

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

21 MARCH 2019

KINSHIP CARE

Introduction

1. There are estimated to be around 200,000 children living with kinship carers (also known as Family and Friends Care) in the UK. Just over 50% of these children are living with grandparents but some children live with other family members such as aunts and uncles or older brothers and sisters. Many of these children are unknown to Children's Social Care and it is therefore difficult to know how many children in Worcestershire are living with extended family members.
2. In 2011 the government issued Statutory Guidance on Family and Friend Care. One of the requirements of the guidance was that each Local Authority had to produce a Family and Friends Policy. Worcestershire developed its policy in 2011 and this was reviewed last year. The policy can be found at

http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/downloads/file/10205/family_and_friends_care_2018

Legal Context of Kinship Arrangements

3. The Children's Act contains two important principles which have particular relevance for kinship care arrangements.
 - LAs have a duty to support children being cared for by birth family and by extended family/connected person where this is in the interests of a child's welfare and safety.
 - The level of intervention by Children's Social Care should be at a proportionate level to ensure children are not at risk of significant harm.

Informal Family Arrangements and Children in Need

4. This is where the children of the parents have asked family members to look after their children for a period of time. This may be for a number of reasons including the parent's physical or emotional health, work commitments, substance misuse, new relationships or custodial sentences. As noted above many of these children will not be known to Children's Social Care and will be supported by universal services. The parents of the child retain parental responsibility for them.
5. Some of these children may receive services if they are assessed as Children in Need (CIN)
6. A child in need is defined in the Children's Act as a child:

- Who is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services or
- A child whose health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of services
- A child who is disabled.

7. For these children, Children's Social Care will work with other agencies and in partnership with the children and their carers to support the carers to put in place what is required for the carers to be able to meet the child's needs.

Private Fostering

8. Where a child is living with a family friend who is not a close family member (i.e. grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling by birth or marriage) or friend for more than 28 days then this is a private fostering arrangement. The LA has a duty to assess whether this is a suitable arrangement and will undertake regular visits to the child. However the parent retains parental responsibility, including financial responsibility, for the child. Some privately fostered children may be assessed as children in need and can receive support under a Child in Need plan.

Child Arrangement Orders (formerly Residence Orders)

9. Child Arrangement Orders give the carers parental responsibility for the child and they share this with the parents. It is usually used where the parents are going to be a significant person in the child's life even though the child is not living with them. Where children have previously been looked after as part of a package of support an allowance can be paid. In the last few years we have seen the number of children for whom an allowance is being paid remaining fairly static, just over 50.

10. Family members can claim universal benefits for any child placed with them under a Child Arrangement Order. Children who were looked after prior to the making of the order are entitled to Pupil Premium Plus and 15 hours free child care from 2 years old.

11. Family members who are caring for children who are the subject of CAO can refer themselves to Children's Social Care for an assessment of need.

Special Guardians Orders.

12. Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) give the carers parental responsibility for the child and means that they can make the big decisions as well as the day to day decision for the children they care for. Most Special Guardians are related to the child or young person. Children and carers are not subject to unnecessary intrusion in their family lives in the way that would be if the child was looked after.

13. WCC offers the following services:

- Funding for an initial legal consultation and the application fee for a Private Law application for an SGO when children are looked after or at a risk of becoming looked after
- Help with set up costs
- SGO support plans which may include an SGO allowance. SGO regulations state that this must be means tested, annually reviewed and not duplicate any universal benefits such as child benefit and child tax credit that the carer may be entitled to. There has been a significant growth in the number of children receiving an SGO allowance from WCC from 57 in 2011 to 292 at the end of December 2018.
- Special Guardians are able to claim Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit if appropriate
- Special Guardians can access the training provided by the Fostering and Kinship services
- The Community Social Work team provides advice and signposting for children subject to SGOs. They also undertake an annual review of the support plan of those receiving financial support and will sign post to Targeted Family Support, Early Intervention Family Support or Family Front Door if necessary.
- Special Guardians, the parents of children who are subject to SGOs, the children themselves and partner agencies can make a referral to the Family Front Door for Targeted Early Help or assessment as a Child in Need.
- Children who were looked after prior to becoming subject to an SGO can access the Adoption Support Fund to pay for therapeutic support this is administered through the Community Social Work Team.
- Children who were looked after prior to becoming subject to an SGO are also entitled to Pupil Premium Plus and 15 hours free child care for 2 year olds.

Kinship Foster Carers

14. This has been a major area of growth for Children's Social Care. In these arrangements the child is looked after either voluntarily or by court order and the legal requirement is that they must be placed with approved foster carers. Family members have therefore been assessed and approved as foster carers. As such they can access the same support and services as other foster carers including foster carer payments.

15. At the end of March 2016 we had 98 children living in this type of arrangement. This has risen to 177 by the end of February 2019.

16. In September 2018 following a review of the Fostering and Kinship Service and because of the increase in kinship work there was a transfer of resources from non-related fostering to kinship fostering.

- Increase from 2 to 3 fulltime Team Managers
- Increase from 11 to 15.5 FTE social workers
- Increase from 2 Business Support Officers to 2.5 FTE Business Support Officers

17. The three teams are specialised teams where there is a high level of expertise of working with Kinship Carers. These teams undertake fostering and Special Guardian assessments and support households approved as foster carers.

18. The number of children looked after and placed with family members who are approved foster carers in Worcestershire is higher than the national average. Statistically WCC has 22% of its looked after children in kinship foster care. The national figure is 17%.

19. Children who are looked after and their carers experience a high level of intervention and it can change the dynamics of the relationship between the child and their family member as the carer also has to fulfil the role of foster carer.

Family Arrangement Coordinator Pilot

20. As noted above children do not always need to be received into Local Authority care to receive support from family members. Parents may at times ask family members to care for their child while they make the necessary changes for them to resume fulltime care of their child.

21. These arrangements often start at times of crisis and as a way of supporting them Children's Social Care is piloting a scheme where we assist parents and the family member to think through what the arrangement will entail and what the parent is willing for the family member to do on their behalf.

22. We see these as short-term arrangements with the parent having an active part in their child's life and working for the return of the child to their care. Although financial responsibility for the child remains with the parent we can assist with a financial contribution when there are additional costs to the child living with the family member.

23. There will be an evaluation of the pilot in April.

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765

Specific Contact Points for this report

Name: Barbara Carter, Group Manager, Fostering and Kinship