

COUNCIL 27TH FEBRUARY 2020

MEMBER QUESTIONS REPORT

1. Question from Councillor Ioan Jones

Kinship care is where a child or young person lives full-time with a relative or family friend because they are not able to live with their birth parents.

Thousands of people care for children because their birth parents are unable to do so for Health, Bereavement, Family relationship breakdowns, Substance Dependency and Financial issues amongst the reasons.

Kinship care is also known as 'family and friends care', 'connected care', 'relative care' or kincare and has always been with us.

Grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, cousins and close friends have always come forward to keep children in the family when there is a crisis.

There are growing numbers of people who are becoming kinship carers – with an estimated 180,000+ children in the care of relatives in the UK

The term kinship care covers:-

- Informal or private kinship arrangement between parents and & relatives.

This form of care removes large numbers of Young People from requiring direct support from the Council's Children's Services (Fostering and Residential) thus reducing the financial impact on Shropshire Council's Children's Services budget.

Questions.

- What help, and support does Shropshire Council offer to Kinship Careers?
- Is this help and support widely publicised?

If so

- Where is it publicised?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

COUNCILLOR ED POTTER, PORTFOLIO HOLDER:

Thank you for your enquiry, I will endeavour to answer your questions in the context of fostering services in Shropshire.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that there are many children who reside within their extended family, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, close friends and siblings who do so without any intervention from children's services and without any involvement from local authority fostering services. These are known as private family

arrangements, which families organise, support and financially support themselves. Families in this situation can assess universal services for support and can and should access universal benefits such as child benefit and child tax credits. If these families require support other than what is available universally, they can contact Shropshire First Point of Contact to discuss this. If appropriate, families can be sign-posted to additional services, sometimes this may result in a referral to early help or a referral into Compass for an assessment of need to be completed.

Fostering services become involved with families where it has been determined that a child or children are unable to remain with their birth parents due to safeguarding concerns and where the local authority has intervened to safeguard children. It is important that wherever possible children remain in their family of origin. Extended family members are encouraged to come forward to offer alternative care. Once families identify themselves as a possible option, viability assessments are undertaken to determine suitability to offer care. If the decision is to proceed and place a child with a family or friend member, approval is sought from the Fostering Agency Decision Maker and temporary approval is given for a period of 16 weeks with the option to extend for a further 8 weeks to allow for a further period of assessment. Once assessments are completed, these are presented to fostering panel for a recommendation to approve and then to the fostering ADM to agree the approval as a connected person foster carer. Once these processes have taken place a carer then becomes an approved connected person foster carer for a specific child or children.

Questions.

What help and support does Shropshire Council offer to Kinship Carers?

Shropshire connected person foster carers are, under case law, afforded the same level of support as a mainstream in-house foster carer. Connected carers will be allocated a designated supervising social worker who will visit them between 4-12 weeks dependant on the need to carry out a formal supervision. This will also be supported by contact via email, telephone and texts dependant on the medium which engages the carer most. There is also a social worker attached to the child who will visit frequently and monitor and implement the child's care plan and also an Independent Reviewing Officer who will oversee the progress of the child's care plan.

Connected person foster carers are entitled to the same training offer as mainstream carers and are expected to complete a pre-approval training day entitled 'Skills to Care' which prepares them for the role and informs them of the legal and regulatory framework within which they are operating.

Connected person foster carers are entitled to free membership to Fostering Network which offer a range of support and resources to all foster carers including membership discounts. They are also automatically joined to the Shropshire Foster Carer Association (SFCA) which is run by Shropshire foster carers for Shropshire foster carers. The SFCA provide buddy support and also social events and trips.

Connected person foster carers receive Looked After Children allowances for the child in their care and also a skills allowance when they are approved at fostering panel and

have completed their skills to care course. They are also given festival, holiday and birthday allowances as well as start-up costs and uniform allowance.

Where there are concerns regarding placement stability, connected carers can access additional support from support workers in the fostering service, such as a targeted youth worker, a carer intervention specialist and where appropriate access to short breaks for a small minority of children.

Is this help and support widely publicised?

The above support is information which is shared by the supervising social worker and the training department. Information is also given to the connected carers when they are approved at fostering panel, for example the membership of the Fostering Network and SFCA.

Information about fostering is found on www.shropshirefostering.co.uk

People who are applying to be connected person foster carers in general would not be seeking this support independently, as they will have either an assessing or supervising social worker who would be covering the support available as well the expectations of the connected person foster carer and their role.

Where is it publicised?

www.shropshirefostering.co.uk

Information is also available from the assessing or supervising social worker. We are currently working on a revised document for information for people applying to be connected person foster carers and also the Foster Carers handbook.

I hope this has provided the answers to your queries. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the Service Manager for Fostering Lisa Preston, her email is lisa.preston@shropshire.gov.uk

2. Question from Councillor Dave Tremellen

Before employing outside consultants, could I, on behalf of what would appear to be a substantial majority of Shropshire residents, respectfully suggest that this Council submits any such proposal to whatever Scrutiny Committee is considered most appropriate so that this Council's own internal fund of expertise, whether in the form of relevantly experienced officers or elected Members, is first examined to determine whether outside intervention is needed?

Response from the Leader of the Council

COUNCILLOR PETER NUTTING, LEADER

As Members will be aware, this Council rarely engages consultants and only does so if other opportunities have been exhausted. In this case it is obvious to us all that the effective management of our Highways Services has been an issue for some time. Indeed, highways issues is the most complained about in the Council.

With respect, the Conservative Party is in power and has been elected to run this Council. Whilst we are open to and welcome challenge through the Scrutiny process we should not, and will not, make decisions through Scrutiny Committees, which, as Members will know, is not a decision-making function of the Council.

I believe that our decision to engage this consultant was the best course of action. Whilst the short-term costs are significant, on balance the savings and improvement we are making far out-weigh this and so the arrangement offers value for money on an 'invest to save basis'. This is the key point I would make to the public, the savings and improvement we will make as a result of engaging this consultant will be far greater than the costs.

I want to pay tribute to all of our Highways staff who I know have welcomed the leadership changes we have made. The dedication and commitment this service has shown during the recent storms for example, demonstrates just how fantastic we can be when it really matters, and people are depending on us. Such dedication deserves good leadership.

Sometimes when in power, tough and potentially unpopular decisions have to be made. We will not shy away from making these decisions in the best interests of Shropshire and our residents.