

**CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL  
FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE (KINSHIP CARE) – ACTION PLAN**

DATE: 23 June 2017

Updated: 11 September 2017

SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION	PROPOSED ACTION	POST TITLE	BUDGET COST	TIMESCALE
<p>a) That the Local Authority implements the necessary measures to ensure that all assessments demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A full investigation of the commitment to the long-term permanent care of the child.</li> <li>• A thorough evaluation of support, both practical and financial, which determines short-term and long-term plans.</li> <li>• The complex and multifaceted issues of mediation and evidence that short-term and long-term contact arrangements have been considered and addressed.</li> <li>• A detailed account of the realistic options/orders that have been considered, and are appropriate, and the advantages and disadvantages associated with these options.</li> <li>• That the completion of the assessment is both fair and balanced.</li> </ul>	<p>All potential carers are assessed, including DBS checks and references. Support for both practical and financial support needs are assessed and reviewed as per policy. Presentations to court include considerations of options, and identify the strengths and vulnerabilities of those options.</p> <p>All reports to court are Quality assured by managers to ensure they include all necessary information. Care plans are agreed by Heads of Service.</p>			

## Appendix D

<p>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.</p>	<p>Democratic Services have written to Her Honour Judge Matthews regarding recommendations from scrutiny.</p>			
<p>c) That the local judiciary receives information on the Local Authority's policies, procedures and practices and is notified when these have been revised.</p>	<p>The action has been implemented as a direct result of the findings of the scrutiny investigation</p>			
<p>d) That a Court Liaison Officer post be created to act as a conduit between the Court and the Local Authority.</p>	<p>Noted.  This function will be considered in the review of social care legal delivery model.</p>	<p>Director of Children's Care &amp; Head of Legal Services</p>	<p>To be within existing budgets</p>	<p>31/09/17  Review of legal services not yet completed</p>
<p>e) That the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel writes to the Secretary of State for Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To outline its concerns in respect of the conflicting legislation when applying care planning and fostering regulations to family and friends care.</li> <li>• To request that the Government revises current legislation and develops regulations specifically for family and friends care.</li> </ul>	<p>Completed – Letter sent 04.09.17</p>	<p>Democratic Services Officer</p>	<p>N/A</p>	

Appendix D

<p>f) That, when possible, the Local Authority tests family and friends care placements to provide an informed evidence-base for placement decisions.</p>	<p>Placements are assessed, tested and reviewed by social workers before application is made for final court orders. Inevitably placements sometimes need to be made in an emergency during court proceedings.</p>			
<p>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.</p> <p>Furthermore, that the resource pack be utilised by practitioners and ward councillors and distributed to community hubs, libraries, GP Surgeries and other community facilities.</p>	<p>The pack has been developed and is shared with family and friends carers. Printed copies are available on request.</p> <p>Action will be taken to ensure the pack is on the website for easy access. However, the wider distribution of physical packs is not considered practical, as details of arrangements are subject to frequent change.</p>	<p>Assistant Team Manager - Fostering to action website inclusion</p>		<p>31/08/17</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Noted. The department already gathers and analyses data in relation to its statutory remit. It does not have the resources to extend this function outside of its statutory role. However it would share appropriate anonymised data with Grandparents Plus, and welcome findings from their research.</p>			

<p>i) That the Local Authority works in partnership with Grandparents Plus to deliver training/briefing sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ward councillors on the context of care by family and friends.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• To frontline staff and social workers to enable them to provide professional and specialist advice in respect of family and friends care.</li> <li>• To family and friends carers on relevant topics, such as safeguarding, contact, maintaining positive relationships and life story work.</li> </ul>	<p>Grandparents Plus is an advocacy group with its own agenda which seeks to influence this and other local authorities. The department will use evidence from Grandparents Plus and other agencies to inform its training and briefings for members and officers, but the responsibility for delivery lies with the council's professional staff.</p> <p>The department delivers training to front line staff, social workers and partners where appropriate. For example, councillors received a briefing on connected persons from the Director of Children's Care on 29.09.16. This will be repeated annually.</p> <p>The service already undertakes training for family and friends carers through the foster care training programme. This is available to all connected persons carers who are encouraged to attend.</p>	<p>Director of Children's Care</p>		
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## Appendix D

<p>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.</p>	<p>The framework is statutorily set. Please note the document entitled ‘Caring for somebody else’s child – options’, which is extracted from care planning regulations and was appended to the initial briefing for scrutiny.</p> <p>Middlesbrough assessment and report templates are set to reflect the statutory framework. It is important to recognise that whilst all assessments take place within a statutory framework, children and families have individual needs. As such it is vital that the social worker involved uses his or her professional judgement to ensure the best outcome for the child.</p>			
<p>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.</p>	<p>We will raise the issue with the programme development board of the NE Training Consultation to ensure the proposal is considered by all social work training providers in the north east.</p>	<p>Head of Quality Standards and Initial Response</p>		<p>Next meeting post agreement of action plan</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Assessments undertaken with all prospective carers are shared with them to ensure they understand the reasons for decisions. The assessment includes reflective analysis of the risks to ensure the carer both understands, and is able to manage, the risks appropriately.</p> <p>In some circumstances a child’s parent</p>			

**Appendix D**

	<p>may not wish certain information to be shared. Information regarding third parties may still be shared where appropriate to protect children and young people.</p>			
<p>m) That a group of designated officers be appointed to carry out family and friends care work.</p>	<p>Noted. However, the department will not be looking to identify a group of dedicated officers. Working with family and friends regarding the care of a child is at the core of all social work with children and families, and as such needs to be a skill for all social workers.</p>			
<p>n) That the Local Authority has one central contact telephone number and email address for family and friends carers.</p>	<p>It is standard practice that all families with a worker are given a direct number for that worker. Family and friends carers who do not have an allocated worker can make contact through the First Contact team.</p>			
<p>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>	<p>Please see the document entitled 'Caring for somebody else's child – options', which is extracted from care planning regulations and was appended to the initial briefing for scrutiny.</p>			

## Appendix D

<p>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.</p>	<p>Gaining the views of children during assessments and reviews is a core standard within social work practice. Children's views are sought by their social workers, by the Independent Reviewing Officer at looked after reviews, and by the Children In Care Council.</p> <p>Views of children (what they think helps, what didn't, how they want to contribute to planning) are fed back to social workers by IROs.</p> <p>As part of the ongoing Transformation Programme, a children's participation worker is to be appointed in the department.</p>			
<p>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.</p>	<p>The current working arrangements with Grandparents Plus will be expanded to include early help / community support officers to enable the expansion of support to those grandparents not involved with Children's Care.</p>	<p>Head of Prevention / Assistant Team Manager - Fostering</p>		<p>31/09/17</p>
<p>r) In respect of Family Group Conferences (FGCs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That the Local Authority's policies and procedures be revised to reflect the importance of this practice.</li> </ul>	<p>The use of Family Group Conferences is already a part of current practice in the department, though it is not used in all cases.</p>			

**Appendix D**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That measures be put in place to ensure all children and families are entitled to FGCs, prior to care proceedings.</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<p>The 'Believe in Families' Transformation Plan for Children's Services includes the development of FGCs and their extension to all appropriate cases. The delivery model will be developed in light of analysis of information, impact on outcomes and fit with local needs.</p> <p>Funding for this plan has been secured from the authority's Change Fund. Bids for external funding will be considered.</p>			
<p>s) That the Local Authority submits a bid for Innovation Funding to implement the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) in Middlesbrough.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) will be considered, along with other evidenced based models of practice, in the development of the sufficiency strategy for looked after children which is part of the 'Believe in Families' Transformation Plan for Children's Services.</p>	<p>Head of LAC</p>		<p>31/09/17</p>
<p>t) That the Local Authority engages with the work of the PAUSE Project.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The Pause Project works with parents (usually mothers) who repeatedly have children removed from their care.</p> <p>The Department does not intend to engage with this project at present, as the costs and the evidence base are not yet established and are prohibitive. However, published learning from the model will be incorporated into future planning.</p>			



	<p>Update – Sept 2017  DfE publication of evaluation of Pause included evidence of a clear financial case.  As a result Children’s Services, with commissioning are undertaking further work to develop a business case, in partnership with other authorities if possible, to bring Pause to Middlesbrough.</p>			
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