

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 17 June 2025

Present:- Councillor Monk (in the Chair); Councillors Brent, Pitchley, Bower, T. Collingham, Elliott, Harper, Ryalls, Hickey and Hemmingway.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Blackham, Fisher, Garnett, Hughes, Sutton, Adair and Ismail.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission, held on 22 April 2025, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items of business on the agenda that required the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting.

4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or press.

5. THE DRAFT KINSHIP LOCAL OFFER

In October 2024, the Government issued statutory guidance on 'Kinship Care', which included a requirement for each local authority to publish a Kinship Local Offer. This update provided an overview of the Draft Kinship Local Offer for pre-decision scrutiny by the Commission, ahead of the offer being provided to Cabinet for approval in July 2025.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children's and Young Peoples Services, Monica Green, Assistant Director for Children's and Young Peoples Services and Chris Macdonald, Service Manager for the Central Locality Teams and Family Activity Base.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member to introduce the report, during which the following was noted:

- The statutory guidance published in October 2024, defined kinship care as any situation where a child was raised by someone other than their parents, this could be a family member or a family friend.
- The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill mandated local authorities to publish a Kinship Local Offer, to extend support to kinship carers and children, and to extend the role of the Virtual School Headteacher to support kinship children.
- The Kinship Local Offer must include support groups, financial support, help with accommodation, education, family time, legal support and therapeutic support. The offer was required to be well publicised and mitigate the barriers to accessing support.
- In relation to the support structure, a Virtual Kinship Hub would be established within the Integrated Front Door and Family Help Navigators would be the first point of contact. Targeted help would be led by a professional via a partner agency or the Family Help Team, with specialised support provided for complex emotional needs.
- The Kinship Local Offer was required to be published within two months of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill becoming Law, the Bill was had not yet become Law. Once approved, the offer would be published online and would be regularly updated.
- In relation to the recommendations on the report, the Commission was asked to consider the content and accessibility of the draft Kinship Local Offer and provide pre-decision scrutiny and feedback which could be incorporated within the final version.

The Chair invited the Service Manager for the Central Locality Teams and Family Activity Base to lead on the presentation, during which the following was noted:

The National Context-

- The Department of Education's definition of kinship care was "any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term".
- The Department of Education's October 2024 Kinship Care Statutory Guidance required the local authority to:
 - Nominate a senior officer to be the lead for kinship.
 - Publish and regularly review the local authorities Kinship Local Offer.
 - Offer family group decision making to all families, before care proceedings.
 - That the Virtual School nominate an officer for educational outcomes, for children in kinship care arrangements.

The Local Context and Progress-

- The local authority had updated the Kinship Care Policy, which was published in 2024.
- A nominated officer for kinship was identified as the Service Manager for the Central Locality Teams and Family Activity Base.
- The role of the Virtual School Head included providing advice and guidance regarding children in kinship care and children with a social worker.
- There was an uplift to kinship allowances following changes to the means testing model, this had been in effect from January 2025.

Decisions and Scrutiny-

- An update on the Kinship Local Offer was presented to the Commission in March 2025.
- The draft Kinship Local Offer was being presented to the Commission for pre-decision scrutiny, ahead of being presented to Cabinet on 7th July 2025.

The Kinship Local Offer-

- The Kinship Local Offer was expected to address and include the following:
- Support groups and training
- Financial support
- Help available to stay in work
- Accommodation
- Education
- Supporting family time
- Family group decision making
- Legal support
- Therapeutic support.

Rotherham's Kinship Local Offer included the following-

- Support groups which were run fortnightly.
- Training which included dedicated training for kinship families.
- Family Help Navigators who were specialised in kinship arrangements.

- Educational advice and support, which also included the Virtual School.
- Connections to the Family Hub networks.
- Support with complexity and instability via the placement stability service which was called Empower. Empower worked with children in care and children in kinship care, the interventions were with therapeutic workers and were designed to improve the stability of unstable situations for children. There was a level of need required to access the service, due to the intensive interventions offered. This service also included accessing the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund, the fund was government established and provided up to three thousand pounds per year, towards the cost of therapy for eligible families.
- Financial allowances for eligible families.
- Help with legal advice for eligible families.

The Chair thanked the relevant officer for the presentation and opened up to questions, during which the following was noted:

- Some kinship carers received the same level of support as foster carers, for example a dedicated Social Worker and six-week visits from a support worker. This would be the case in situations where the child or young person had progressed through the system as a child in care, before moving onto a longer-term special guardianship arrangement or kinship arrangement. There had also been occasions where foster carers had stepped down to enter a kinship arrangement, in these cases they would already have statutory foster carer training and an allocated social worker.
- For kinship arrangements, the right support was offered at the right time. Often kinship arrangements would avoid the child entering children's social care and statutory services, due to the intervention of the service, and the support provided at that point. An example was provided of a situation where an auntie wanted to support their niece or nephew via a kinship arrangement, to prevent them entering the care system and requiring a foster placement. However, the auntie could be unaware of the trauma and the impact it could have, therefore they would benefit from support relating to this, which would be provided as a bespoke offer for the individual situation.
- The service was aiming for children in kinship arrangements to be visible to all services such as health services and education services. They were aiming for services to recognise that children in kinship arrangements lived in different arrangements as may require additional support at times. Examples were provided of services being aware of events such as Father's Day and the impact of events such as these.

- There was a communication plan in place for the Local Kinship Offer to be publicised widely, once approved by Cabinet. This would be publicised via the Kinship Care Delivery Group which was attended by several agencies, such as health and education. The Education Safeguarding Lead would publicise the offer via Teachers Forums and the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead Forums. The Council's Communications Team would share the offer on social media.
- As part of daily practise, the service would make themselves aware of any family connections around child and any potential kinship options available. However, this would require parental consent. Every month there was Family Network Meetings across the service, the meetings assisted the service to understand what family connections were present and the value of them to the child.
- Once approved, the Kinship Local Offer would be reviewed as a minimum, on an annual basis. The Kinship Care Delivery Group would also test the efficiency of the offer.
- Health services wasn't a heading that was mandated to be included within the Kinship Local Offer, however the service had included this in Section's 16 and 17 of the draft offer, which included a focus on health, mental health, trauma and neurodiversity.
- The data captured for kinship care arrangements was complex and very robust in terms of the legal arrangements that the local authority would be aware of. Examples were provided of how the data captured children in special guardianship arrangements, children who were privately fostered and children who had a child arrangement order in place. All of the above would be known to the Virtual School and the Virtual School Headteachers would track the outcomes of the above cohorts of children in terms of educational outcomes. The Virtual School also offered advice and guidance to kinship carers.
- The vision behind the Kinship Local Offer was that any child or family who fit the definition provided by the Department of Education, would be statutorily entitled to the support offered via the Kinship Local Offer, and families could approach the service via Navigators. Some families would enter the service after intensive processes via statutory services, other families may not have had this level of exposure, so the publication and promotion of the Kinship Local Offer via schools and health services would ensure a graduated response, and that the right level of support would be provided where required.
- Members felt that the Draft Local Offer document would only work effectively as a digital resource, due to the hyperlinks added in and could exclude people who were not able to access the offer digitally. The service agreed and offered to develop a shorter

version in the form of a leaflet, which would provide a high-level overview of the support available and would direct people to the Navigators for further advice and guidance.

- There was a strong safeguarding partnership offer available relating to trauma, which helped to ensure that schools in the borough were trauma informed.
- Members felt that the language used within the officer was not widely accessible. As a result, the service agreed to review the language used and amend where required.
- The service was working alongside the Communications Team, who were assessing search engine optimisation and how to ensure that the local offer would be publicised as widely as possible.
- Members felt that further information should be added to specific section of the draft kinship local offer which included the support available for trauma trauma support, and that any policies referenced within the document should also include hyperlinks to those documents.

Resolved:- That the Improving Lives Select Commission:

- Considered the content of the draft Kinship Local Offer and associated presentation and acknowledge the updates to practice.
- Considered the content of the Kinship Local Offer and advised on the accessibility of the language in the offer.
- Request that a leaflet be developed to sit alongside the Kinship Local Offer, which includes an overview of the support available and signposts individuals to the Kinship Navigators for further support.
- Request that the language used within the draft Kinship Local Offer is reviewed to ensure that it is accessible to all, including young people.
- Request that additional information is added into the specific section which includes the trauma support.
- Request that hyperlinks to all policies referenced within the draft Kinship Local Offer are added in.
- Request that a progress update on the Kinship Local Offer is presented to the Commission at a later date, following the first annual review of the impact of the offer.

6. NOMINATION FOR HEALTH, WELFARE AND SAFETY PANEL

The Commission was asked to nominate one representative to sit as a member of the Health, Welfare and Safety Panel for 2025/2026.

Resolved:- That Improving Lives Select Commission appointed Councillor Brent as it's representative on the Health, Welfare and Safety Panel for 2025/2026.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme, and the following was noted:

- The work programme for 2025-2026 was awaiting drafting.
- There would be a separate informal meeting following the conclusion of this meeting, for members to draft and discuss the 2025-2026 work programme.

Resolved: - That the update be noted.

8. IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION - SUB AND PROJECT GROUP UPDATES

The Chair provided a progress report on sub and project group activity.

- It was advised that an update on the proposed scrutiny review relating to trauma and children missing education, would be provided to members during the informal work programme meeting.

Resolved: - That the update be noted.

9. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.