



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13TH JANUARY 2021

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Author: –Ann Marie Browning Head of Looked After Children Services.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 Further to the Notice of Motion that is included below at 1.2 and 1.3 in the names of Councillors J James and L Hooper, this report is to provide scrutiny committee with the opportunity to consider and scrutinise the current services to friends and family members providing care kinship care in line with the Council's statutory duties.

Notice of Motion

1.2 It is estimated that there are 200,000 children being brought up by family members or friends in the United Kingdom in what is termed as 'Kinship Care'. These kinship carers have stepped in to care for children whose parents are unable to look after them and keep their families together, and it represents three times the number of children in the national foster care system – and is a growing figure. Kinship care is one of the main ways to provide a sense of security, continuity and belonging for children who cannot live with their parents and it provides high levels of stability and enduring support well into young adulthood. However, the support that is offered to kinship carers throughout the country lacks consistency, and carers often feel isolated, abandoned and 'hung out to dry'. This is in marked contrast to the support that foster carers and adoptive parents can receive.

- 1.3 This Council recognises the invaluable work that kinship carers do for their loved ones, often under the most trying of situations, and is committed to providing the help, engagement and support that they need. This Council requests that a report be considered by the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee to look further into the role of kinship care in the County Borough and to work closely with Grandparents Plus to identify ways in which it can meet the needs of kinship carers and those in kinship care.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that scrutiny considers and endorse the contents of this report.
- 2.2 Agree the outlined next steps.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The reasons for the recommendations are so that scrutiny can:
- Acknowledge the information contained within this report.
 - Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.

4. BACKGROUND:

- 4.1 Under Part 6 of Social Services and Well Being Act (Wales) 2014 Rhondda Cynon Taf children's services are responsible for making sure that where there is no safe alternative to becoming looked after, children are afforded every opportunity to grow up within their family and kinship network. Arrangements are in place as part of the Service's permanence planning practice and policy to make sure that, where safe and appropriate, placement within the family and kinship network is an option that is given primacy. We recognise the contribution of family and friends' carers to ensuring that children remain well cared for and living within their extended families.
- 4.2 The following regulations inform the development of services and support for family and friends' carers:
- Social Services and Well Being Act (Wales) 2014
 - Regulated Fostering Services Regulations 2019
 - Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulation 2015 (Reg 24)
 - Special Guardianship (Wales) Regulations 2018
 - Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
 - Child Arrangements Order (Section 8), Children Act 1989

4.3

There are several ways a family member may become a carer for a child or young person. This can be through obtaining, child arrangement orders, special guardianship orders (SGO) or through approval as a kinship foster carer. Family members within communities are also able to make informal arrangements where safe and appropriate. The law and accompanying guidance and regulations require children's services to carry out assessments and provide support for children who are subject to a special guardianship order or care order. Family and friends' carers who wish to be considered as alternative carers for a child and young person are assessed as to their suitability.

4.4

In recognition of the increasing numbers of family and friends' carers and need to develop our services, children's services restructured its fostering services in 2016. The service consists of a specialist kinship assessment team, special guardian assessment staff, support workers and a fostering support team consisting of a senior practitioner and social workers who co-ordinate services that support approved kinship foster carers.

4.5

Family and friends' carers who may be special guardians or have informal arrangements for care of a family member are also able to self-refer for access to support through the Resilient Families Service.

4.6 A task and finish group has been in operation with a view to reviewing the offer to special guardians and implementing the SGO code of practice published in May 2019. In February 2020 children's services developed a new pathway, which includes the provision of information, advice and assistance regarding special guardians at the front door Information Advice and Assistance Team. We also developed our access to information for those interested in SGO through a new web page on RCT website.

4.7

Children's Services have extended the range of support opportunities to family and friends' carers over recent years to mirror those received by mainstream foster carers. Progress with this has been slower in 2020/21 due to the impact of the COVID Pandemic. However, we have established:

- Support groups specifically for kinship carers and special guardians
- Annual Christmas events for children living with kinship carers
- Training opportunities and masterclasses co-ordinated by RCT learning and development team
- Pioneer foster carers able to support kinship carers where support needs are identified as a priority

4.8

Children’s services remain committed to developing our package of support to family and friends’ carers during 2021/2022. Officers are active members of AFA Cymru specialist interest group for family and friends carers and are currently participating in research reviewing stability of special guardianship order arrangements. We have also implemented the AFA Cymru good practice guidance in assessing kinship (connected persons) foster carers.

4.9

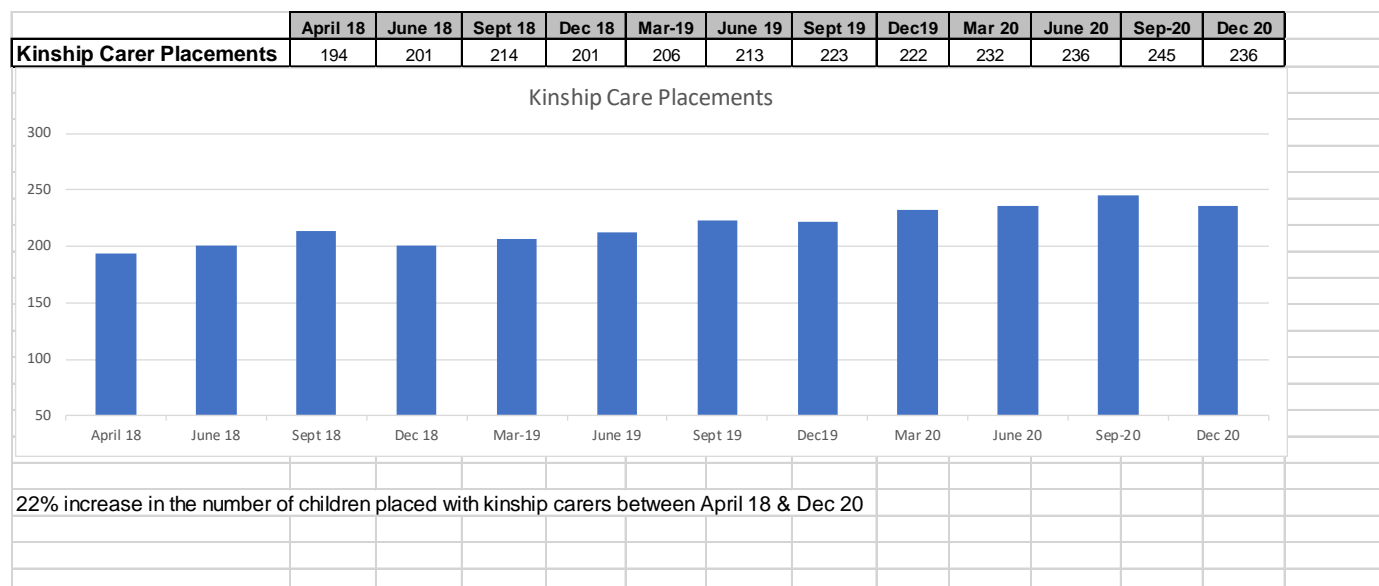
During 2020 the Service Manager Children for Looked After Services developed links with Grandparents Plus who had recently established their organisation in Wales for the first time. The organisation had previously been very active across England; however, they have now based their regional service across RCT and Merthyr Tydfil for the first time. During 2020 they have appointed a regional officer and will be implementing a programme of work to improve support to kinship carers across the region. Children’s services have invited the newly appointed regional officer to attend meetings with staff and carers and will continue to work collaboratively to improve and review our support offer.

Data

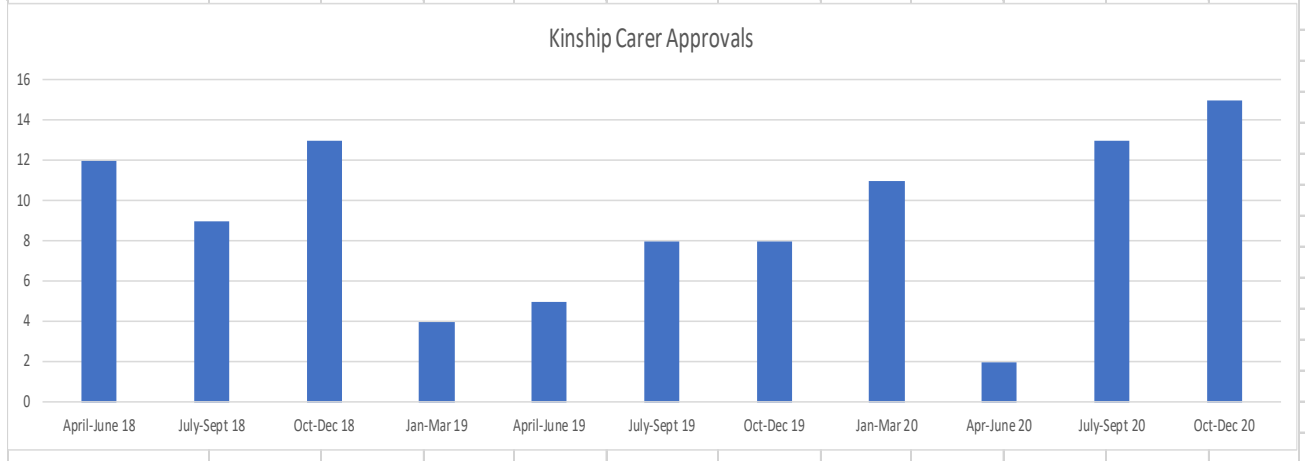
Kinship Foster Carers

4.10

The trend data between April 2018 and December 2020 indicates a 22% increase in the number of children placed with approved kinship foster carers. We also continue to see an increase in the number of kinship placements made and the number of kinship foster carers approved.



	April-June 18	July-Sept 18	Oct-Dec 18	Jan-Mar 19	April-June 19	July-Sept 19	Oct-Dec 19	Jan-Mar 20	Apr-June 20	July-Sept 20	Oct-Dec 20
Kinship Carer Approvals	12	9	13	4	5	8	8	11	2	13	15

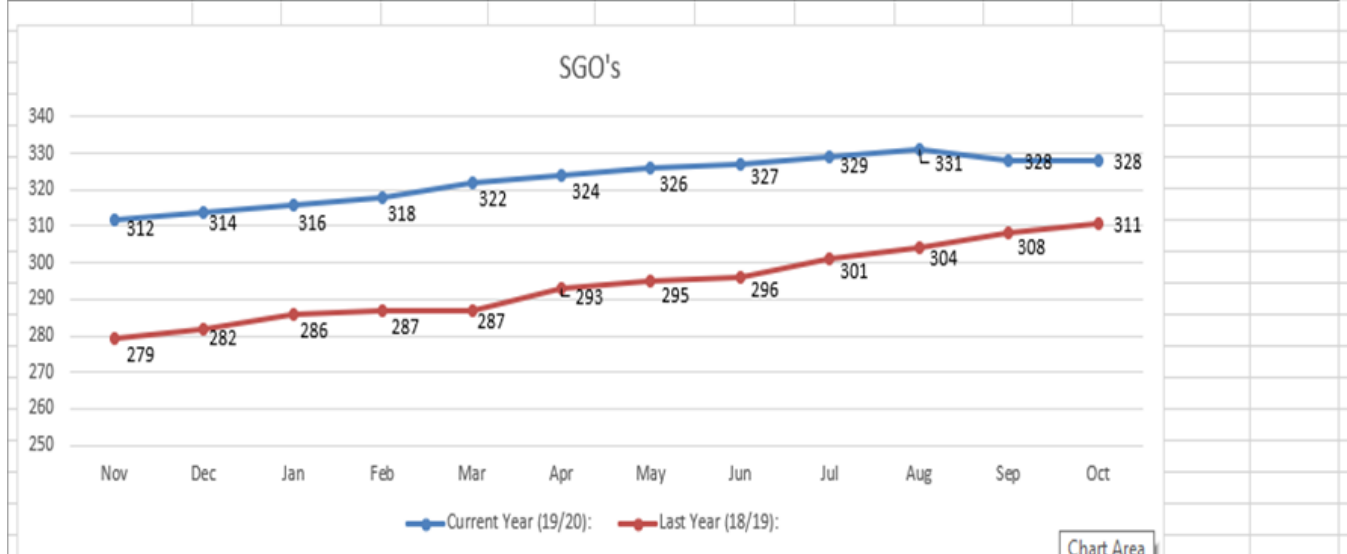


Special Guardianship Order Arrangements

4.11

The trend data indicates a gradual increase of special guardianship orders being granted over the past 12 months when comparing to the previous 12-month period. The number of Special Guardianship Orders granted has been on an upward trend, but at a reduced rate due to the impact of the COVID Pandemic. We anticipate that the number of SGOs granted will continue to rise. We do not anticipate a decline in the level of demand for SGO assessment and support going forward.

Monthly SGO numbers over the last 12 months, compared with SGO numbers at the same period last year												
	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Current Year (19/20):	312	314	316	318	322	324	326	327	329	331	328	328
Last Year (18/19):	279	282	286	287	287	293	295	296	296	301	304	308
Variance:	33	32	30	31	35	31	31	31	31	28	27	20



6. NEXT STEPS:

The next steps:

- To continue to develop and improve the support services available to kinship foster carers
- To continue to implement the code of practice for special guardians and improve the support offer available
- To continue to collaborate with organisations to improve support to friends and families carers across RCT

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1

An Equality and Assessment Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the development of services to kinship carers

8. CONSULTATION

8.1

This report did not require specific consultation, however, consultation has taken place with kinship foster carers as part of the support groups.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 There are no direct financial implications aligned to this report for the council.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The legal requirements for children looked after are set down within Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act (2014)

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP

11.1 The appropriate placement of children looked after will make a positive contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan Vision of *'a County Borough that has high aspirations, is confident and promotes opportunity for all'*; as it will deliver against the specific priorities of *'People - Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone and 'Place - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work'*.

11.2 It will also help the Council to meet three of the seven wellbeing goals that The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' puts in place as follows:

1. A more equal Wales
2. A healthier Wales
3. A Wales of cohesive communities

12. **CONCLUSION**

12.1

The role of family and friends' carers in supporting children and young people are recognised as significant and valuable. Children's services will continue to work with a range of carers to ensure vulnerable children and young people receive the best care.

12.2

The reasons why children become looked after are complex and when they enter the care system, they often have a wide range of problems including complex and cumulative vulnerabilities. To ensure we can meet the needs of these children and young people we recognise the need for a variety of placements and accommodation options so that children and young people are able to achieve the best possible outcomes and live successfully in their communities. Where appropriate, where appropriate being able to live with extended family and friends.