

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 26 June 2024

Subject: Kinship Care

Report of: Strategic Director - Children and Education Services

Summary

The first ever National Kinship Care Strategy for England has been published, setting out the Government's plans for kinship care, including new commitments and £20 million investment over 2024-5.

The Government committed to delivering a dedicated kinship care strategy in February 2023 when it published its Stable Homes, Built on Love plan for children's social care.

We are here to present our Manchester response to this strategy and commitments to our Kinship Carers and Communities.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

1. It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee Members consider the progress and impact being achieved by the Fostering Service in Manchester and how we are meeting the ambitions set out in the National Kinship Care Strategy.
2. We will continue to progress our plan aligned to the guidance and consult with our Kinship Carers and children to deliver our ambitions for children living in Kinship Care.
3. We will continue to develop our offer and focus in key areas which will be complimented by our Corporate Family Approach will be of significant importance in the progress of these priorities. These are also in line with the required reform and what *'Our Manchester kinship carers'* are telling us:
 - We have clear policy in place to support our cared for children and families with housing. However, in reality our families are still struggling to secure appropriate housing within their communities. For some kinship families looking after children in their networks, they require priority access to larger accommodation which meets the needs of their families.
 - Manchester are now an accredited 'Fostering Friendly' organisation. For any kinship carers who work for Manchester, there is a HR policy in place which support them in their role. This includes additional paid leave, for training, development, settling and caring for children. This offer needs to be more widely understood and promoted and we would like other organisations and

local businesses to become 'Fostering Friendly' as this would support more carers across the city to care for the children in their networks.

Wards Affected: All

<p>Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments</p>	<p>This service, policy or function does not impact adversely on different protected or disadvantaged groups. Our strategy aims to promote further equality, diversity and inclusion within our service delivery and recruitment.</p>

<p>Manchester Strategy outcomes</p>	<p>Summary of how this report aligns to the Our Manchester Strategy/Contribution to the Strategy</p>
<p>A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities</p>	<p>The Fostering Service employ staff and foster carers from a range of cultural backgrounds, which reflects the culture and ethnicity of most of the children we work with.</p>
<p>A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success</p>	<p>The Fostering Service employ staff with experience and knowledge of the area. We work with staff across the service and take a role in driving improvements and development across the city.</p>
<p>A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities</p>	<p>We are now working in our local communities and within our organisation to recruit more Manchester Foster Carers and Social Workers with the skills and potential to deliver on our ambitions.</p>
<p>A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work</p>	<p>The Fostering Service have a specific recruitment strategy for new staff and we have successfully recruited new talent to the service over the last year.</p>
<p>A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth</p>	<p>The Fostering Service are involved in the GMCA, Coram Baaf, Fostering Network and North West Leads networks. We also implemented the internationally recognised Mockingbird Programme in 2022.</p>

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

4. Equal Opportunities Policy
5. Risk Management
6. Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

None

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy, please contact one of the contact officers above.

Family Rights Group
Kinship Charity
Fostering Annual Report 2022-23

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The first ever National Kinship Care Strategy for England has been published, setting out the Governments plans for kinship care, including new commitments and £20 million investment over 2024-5. This strategy aims to enable more children who cannot live with their parents to stay with people who are known to them and love them.
- 1.2 The Government committed to delivering a dedicated kinship care strategy in February 2023 when it published its Stable Homes, Built on Love plan for children's social care.
- 1.3 This report details our Manchester response to the reforms and our commitment to kinship carers and families.
- 1.4 The strategy aims to:
 - Make sure children in kinship care have good outcomes
 - Give more help and support to kinship carers
 - Listen to what kinship families need and want
- 1.5 One of the main commitments announced as part of the strategy was funding to launch a Pathfinder programme in 2024, in up to 8 local authorities, to provide special guardian kinship carers who care for previously looked after children with a financial allowance, paid at the same rate as the National Minimum Allowance for foster care. In May 2024 we applied to become a Local Authority Pathfinder. We are currently awaiting this decision. Alongside this we are continuing to develop and strengthen our offer across Manchester.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In Manchester we have experienced significant growth in kinship care.
- 2.2 Today we have 909 children living in formal kinship care arrangements in Manchester. Compared to 706 5 years ago. This is a 29% increase.
- 2.3 In the last 5 years we have experienced a 33% rise in children living in kinship fostering arrangements and a 27% increase in children living with Special Guardians.
- 2.4 In 2014 we developed a small team of Social Workers who worked with our kinship carers and communities to assess and support. In 2024, to respond to increased need, we now have 3 teams dedicated to kinship care and our number of children living in their kinship communities continues to rise.
- 2.5 The Family Rights Group have provided information on the National Kinship Care picture:

The benefits of kinship care:

- Children who grow up in kinship care are likely to have better outcomes than children who grow up in other types of non-parental care.
- Greater sense of identity and report feeling loved
- Better social & emotional wellbeing and physical health
- More likely to be living with their siblings
- More like to have a stable, permanent home
- Have higher levels of employment later in life
- The savings to local authorities of children thriving in their family network rather than going into the care system is also significant.

What do we know about kinship carers?

- The North East England has highest % of kinship care households (2.3%)
- Half of kinship carers had to give up work to take on the children
- More likely to be deprived & experiencing financial hardship
- More likely to have a carer or child with a long term physical or mental health condition
- A minority of kinship carers report being at breaking point

What do we know about kinship children?

- Most likely to be raised by a grandparent (59%)
- More likely to be teenagers than wider child population
- More likely to have special education needs than wider child population and at risk of exclusion
- Black children are more likely to be living in kinship care than White children

2.6 We understand our kinship communities and have undertaken considerable work to identify and understand their needs.

The Manchester picture:

The benefits of kinship care

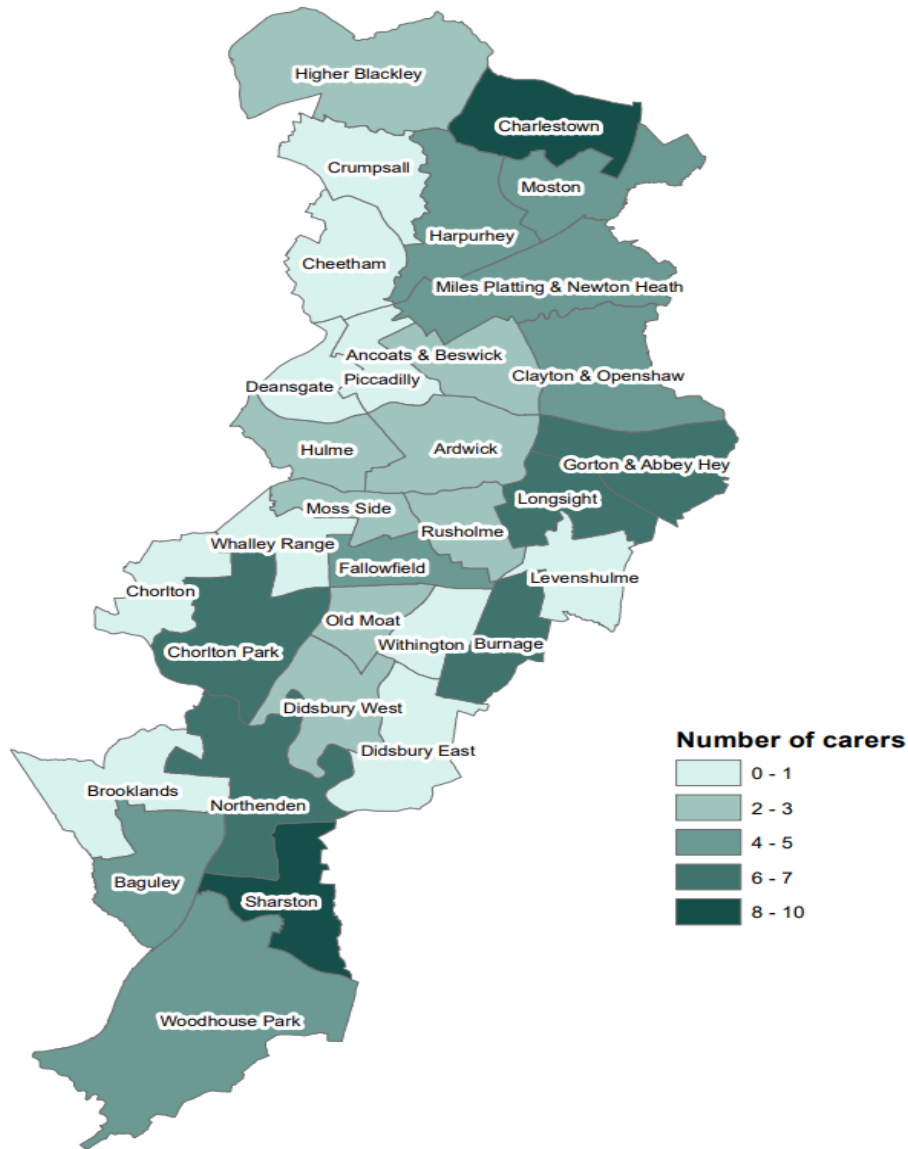
- Our children in kinship care are less likely to experience instability only 2.1% of children in kinship care had experienced 3 moves or more.
- Our increased support offer for families has had a significant impact. In the last 2 years we have achieved a 35% reduction in unplanned endings for children living in kinship care.
- Our children in kinship care are more likely to remain with their families post 18. In the last 12 months 100% of our children turning 18 remained 'staying put' in their homes.

What we know about our kinship carers and children

- 18% of our current cared for population live in Kinship Foster Care.
- 677 Manchester Children live with a Special Guardian
- Currently there are a total of 908 children in Manchester that are living in formal kinship arrangements, supported by the local authority.

- Black children in Manchester are more likely to live in kinship care. 38% of children in kinship care are from a black background, compared to 22% of children in our cared for population and 28% of the general population.
- In Manchester we are working with Manchester Metropolitan University to undertake a 'Black' Kinship Care Study- involving social workers and kinship families. This will enable us to develop our understanding and offer further.
- In Manchester our children living in kinship foster care are more likely to be teenagers, compared to the wider child population. With 35% of children in kinship care being 13 or over.
- In Manchester children living in kinship foster care are 3 x more likely to have Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP's) than the general population. 15% of children living in kinship care have EHCP.
- Our kinship carers are more likely to be deprived & experiencing financial hardship. They are more likely to have a carer or child with a long term physical or mental health condition. They are more likely to have a registered disability.

2.7 We have focused on linking communities in to support and have identified the communities in which our kinship carers reside, we are linking these families in with the Family Hubs and Family Offer:



3.0 Main issues

3.1 In response to the National Kinship Care Strategy the Family Rights Group have published guidance and a 'checklist' of policies that can help kinship families. Below, we have considered the checklist and provided evidence of how we are meeting the needs of our kinship families, in line with the guidance and reform.

What can Local Authorities do? (Family Rights Group)	What do we do in Manchester?
Family & friends care policy: up-to-date, published, drawn up with kinship families	We are currently updating all of our policies through co design.
Understanding your kinship family population	We understand our Manchester Kinship population and we are committed to meeting their needs.
Senior kinship care lead with contact details	Billie Walbank is out Senior Lead in this area
Family group conference (FGC) service – mandated offer to all families pre proceedings, working to accredited standards	Our Family group conference (FGC) service offer a service to all families who need one, working to accredited standards. We are driving the use of this to ensure early identification of family members for all of our children.
Initial family & friends care assessments – following good practice guidance	Our assessments are of good quality and compliant with, guidance and tested through panel and court
Kinship families' voices driving & scrutinising policies, procedures and service planning	Kinship families' voices are now involved in planning and shaping delivery. We are currently including our kinship families in updating our policies
Awareness & training amongst workforce & other partners	There is a good awareness within our organisation and we regularly communicate with our partners to ensure our kinship families are supported and celebrated.
'Thank you' recognition events for kinship carers and kin children (including of kinship care week)	Our Kinship carers attend regular family events, awards and parties
Employment policies	Manchester City Council are now an accredited 'Fostering Friendly' organisation with approved HR Policy in place.
Sign up to supporting 6 tests	Manchester have signed up to supporting 6 tests

Local Support (Family Rights Group)	What do we do in Manchester
Do you have a published local offer?	We have a published offer which we are currently updating through co design with our kinship carers
Kinship support team	MCC have 3 dedicated teams who offer tailored support to kinship carers and families
Financial support – legally compliant (see LGO reports), good practice (criteria transparent? how are other means taken into account, is it until child is 18?)	Yes this offer is currently in place and has been tested by our legal service
Funded independent legal advice (& signpost to FRG advice service)-	This is in place
Access to specialist benefits advice	This is available via our commissioned service 'Foster Talk' which is available to all foster carers and Special Guardians
Kinship friendly housing policies/protocols -	Housing is a significant pressure despite policies and protocols being in place
Peer support groups for kinship carers and kin children	Yes we hold regular family groups and events , which are well attended.
Support with managing contact & mediation services	This is a pressure that our families feedback
Training opportunities open to kinship carers –	We offer a preparation and ongoing training offer from pre care to post SGO
Counselling & therapeutic support for children, separated siblings, carers & parents	Our families are accessing the Adoption and Special Guardianship Fund with support from a dedicated worker within the organisation.
Lifelong Links service for children in care	This is in progress in Manchester

Accessing Entitlements and opportunities (Family Rights Group)	What do we do in Manchester
School admission policies	Kinship arrangements are identified in school admissions. We are working with virtual schools to further develop the commitment to "expand the role of virtual school heads – education champions within local authorities – to cover kinship care. They will ensure that the education of children in kinship care is prioritised so they go on to have bright futures.
Pupil premium plus	This is currently in place and our kinship children are entitled to this pre and post SGO.
Supporting special guardians to apply for therapeutic support for children via the Adoption Support Fund	This is in place and we now have more families accessing this support fund in Manchester. We have had 29 applications approved since 2021.
Family Hubs	The Family Hubs are in place in the city and our kinship carers are linked in with these Hubs. Support Groups take place in these Hubs with regular signposting.

3.2 The tables above evidence that we have measured ourselves against the reform objectives and recommendations and we are confident that we are meeting the priority areas for our families.

3.3 Our kinship offer has developed significantly, and the data indicates that these developments are having a positive impact for our children and families, with more children who are thriving in kinship arrangements.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 Panel to note the content of this report and the progress of the fostering service in meeting the updated guidance for Kinship Care.

4.2 In line with the above we have made the following recommendations:

1. We will continue to progress our plan aligned to the guidance and consult with our Kinship Carers and children to deliver our ambitions for children living in Kinship Care.
2. We will continue to develop our offer and focus in key areas which will be complimented by our Corporate Family Approach will be of significant importance in the progress of these priorities. These are also in line with the required reform and what *'Our Manchester kinship carers'* are telling us:
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