

**REPORT TO EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE –
8 OCTOBER 2020**

KINSHIP SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 This Annual Report for Aberdeenshire's Kinship Care Service offers details of the framework for kinship care for Aberdeenshire's most vulnerable children who require to be looked after away from parental care, and the services available to assess and support those carers.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Consider the Kinship Care Service Annual Report and provide comments to the Service; and**
- 2.2 Continue to support the ongoing work of the Kinship Care Team and work to place children within their extended family wherever safe and appropriate to their needs.**

3 Purpose and Decision-Making Route

- 3.1 This report is being presented to the ECS Committee as part of Children's Services' commitment to raise the profile of the Kinship Care Service provided to children and families in need of such services in Aberdeenshire and to invite feedback on both the achievements of and challenges for the Service.
- 3.2 This report contributes to Children's Services' self-evaluation and improvement planning process to ensure that resources are appropriately supported and allocated, and the Service is able to continue to meet local need. The views of children and adults who use the Service inform both service delivery and improvement work.
- 3.3 The 2019/2020 Annual Report has not been considered by any other committee. The 2018 Annual Report was considered by this Committee at its meeting on 10 October, 2019.

4 Discussion

- 4.1 The aims of Aberdeenshire's Children's Services are first and foremost to enable and support children to remain in their families of origin and, where this is not possible and where alternative family based care is required, the Kinship Care Team assesses and supports extended family members to care for our Looked After Children and Young People.
- 4.2 Aberdeenshire Council's Kinship Care Service has its practice underpinned by the core components, values and principles of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and within the legislative context of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995,

The Children & Young Persons (Scotland) Act 2014 and The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

Throughout Aberdeenshire and all of Scotland, there are many children who are unable to live with their birth family and who, instead, live with friends or extended family. This is often a private arrangement made by the family without the active involvement of any of the public services. As long as the child is properly taken care of, there is no remit for local authority involvement (except where Private Foster Care requirements apply.)

- 4.3 In other situations, however, the local authority may have formally placed a child with friends or family and, in this situation, the child is regarded as being legally 'looked after' by the local authority and thus in a "Kinship Care" arrangement.
- 4.4 Aberdeenshire has a strong history of supporting children to remain, wherever possible, with their families and has had a designated Kinship Care Team since 2010, which offers support and advice to all Kinship Carers. Where a child or young person is legally 'looked after' by the local authority and in a Kinship Care arrangement, a number of background checks on the carers will be undertaken. The law also requires the local authority to assess the capacity of Kinship Carers to care for and meet the needs of a child/ren in their care.
- 4.5 This "assessment" is undertaken to help ensure that the child is safe and will be well cared for. As part of this process, carers will also be required to sign a written Kinship Carer's Agreement outlining their role and responsibilities.
- 4.6 The overall assessment of the carer's capacity to care for the child is eventually presented to an independent panel which is asked to consider approval of carers as formal Aberdeenshire Kinship Carers and make a recommendation to the local authority.
- 4.7 From October 2015, the Scottish Government required local authorities to pay Kinship Carers who are caring for a Looked After Child a sum of money which is the same as the allowance received by approved Foster Carers .
- 4.8 Where children live with family members as part of a **private family arrangement** and are thus not '**Looked After**', there is no eligibility for parity payments from the local authority.
- 4.9 In both sets of circumstances above, Aberdeenshire Council will provide Kinship assistance in such a way as to help safeguard, support and promote the wellbeing of a child, including advice, information and counselling.
- 4.10 The Service is delighted to present its Annual Report for 2019/20 (Appendix 1), which outlines the progress made over the last year to meet the needs of Aberdeenshire's children who require to be looked after in Kinship Care and support to the families who commit to offering these children a safe and loving home.

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 This report helps deliver Council Priorities: Our People - Education and Health & Wellbeing

5.2 This report also helps to deliver against [Aberdeenshire's Children's Services Plan](#) Priority – 'Corporate Parenting'.

5.3 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		X	
Staffing		X	
Equalities		X	
Fairer Scotland Duty		X	
Town Centre First			X
Sustainability		X	
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing	X		

5.4 By endorsing this report and subsequently supporting the recommendations, which include listening to the needs, fears and wishes of children and young people, actively facilitating children and young people's participation, promoting Children's Rights and being proactive and determined in our collective efforts to address these, the Council will have a positive impact on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people across Aberdeenshire.

5.5 An equality impact assessment is not required because the report is an annual report and does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

5.6 There are no staffing implications.

5.7 Kinship Care is one of the most cost-effective ways to provide care for our children and young people as well as having a high rate of stability of placement (96%). A placement in Kinship Care, therefore, has financial benefits in the longer term for the Council, as successful placements require less resource to support them and many of our young people live very settled, 'normal' lives within their extended families and go on to be successful in their adult lives.

5.8 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level

[Corporate Risk Register.](#)

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- ACORP001- Budget Pressures

[Directorate Risk Registers.](#)

- BSSR001 – Balancing the books;
- ECSSR003 – Embedding GIRFEC; and
- ECSSR004 – Support inclusive, vibrant, and healthy communities.

6 Scheme of Governance

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 6.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section E.1.1 (a) of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as the matter relates to Children's Services.

Laurence Findlay
Director of Education and Children's Services

Report prepared by Kirsty Theodoreson, Social Work Manager
25 August, 2020

List of Appendices:

APPENDIX 1 – ANNUAL REPORT OF THE KINSHIP SERVICE 2019/20

Aberdeenshire Council Kinship Care Service
Annual Report 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020

Background

The Kinship Care Team in Aberdeenshire became operational on 1 June 2010 and consisted of 1 Team Manager, 4 Social Workers and 5 Family Support Workers.

Currently the team comprises:



*2 of whom are currently on maternity leave

In the 10-year period that the team has been in operation family support work hours have consistently been converted to social work hours when posts have become vacant to meet the needs of the complexities and challenges of the assessment work which the team undertake.

The practice of Aberdeenshire Council's Kinship Service, located within Children's Services is underpinned by the core components, values and principles of GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child). These are enshrined within the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009, which replaced the previous Fostering regulations.

Kinship Team's Role

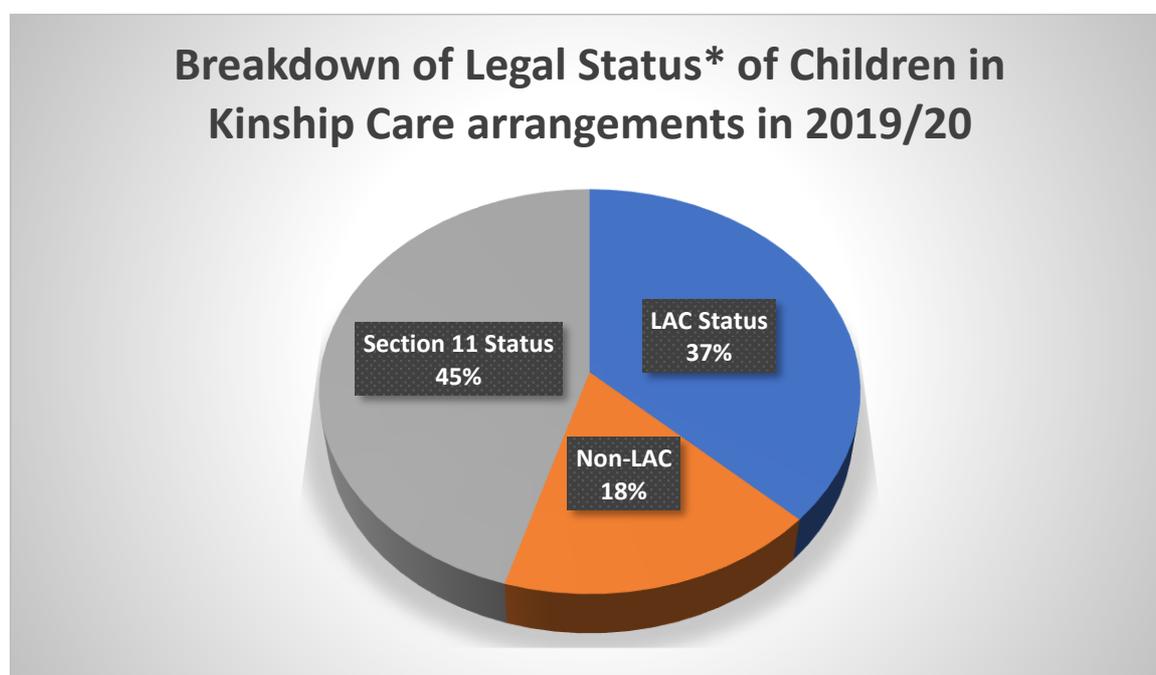
The dispersed team provide the following key services:

- Assessment, approval, and ongoing support for Kinship Carers who are caring for a Looked After Child including financial support.

- Support for informal Kinship carers, where the child is not formally looked after. (Throughout Aberdeenshire and all of Scotland there are many children who are unable to live with their birth family and who, instead, live with friends or extended family. This is often a private arrangement made by the family without the active involvement of any of the public services.)
- A duty service to all Kinship carers in Aberdeenshire.

A kinship carer may be a family member or a family friend who has a pre-existing relationship with that child.

- Number of Social Work Supported Kinship Care arrangements in Aberdeenshire in 2019/20 was 156
- Number of Children in Social Work Supported Kinship Care arrangements in 2019/20 was 216
- Number of Kinship placement breakdowns was 7 (4%) which is the equivalent to saying that 96% of kinship placements were sustained through 2019/20.



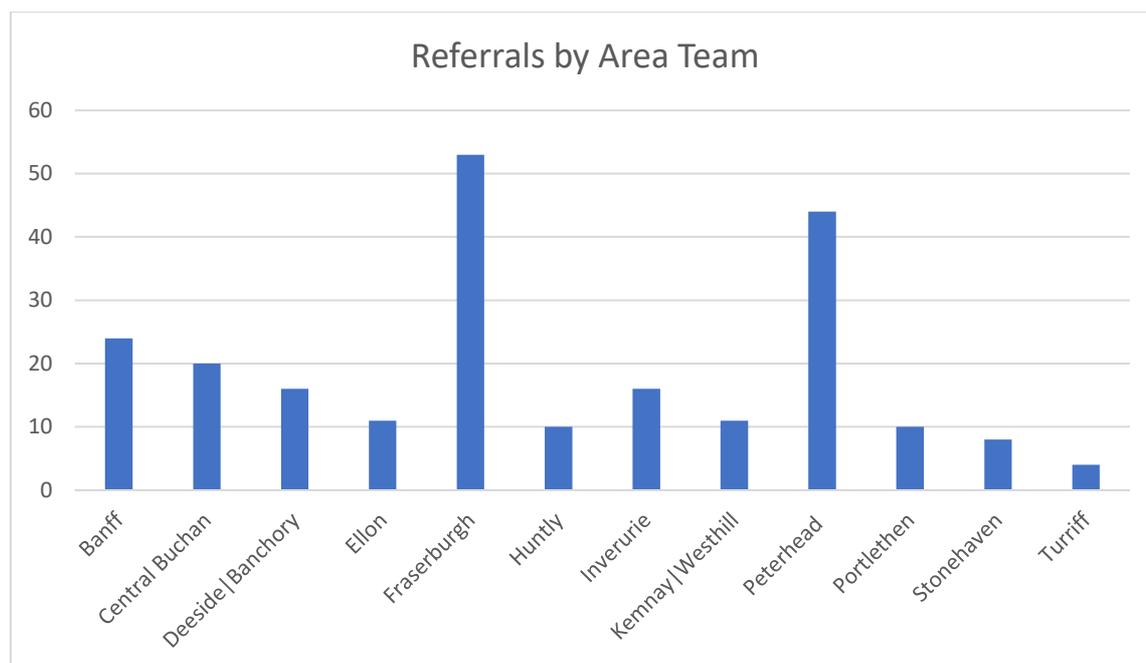
**Looked After Child (LAC) Status refers to Compulsory Measures of Supervision
Non-Looked After Child (Non-LAC) refers to informal/private family arrangements
Section 11 refers to carers holding a Residence Order giving them Rights and Responsibilities for the child/young person.

Assessment of Kinship Carers who are caring for a Looked After Child

An assessment can take place either before a Looked After Child is placed with a family member (*a Prospective Kinship Assessment*) or alternatively can take place when a Looked After Child has already been formally placed by Social Work with a family member under Section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

A referral is made in the first instance to the Kinship Care Team by the Children and Families Social Worker. The Kinship Carer is then asked to complete a Notification of

Interest Form confirming that they wish to be considered for Kinship Care and giving a signed mandate for statutory checks to be completed. Initial visits can be arranged to discuss and explain what Kinship Care entails before a family member commits to the process. It is vitally important that candidates fully understand the process they are committing to any subsequent approval as a Kinship Carer for a looked after child carries with it a certain level of responsibility. Referrals are received from Children and Families Teams across Aberdeenshire with Peterhead and Fraserburgh having both higher number of looked after children and subsequently a higher need for kinship carers.



On occasions more than one family member may come forward. In this instance a family meeting can be convened to support family members and enable them to make an informed choice on which family member should be considered.

When applying to become a Kinship Carer, the Local Authority has a duty to consider information from the following list which may preclude a person from being approved as a Kinship Carer under the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

- Significant current or historical involvement in offending behaviour
- Significant current or historical involvement in substance/alcohol misuse
- Significant health concerns, serious illness, or disability
- Previous involvement with the Social Work Service where concerns existed in relation to child welfare, care, or protection
- Parental experience, including the outcomes of any previous children
- Other factors indicating concerns or risks

Where statutory checks highlight any indicators of the above, the Service must take this into consideration when assessing the viability of an application and a decision may be made at this stage not to progress an application to a full Kinship assessment. Once a Kinship assessment is completed, the completed assessment along with a recommendation is presented to Aberdeenshire Kinship/Fostering and Supported

Lodgings Panel which is independently chaired. The Panel makes a recommendation to the Local Agency Decision Maker (ADM) within Aberdeenshire Council who makes the final decision and writes confirming the decision to both the carers and the service. Where the Panel and ADM are unable to support formal approval of family members as kinship carers, an appeal can be brought to the Head of Service.

- Number of Kinship Care families considered by Fostering, Kinship Care, Permanence and Supported Lodgings Panel from January to December 2019 was 23 (a 28% increase since 2018)
- Of the 14 cases where children had already been placed in Kinship 13 were approved.
- Of the 9 Prospective families where they applied to have children placed with them on a Kinship arrangement, 7 were approved and 2 were not approved.

Substance misuse continues to be the most common underlying factor in Kinship referrals accounting for 55% of referrals, with neglect/care concerns accounting for 28% of referrals.

Duty Service

We have a duty service operating Monday – Friday during working hours which any Kinship Carer can call for advice and guidance.

Snapshot of referrals

In the period January 2020-March 2020 we had 10 referrals to the Kinship Care Team from across Aberdeenshire.

Of these 10 referrals we have had referrals from:

- Paternal Grandparents
- Maternal Grandparents
- Paternal Aunt & Uncle
- Family friend with pre-existing relationship with the child

At times, applications for kinship care pertain to families from Eastern Europe and on these occasions, we require the ongoing support of translating services and will also require interpreters throughout the assessment process. Where a carer lives out with the UK, we remain committed to assessing viability and use a London based organisation who arrange and progress checks for us abroad.

Covid-19 has impacted on the core work of the Kinship Care Team particularly in relation to progressing assessments and the team have had to be creative and utilise a range of skills to gather relevant information for these pieces of work. The biggest impact has been on progressing statutory checks for assessments, particularly medicals for Kinship Carers.

In addition, the team have strongly focussed on providing support to carers throughout the initial period of lockdown. Whilst support has primarily been provided virtually or over

the telephone, practical help has been provided in relation to shopping, linking in with schools, managing contact with family members and using technology.

Section 11 applications have also been on hold as they have not been identified as a priority task by the court system. In August 2020, the courts began again to consider Section 11 applications.

Achievements

Kinship Care is a positive experience for children/young people and maintains their sense of identity with carers who understand their family history and experiences. Kinship carers support the children in their care not only with their education and social activities but in maintaining ongoing and meaningful relationships with birth parents and other extended family members. This can be challenging in many ways but is underpinned by their desire to do their best for the children in their care.

In 2019 five young people who are living in a Kinship Care Placements were attending college and being supported financially through a Care Experienced Bursary.

A clear example of what a Kinship Placement can mean for a young person is evident in the case of two young people who live with their grandmother. They took part in national auditions Youth Musical Theatre in 2020 and were both offered a place in their summer shows. More than 1400 young people took part in auditions from all over the UK and Ireland. They were allocated places in shows scheduled to take place in England. Due to Covid-19 these projects have been re-arranged for early next year and they will both take part in the productions.

A further example pertains to a primary school aged child who lives with her grandmother who has secured a Residence Order. In the past year, the grandmother has supported and advocated for her granddaughter in many forums and has enabled her to have ongoing relationships with both her birth parents and establish a relationship with a half-sister she had not been aware of. In addition, she has linked in with relevant professionals to secure the support her granddaughter needs to thrive. She has also found time to give her granddaughter some wonderful memories – taking her to concerts and on holiday. This again illustrates the inner strength that Kinship Carers have. The Kinship Carer could not imagine her life without her granddaughter in it.

As a service we continue to administer the database for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library for Aberdeenshire Looked After Children aged 0-5 which is also partly funded by the Scottish Government. Our families love receiving the books which promote literacy, numeracy, and connections/attachment.

In addition, we work closely with the Early Years Education Project Officer to ensure two-year-old Looked After Children in Kinship & Foster Care are offered a free nursery place within the eligibility criteria under Section 47, Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Team News

Elaine Bremner retired from the post of Team Manager in January 2020 – she set up the original team and successfully navigated the challenge of developing the policies

and procedures for the Kinship Care Service in Aberdeenshire in its entirety. Her legacy of sound procedural practice will ensure that the Kinship Care Team is ready for the challenges this next decade may bring.

Her successor Jane Livingston officially came into post on 23 March 2020 and was promoted from within the team.

Team Developmental Priorities for 2020

Covid-19 has thrown a bright light on the challenges that we face as a service in supporting our Kinship Carers effectively. We have Kinship Carers who are:

- Over 70 (classed as a vulnerable group)
- Have pre-existing health conditions (classed as a vulnerable group)

all of whom have continued to care for the children in their care. We have had to ensure that we know their contingency plans if they should become ill and it is anticipated that the way we address this within our assessments will have a greater significance in light of this crisis.

As a team we have a strong desire to support all Kinship Carers throughout Aberdeenshire in a meaningful way. The key to effective support is the relationship and knowledge the team builds with carers through the assessment process and having a real empathy for the situation they find themselves in. This in conjunction with effective partnership with colleagues from different services and sectors leads to effective support for our carers.

Accordingly, our focus for the year ahead will be:

1. To seek feedback from our kinship carers to help us shape and inform the ongoing development of the service.
2. To continue to support carers throughout the Covid-19 crisis and transition back to a more 'normal' life when restrictions are lifted.
3. To build on and improve the links with our colleagues in Children and Families Teams and other social work teams e.g. Adult Services to help support their understanding of Kinship and the challenges it can raise.
4. To ensure that the views of our children and young people in Kinship Care are sought, listened to, and recorded effectively within Kinship Assessments.
5. To review our Kinship Assessment process, in particular relating to the format of the assessment form itself and the ongoing management of contact with birth parents and other family members.
6. To consolidate our knowledge as a Team about continuing care and ensure that this is progressed effectively where relevant for Kinship Carers and the young people they care for.
7. To work in close partnership with Permanence Managers to ensure the effective sharing of information and consolidate a joint working approach.
8. To update the Section 11 process for kinship carers and Children and Families workers to ensure the Guidance and supporting documentation is fit for current purpose.

9. To work with colleagues in Children and Families to provide consistent guidance for Teams in identifying formal and informal arrangements in Kinship Care as this is often an area of complexity, which requires early resolution.
10. To update guidance regarding the transfer of cases from out with Aberdeenshire and to other authorities from Aberdeenshire.
11. To build on the digital knowledge we have gained during lockdown and adapt and incorporate it into our roles post Covid-19 restrictions.

Report compiled by Jane Livingston (Team Manager)