

North Lanarkshire Council

Report

Education and Families Committee

approval noting

Ref

Date 12/11/19

Corporate Parenting: Virtual School Implementation and Reconfiguration of Kinship Support

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Executive Summary

In line with the North Lanarkshire Corporate Parenting Strategy and Improvement Plan (2019-22) and the programme of work (P044), a range of improvement activity is being progressed with the aim of improving outcomes for looked after and care experienced children and young people.

Further to the report on the development of the Virtual School presented and approved by Committee in September 2019, a more detailed implementation plan for the Virtual School is attached for information as Appendix 1 of this report.

This report also advises Committee of the growth in the numbers of children and young people looked after within kinship care arrangements in North Lanarkshire and outlines proposals to reconfigure arrangements for the assessment, review and support of kinship carers. The changes are intended to improve the experience of children and young people in kinship arrangements and to enhance the wider support available to kinship carers whilst making best use of available resources. It is anticipated this will also reduce placement breakdowns and better support transitions.

It is also expected that this group of children and young people and their carers will benefit from wider developments in relation to family support which will be reported to the next Committee in the next cycle.

Recommendations

Committee is asked to:

- (i) Note the contents of this report
- (ii) Approve the attached implementation plan for the Virtual School
- (iii) Approve the proposal to establish a kinship care team and the next steps set out to support this at 2.8 – 2.12 of this report.
- (iv) Receive a report on associated developments in family support and family group decision-making in the next committee cycle.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority Support all children and young people to realise their full potential

Ambition statement (7) Enhance collaborative working to maximise support and ensure all our children and young people are included, supported, and safe

1. Background

- 1.1 The introduction of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 brought a range of new duties and responsibilities on corporate parents, including local authorities to promote the welfare of looked after and care experienced children and young people including those cared for within kinship care arrangements, introducing in addition responsibilities in respect of continuing and after care to the ages of 21 and 26 respectively. Further duties in respect of a wider range of kinship carers and eligible children were also introduced through the 2014 Act, the Kinship Care (Scotland) Order 2016 and a subsequent agreement between COSLA and Scottish Government which centred on financial support payable both to 'formal kinship carers' and some categories of 'informal kinship carers caring for eligible children, bringing this in to line with allowances paid to foster carers.
- 1.2 Kinship care involves the care of a child or young person by an extended family member or close friend and can provide clear benefits for children and young people often supporting a continuation of family identity and to maintain them within their own communities. Kinship carers can however also struggle to meet the challenges of supporting children and young people who have often experienced trauma and who may have complex needs and may also experience difficulties managing the change in family dynamics and relationships which can emerge as a result of a placement in particular in the links with parents.
- 1.3 Arrangements to assess and support kinship carers and kinship care placements in North Lanarkshire have evolved and changed over the years moving from previous less formal 'link carer' arrangements with the establishment of a Kinship Care Scheme and supporting procedures in 2008. These have since been revised in line with new legislation, however to date the lead responsibility for assessing and supporting kinship carers has remained with the same locality social worker and social work teams responsible for the child or young person placed. This contrasts with the arrangements for foster care where a separate Children's Carer's team lead on the assessment, review and support of carers.
- 1.4 In addition to the support provided through social work localities there are currently a number of additional supports available to kinship carers. Income maximisation is undertaken for all carers by social work localities supported by the Financial Inclusion Team. Community Learning and Development staff currently facilitate six local kinship care support groups which provide a forum for discussion, advice and mutual support and across North Lanarkshire kinship carers can also access support from Nurture Scotland and through Citizens Advice Bureaus (CABs). Many kinship carers do not however engage with available supports and this can contribute in some circumstances to placement breakdowns.
- 1.5 Over the period since 2008 and in particular since the 2015 the number of children and young people cared for within kinship care arrangements supported by the local authority has grown significantly from 207 children and young people to 494

currently, of which a number are pending approval at the kinship care panel. Of this number 340 children and young people are looked after and therefore considered to be in formal kinship care arrangements whilst the remaining 154 are eligible children in informal kinship arrangements. The latter include children subject to a kinship care or residence order who were previously looked after, at risk of becoming looked after or placed by the local authority. In addition 27 young people are currently in kinship care on a continuing care basis. This number is likely to grow over the coming years.

- 1.6 Whilst the growth in kinship care arrangements has supported children and young people remain within their families and communities there has not been any significant consequential reduction in the demand for other types of care placement and the cost of kinship care allowances has also grown significantly as highlighted in section 4.1 of this report.

2. Report

- 2.1 The growth in kinship care arrangements and enhanced duties in respect of kinship care outlined above have placed a number of pressures on current service arrangements impacting on the performance and sustainability of these arrangements and the consistency of support offered to kinship carers. In particular there are, due to competing demands, challenges associated with the same workers carrying responsibility for both the child's plan and the assessment and support of kinship carers. These have contributed to:

- Focus being drawn from early intensive focus on family support and potential rehabilitation to the assessment of the carers.
- Less than optimal planning for permanence for children and young people within kinship arrangements.
- Some kinship carers expressing concerns about the level of support available.
- Some placements breaking down or the quality of care being compromised,

These issues can impact both on outcomes for children and young people and on carers and the limited numbers of children and young people being supported to return to their parent's care also contributes to the growing cost of the service.

- 2.2 A range of actions have already been taken to support improvement. These have included:

- A revision of operational procedures with additional focus on immediate post placement planning.
- A focus within the PaCE (Permanence and Care Excellence) Improvement Programme on tracking and progressing permanence planning within kinship arrangements.
- The identification of support to kinship carers as a key priority within the development of the Virtual School Model.
- The development of a small Family Group Decision Making project to support families to work together with professionals and to empower them to find their own solutions, with the potential to reduce the need for formal care and to support transitions or the quality and sustainability of care arrangements.

- A test of change involving a dedicated social worker based out with the locality teams undertaking 12 kinship care assessments.
- 2.3 Analysis of the test of change and feedback from the kinship care panel suggested that the assessments were more robust and carer focussed than those completed by locality staff and that the completion of these by an independent worker allowed locality staff to focus more on the plan for the child.
- 2.4 As noted above current support arrangements for kinship carer support are inconsistent across both individual arrangements and localities. These also make it more difficult for the service to maintain a comprehensive overview of the needs of kinship carers or to identify the wider gaps in training and support required to support them better help the children and young people move through the different transitional stages of their lives.
- 2.5 In view of the above it has been identified that there are a number of potential advantages to aligning arrangements for the support of kinship carers more closely with those for fostering and adoptive carers, whilst recognising them as a distinct group whose needs are different and that unlike the fostering and adoption service this would not be a regulated service registered with the Care Inspectorate.
- 2.6 It is therefore proposed to develop a kinship care team which would be co-located with the current Children's Carers Service and thus would be able to draw on some of the expertise held within this service and that this new team take responsibility for the assessment, review and importantly also support of kinship carers. This has the advantage of both creating a vehicle for significantly enhanced support for kinship carers but also allowing locality social workers to focus more robustly on planning for the child or young person.
- 2.7 It is proposed that the new reconfigured kinship care support team would therefore provide:
- Assessment of new formal and informal kinship care placements and for continuing kinship care placements.
 - Identification of training and support needs.
 - Link worker support for formal kinship carers (and for informal where assessed need).
 - Access to training and support groups.
 - Annual review of kinship carers.
 - And with partners identify community resources and build community awareness/capacity to support the needs of kinship carers.

Next Steps

- 2.8 It is proposed that the kinship care team be established through the reconfiguration of existing staffing establishments within both locality children and families and the centrally managed teams and that this is taken forward through appropriate HR processes.
- 2.9 Further engagement will be undertaken with kinship carers as part of the planning for the new service and in particular efforts will be made to seek the views of carers who are not currently part of existing support networks.

- 2.10 Further engagement will also take place during planning with partners including the Third Sector.
- 2.11 Parallel work will continue to improve wider family supports and a report on this and the proposed expansion of Family Group Decision Making will be brought forward in the next committee cycle.
- 2.12 It is proposed that the new kinship care service will be in place for April 2020.

3. Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

The proposed improvements outlined within this report are designed to have a positive impact on looked after and care experienced children and young people, those in informal kinship care and kinship carers all of whom are vulnerable to structural disadvantage and specifically also continue the commitment to income maximisation for this group.

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

Completed

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

There is no Financial Impact in relation to the creation of a new Kinship Care team as the posts will be created by restructuring existing staffing resources. It is anticipated that the introduction of the new team will reduce the cost pressures associated with the growth in demand for Kinship Care through improvements in the quality of planning and an increased focus in rehabilitation.

The cost of supporting formal and informal Kinship placements has grown significantly in recent years due to increased demand, changes to legislative responsibility and maintaining financial equity with fostering allowances. Based on existing funding availability and commitments the Service is projecting an overspend of £0.360m during the current financial year.

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

As noted above it is proposed that the new team be created within the existing establishment through the reconfiguration of staffing resource. This will not involve any regrading of staff and given turnover within the service it is anticipated the change will be achieved through relocation of vacancies or staff who wish to be part of the new service.

4.3 Environmental Impact

None

4.4 Risk Impact

As above it is anticipated that new arrangements will support address the operational and financial risks associated with the growth in demand for kinship.

5. Measures of success

5.1 As part of the continued development work for the new service a suite of measures will be developed. These will include:

- Kinship Carer feedback/satisfaction
- No of carers accessing additional support and training

Targets of:

- Reduced placement break down
- Increase in permanence
- Increase in rehabilitation
- Increase in engagement, attainment and positive destinations

6. Supporting documents

6.1 Appendix 1 - Virtual School Implementation Plan



Alison Gordon
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Virtual School Implementation Plan: 2019 – 2020 (Summary Document)

Theme / Strand	Timescale / Process
Establishment of Team	
1. Virtual School Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Creation of Virtual School team structure and appointment of staff (August 2019)</i> • <i>Creation of Cluster Link model within Virtual School (August 2019)</i> • <i>Looked After Teachers realigned to Virtual School (January 2020)</i>
2. Support Structures/Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Scoping exercise with key stakeholders on current support practices/ gaps in provision (Dec 2019)</i> • <i>Review of current supports and creation of tiered support structure (Jan 2020)</i> • <i>Creation of menu of supports available and system of access (Jan 2020)</i>
3. Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Creation of Virtual School website/Twitter to provide information for young people, families and workers (Nov 2019)</i> • <i>Virtual School leaflets for young people and families (January 2020)</i>
4. Future Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Creation of reference group of key stakeholders (November 2019)</i>
Data Analysis and Use	
5. Gathering data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Creation of accurate database of LACE young people linking information from MySwis and SEEMIS (August 2019)</i> • <i>Definition of LACE legislation guide for Education staff (August 2019)</i> • <i>Update system of sharing recorded LACE information with schools via SEEMIS (September 2019)</i>
6. Use of data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identification of priority individuals and groups requiring enhanced support (September/October 2019)</i> • <i>Creation of Educational Dashboard to ensure robust tracking and monitoring of attainment data of LACE population (November 2019)</i>
Improving Attainment and Health & Wellbeing	
7. Partnership Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Summer programme in partnership with NL Leisure offered via schools, Social Work and Kinship groups (June 2019)</i> • <i>Pilot programme in partnership with NL Leisure/Active Schools delivered (August 2019)</i> • <i>Consultation service for schools and other professionals (August 2019)</i> • <i>Establishment of Designated Manager role for LACE young people within all NL educational establishments (September 2019)</i> • <i>Pilot selection of Health and Wellbeing partnership programmes within at least six clusters (January 2020)</i>
8. Support and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Individualised programmes of support created to improve engagement and re-engagement in learning including Vocational Education (August 2019)</i> • <i>Establishment of links with relevant partners for delivery of training programmes linked with employability skills for young people (August 2019)</i> • <i>Updated training in Literacy and Numeracy including SAC Interventions delivered to variety of stakeholders including Kinship groups (November 2019)</i> • <i>Delivery of programme of training to support development of Literacy and Numeracy skills and Wider Achievements for Children's House staff (November 2019)</i> • <i>Development and training on suite of interventions to support improved wellbeing for young people and their families (January 2020)</i>