

**Cabinet 21 June 2012****5. KINSHIP STRATEGY****Relevant Cabinet Member**

Mrs E A Eyre

**Relevant Officer**

Director of Children's Services

**Recommendation**

**1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Young People's Social Care (Lead Member for Children's Services) recommends that the Cabinet:**

- (a) notes the consultation responses on Option 4 for support, including financial support, to kin carers; and
- (b) approves the final Kinship Strategy as set out as Appendix 1.

**Background Information**

2. On 19 April 2012 the Cabinet were asked to:
- (a) note the consultation responses to the Draft Kinship Strategy;
  - (b) consider the reasons for changing the financial support available to kin carers and the possible Options, and approve the recommended Option 4 for consultation;
  - (c) agree that the final Kinship Strategy be presented to the Cabinet in June 2012 for approval.

The Cabinet approved these recommendations.

## The Context

## Kinship Strategy

3. The statutory guidance for Family and Friends Care came into force in April 2011. It sets out a framework for the provision of support to family and friends carers. In particular, it provides guidance on the implementation of the duties in the Children Act 1989 in respect of children who are being brought up by members of their extended family, friends or other people who are connected to them. It requires local authorities to publish a Family and Friends Care Policy, which Worcestershire has now done.

4. The Kinship Strategy supports this policy and outlines the approach that the Council will take to support kin carers in Worcestershire.

5. The Kinship Strategy is aligned with the Looked After Children Strategy. The aim of both strategies is to ensure Worcestershire is looking after the right children, in the right placements with the right support to meet their assessed needs.

6. The Kinship Strategy aims to give clarity for kin carers and those providing support to kin carers to ensure that children are enabled to live with kin carers who can meet their needs where this is a direct and appropriate alternative to the child needing to be looked after by the local authority.

7. The Kinship Strategy makes it clear that many family and friends carers do not require more than universal services and it is not the intention of the Council to intervene unnecessarily in family life. However, some children have experienced adverse circumstances that may affect their development and well-being. Some family and friends carers may have also faced difficulties in parenting their own children in the past.

8. Where children's welfare might be significantly impaired without additional services, social care services will ensure that the child's assessed needs, including any risk factors, are taken into account in any assessment of family and friends carers in order to ensure that the child receives the care they need.

## Consultation

9. The Kinship Strategy went out for initial consultation in December 2011 with existing kin carers and children placed with them. There is support for the Strategy from existing kin carers.

10. The revised Kinship Strategy includes a proposed change related to financial support in terms of payable allowances.

11. Following the April Cabinet, wider consultation took place with the following groups via an online questionnaire on the Council's website:

- Existing kin carers
- Children and young people placed with kin carers
- Other foster carers
- Independent reviewing officers
- CAFCASS (children's Guardians)
- Children's Services staff
- General public.

12. The consultation period ended on 2 June 2012. 28 individual responses were received. The outcome of the consultation indicates support for Option 4 (see Appendix 2) which had been the preferred option for the reasons set out in the report to the April Cabinet. This is still seen as the most appropriate option.

## Recommendation

13. The Kinship Strategy has been amended to include Option 4 :

- Focus is on the income for the child rather than household income
- Age-appropriate foster care allowance used as the required level of income for child who is subject of the order
- Additional payments for carers where they had previously been a foster carer.

14. After the carers have claimed any benefits to which they may be entitled for the child the local authority "tops up" so that income they receive for the child or young person is equivalent to the age-related foster care allowance, with the provision that the maximum we would pay for is until the child was 16 or 18 if in full-time education.

15. If the prospective carer has been a foster carer, after the carer has claimed any benefits the local authority "tops up" to the amount that the carer was previously receiving from the authority for the child (e.g. fee and allowance).

16. Unless there are significant changes in the carers' circumstances allowances will be paid for the life of the placement until the child is 18.

17. Regulatory requirements mean that the Council has to consider the special guardian's resources but the local authority can set the level of income that is disregarded. The local authority proposes that the level at which income is disregarded is aligned to the household income exceeding the level at which the higher tax rate would be applied (£38,000), not including income specifically for the child.

18. An additional paragraph was added to Section 2 (Background) in response to a concern that children's needs may be 'minimised' if placed with kin carers, to clarify that any assessment of kin carers will ensure that the needs of the child and any potential risks are taken into account.

19. An Equality Impact Screening has been completed (attached as Appendix 3). The consultation did not raise any issues to indicate that a full Equality Impact Assessment is required. The proposed Kinship Strategy does not discriminate against any vulnerable groups.

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

## **Supporting Information**

- Appendix 1 - Kinship Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Consultation responses to Draft Kinship Strategy
- Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Screening

## **Contact Points**

### **County Council Contact Points**

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### **Specific Contact Points for this report**

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## Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children's Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Options Paper regarding financial proposals

Consultation Questionnaire

Family and Friends Care Policy

Agenda papers for the meeting of the Cabinet held on 19 April 2012.