.

It was commented that Leeds had taken the original UNICEF idea and used it to guide its ambitions around being a Child Friendly City. In Leeds, children's voices and opinions were taken into consideration and influenced decision-making processes. Members heard that UNICEF UK was now working with Leeds Children's Services on a 'rights-based' approach to ensure children:

- Were informed of their rights.
- Could access services when they needed them.
- Helped to design, implement and evaluate services designed for them.

To support the vision, Leeds had adopted 3 'Behaviours' to guide its work, namely: listening and responding to the voice of the child; restorative practice - doing with, not for or to and outcome based accountability (OBA - is anyone better off?)

The scrutiny panel heard that children, young people and their parents and carers had a right to

be involved in decisions that affected their lives. Having a voice and influence meant that they felt that their voices were listened to, valued and could influence decisions and actions.

In terms of restorative practice, Members were made aware that Leeds had invested greatly in Family Group Conferences (FGC). It was explained that FGC were at the heart of the restorative approach to support families when there was a safeguarding issue. The FGC aimed to help families develop their own solutions to the difficulties they were facing. An FGC was a meeting where a child's wider family came together, talked about concerns and made a plan for the future care of the child. FGC were intended as a respectful and empowering process in which parents, children, wider family members and family friends were given clear information about safeguarding concerns and were asked to produce a plan to address those concerns. A major benefit of FGC was that the child or young person participated and could influence the plan being made for them.

In Leeds, each FGC was coordinated by an accredited FGC coordinator, who was independent from the social work service or other services. The coordinator was neutral, with no case management or decision-making responsibilities. It was commented that most families and workers valued that independence. A key element of FGC was that it allowed the family to make plans without professionals being involved in their decision-making. There were 35 FGC coordinators and 4 team managers currently working in Leeds. Leeds had accessed central government funding to facilitate and subsidise the FGC. A Member queried how the funding was accessed. It was commented that the funding had been received from an innovation fund from the Department for Education and bids could be made by local authorities.

With the investment of the FGC, Leeds had achieved a reduction in the number of looked after children. The investment in FGC had resulted in a reduction from 1425 in March 2011 to 1244 in October 2016.

The Local Authority's Family Placement Manager commented that management had recently advised that FGC were required for all future cases in Middlesbrough.

Members were informed that Leeds had adopted a city-wide approach known as Outcome Based Accountability (OBA). OBA was founded by Mark Friedman. OBA was a conceptual approach to planning services and assessing their performance that focused attention on the results - or outcomes - that the services were intended to achieve.

OBA provided Leeds with:

- A single, clear and consistent methodology across the city.
- A common language around performance and improvement.
- An approach that could be applied to a wide variety of issues but always focussed on outcomes.
- A way to visually demonstrate to staff, partners and the public that progress was being made.

The scrutiny panel heard that in 2011, the Fostering Service in Leeds had one kinship care team to support family and friends foster carers. Following investment, that increased to two kinship teams. One team focussed on the increased demands from court with regard to family and friends carers assessments and the other focussed on supporting family and friends foster carers and special guardians. There were approximately 10 officers in each team and there was



also additional sessional workers.

It was explained that Leeds currently had over 500 children cared for under SGOs and there was 140 family and friends foster carers. Numbers had increased over the past two years and a further increase was expected in respect of SGOs, as FGCs were consolidated.

It was advised that each team provided both support and challenge to enable permanence for children and young people.

In Leeds, historically, there had been inconsistencies in respect of the financial support that family and friends carers were entitled to, in their progression to special guardianship. Special guardianship provided legal permanence for those children for whom adoption was not appropriate. It was commented that in Leeds, a guideline had been implemented. The guideline specified that if a child was over 10 years old and had previously been looked after (for more than two years) before the special guardianship order was made, whether that be with a family and friends carer or their existing foster carer, the carer would qualify for financial support until the child was over 18. If the child was under 10 years old, financial support would be provided for two years. Financial assessments were required to provide evidence to senior managers that payments were necessary. Financial support was then reviewed on an annual basis. One-off discretionary payments could also be made.

A Member queried how Leeds City Council delivered financial and support services, for family and friends carers, within budget. It was commented that monies were accessed from the general fostering budget. It was commented that previously, there had been an overspend associated with building work and the development of properties to accommodate children. Leeds City Council no longer gave approval for that type of work, instead the kinship teams worked closely with the housing department to find appropriate existing housing stock that could meet the needs of families. A housing officer was recently seconded to Children's Services to ensure that housing kinship families remained a priority.

The scrutiny panel was advised that central government funding had also been utilised to develop the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) in Leeds. Leeds was part of the national pilot, led by the Fostering Network. The MFM was an alternative way of providing foster care. It involved foster carers being part of a group with other foster carers who were described as satellite foster homes; they were supported by a central 'hub' home which provided resources and support to the satellite homes. The hub home and the satellite homes were supported by a fostering service, which provided someone to act as a liaison worker.

The aims of the MFM were to increase placement stability for looked after children, prioritise sibling connections, promote active child protection, support permanency and improve the support provided to foster carers so that the Local Authority could retain foster carers.

The scrutiny panel heard that the model was developed in Washington State, USA and was based on the concept of extended family. The model was evidence-based, had been formally evaluated and showed improved outcomes for children, young people and foster carers.

A Member queried how long the culture in Leeds had been embedded in processes and practices. It was commented that since 2009, a strong culture had ensured that children and young people were listened to and were influential in informing service delivery. There was a Voice Influence Change Team in Leeds who promoted the voice and influence of parents, carers and families across all services. It was also commented that there was a city-wide group,

the Kinship Care Reference Group, which was made up of partners across the city and reported to the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP), which fed into the Corporate Parenting Board.

It was commented that awareness raising was of the utmost importance to ensure that families received the appropriate advice and assistance, during the early stages of considering whether to care for a relative or a friend's child. That advice would enable them to weigh up the options and to consider what support services they might require. It was advised that all services needed to be aware of, and sensitive to, the needs of these children and their families and give priority access to services for housing, education and health.

It was commented that in Leeds, family and friends carers had access to a one-off consultation fee to gain legal advice. Furthermore, Grandparents Plus and Family Rights Group were charitable organisations who could advise and provide impartial advice on rights and options.

A discussion ensued in respect of the range of legal situations in which family and friends care took place. The scrutiny panel received further information on the legal frameworks that could apply when caring for somebody else's child and the entitlement to support services relating to those. Financial support, both entitlements and discretionary, was discussed at length. The Family Placement Manager added that, in respect of SGOs, family and friends carers were entitled to an assessment for financial support, for a period of two years.

To alleviate budget pressures, Leeds worked with businesses and the corporate sector. For example, the Trinity Shopping Centre made their facilities available to kinship carer support groups. It was added that creative working was always encouraged.

The scrutiny panel was advised that a conference had been arranged by CoramBAAF Training and Consultancy, which would take place in Leeds. CoramBAAF had extensive expertise and insight into the adoption and fostering sector in the UK. The conference was scheduled to take place on 23 February 2017 and would look at the future of special guardianship.

It was also commented that Leeds City Council would be hosting an event, which had been arranged for 27 April 2017 and further information would be available once arrangements had been finalised. Members were advised that they would receive information, in respect of the event, in due course.

Finally, Members received copies of the following documents:

- The Kinship Care in Leeds Leaflet - The leaflet provided advice and information on kinship care, the legal framework, what practical and financial support was available, what orders were available to care for a child permanently, social worker involvement, placements, responsibilities, assessments, preparation and where further information and legal advice could be accessed.
- The Kinship Care and Special Guardianship Newsletter - The newsletter provided information on support groups, the Kinship Care Service staffing structure, upcoming events and training opportunities, Personal Education Plans (PEPs), the Pupil Premium and specialist provision.

It was explained that, in Leeds, there was one central contact number for family and friends carers.

**AGREED** as follows:

- That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.
- That the final report, on the topic of family and friends care, be drafted and considered by the scrutiny panel at its next meeting (1 February 2017).