

MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL

SCOTTISH CHILD ABUSE INQUIRY

ADDENDUM REPORT

FILE READING – FOSTER CARE

INTRODUCTION

This is a summary of findings from continued scrutiny of social work records since the submission of the Council's formal report (30/09/2020) to the Inquiry, to 31/03/2022. In view of the time available to conduct file reading and to compile and submit the report by the specified deadline, the number of records that could be checked was relatively few and could not be considered an adequate sample. Furthermore, the records examined had already been identified by staff carrying out a cataloguing project as possibly containing concerns about a child. For these reasons, it was decided to continue checking archive records and reading in detail those of any child who had been in foster care during the period covered by the Inquiry.

METHODOLOGY

We initially checked records for all foster carers of whom we were aware, and for whom a record could be found. Any concerning incident involving a child was cross-referenced with the child's own record. Subsequently we have been working through the boxes held in archive in numerical order. These are social work records, some of which are child records and some adult records. We do not know the contents of any of the boxes before they arrive so there are of course many boxes which contain no child files. All files received have been documented on a spreadsheet with basic information such as user group, dates covered by the file and the location of any other files on the subject and their family, if known. Any children's records are described in more detail including types of placement. Where we have found a child who was in foster care we have read the file in detail and compiled a record which sets out placements, dates and other important information such as family contact, recording of reviews and other formal meetings, number of placements and outcomes.

To the end of March 2022, we have checked and logged over 2,700 social work records. Of these just under 200 were foster carers and around 500 were children who had been in foster care.

FINDINGS

A total of 71 incidents, allegations, concerns or complaints involving a child in foster care have been identified in respect of 66 children (Appendix 1). This represents approximately 15% of the records sampled between 01/10/2020 and 31/03/2022.

Eleven of these were included in the Section 21 report submitted in 2020. One was not included in the Section 21 report but involved carers in respect of whom another incident which was included in the report. All incidents of which we had become aware were reported in the 2020 report. Since then, work has continued checking archive records and reading in detail the file of any child in foster care during the period covered by the Inquiry. This explains the higher number of incidents noted in this Addendum Report.

The child table (Appendix 2) includes 27 incidents also included in the carer table and seven where the incident was not noted in the carer table, but where other incidents relating to the carers were.

Twenty incidents had not been included in the 2020 report nor referred to in the carer table. Incidents were noted in the records of 43 carers who were not included in the 2020 report. Of course not all of these could be termed abuse and many were unsubstantiated. There is no indication of any abuse that was sustained, systematic or widespread.

It should, of course, be borne in mind that what was considered acceptable practice, for example in relation to physical discipline, has changed significantly over the years, as have the regulations, guidance and legislation on which practice is based.

CONCLUSIONS

Again we have not found evidence that would suggest that intentional abuse of children in foster care has taken place in Midlothian, at any time for which we hold records, in a widespread or systemic way.

We have considered in light of this file review our assessment of the extent and scale of such abuse, as noted within our response to Part B, question 3.1 (b) (page 5 of our Part B-D response) of our section 21 response of 30/09/2020. We consider that our response to that question is supported by our continued file review.

Our file review has noted a further 3 de-registrations, the details of which are contained in Appendix 1.

We have considered our response to Part D questions 5.8 to 5.10. We have included the requested information relating to individual carers in question 5.8 and 5.9 within the Carer Table attached as Appendix 1.

We have reviewed our responses to 5.8 (c) to (f). Where relevant and where that information is available we have noted within Appendix 1.

We are also now aware of a criminal proceeding, details of which are contained in Appendix 3 as an addendum to question 5.13.

Of course there are outliers on every graph, but it seems unlikely, given the number of records that have now been checked, that the remaining records are likely to show a significantly different pattern from those already examined.

The work of our Records Officers in the cataloguing project (as detailed in Part C, 4.9 (ii) (h) (page 95 of our Part B-D response) will continue when staffing and logistical arrangements permit. Work has been undertaken by our Record Officer in revising the existing 'Practice Governance Case Recording Policy and Procedures', a draft of which is attached (Appendix 4). We would intend to further update the Inquiry if any additional allegations are found within the file review.