

Addendum following appearance by The North Ayrshire Council at Inquiry 13th May 2022

This further addendum is provided by way of clarification to the Inquiry in respect of matters identified as requiring further exploration by Lady Smith following the evidence of Scott Hunter, CSWO, on 13th May 2022 and should be read alongside the substantive A-D response submitted 31st July 2020, addendum of 20th December 2021 & further information provided 25th February 2022.

Rectification of data held by inquiry – children in kinship care

It is noted that the witness erroneously referenced there being 370 children in kinship care as at the date of giving oral evidence before the inquiry. The North Ayrshire Council can confirm that there were in fact 349 children in kinship care as of 13th May 2022.

Placement timeframes

At page 2 of the substantive A-D response it is noted in relation to timeframes around placements that there were '105 (*files*) that relate to children where specific placement timeframes could not be confirmed'. The North Ayrshire Council can confirm that for those files, the placement duration was neither clearly defined within the case records nor able to be ascertained by the file reader. Of the 105 files referenced, most were historic files predating the electronic recording systems which would require population of data fields relating to placement start and end dates.

Children accommodated prior to 2006

At page 26 of the substantive A-D response it was concluded that 'It has not been possible to collate information in relation to the number of children accommodated by The North Ayrshire Council prior to 2006'. The North Ayrshire Council can confirm that this was not possible due to a lack of records management system or database designed to capture the information. Such a system was first introduced to the authority in 2006 to allow for compliance with the request for provision of statistical returns to the Care Inspectorate.

Delay in placement in family based care

At page 29 of the substantive A-D response it was observed that 'A main aim of the scheme was also to target children under 12 years of age.....' based on research findings which concluded that looked after and accommodated children under 12 had better outcomes in the round when placed within family based care. The delay in placing children under 12 in such a care setting was attributable to the challenges in recruiting adequate carers for this purpose; in essence a resourcing issue.

Ethnic background of children accommodated

At page 36 of the substantive A-D response, reference was made to children accommodated in foster care from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately, The North Ayrshire Council are unable to provide a breakdown of numbers of children accommodated in foster care from travelling communities/Romany heritage or asylum seeking children, but would ask that the Inquiry recognise that individual files/anecdotal evidence account for the initial inclusion of this statement.

Use of communications diary

Page 106 of the substantive A-D response makes reference to the fact that '.... a communications diary was frequently used between birth parents.....'. The North Ayrshire Council can confirm that the communications diary is a physical record passed back and forth between carers and birth parents in order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge/significant lived experiences of the child.

Case study – BR

The link carer scheme was introduced by Strathclyde Regional Council as a primitive kinship care scheme. Approval for such a scheme required assessment of a prospective carer's suitability to care for a specific child only, together with Disclosure Scotland and local authority checks.

Foster care and link carer schemes were running simultaneously at the time of the young person's inception into care. BR and his partner were turned down as foster carers due to household/environmental factors rather than concerns regarding their ability to care for children. In particular, it was noted that the couple had six dogs which would have automatically precluded them from becoming foster carers. The young person who was placed with the couple had spent considerable time in their company through her work at their stables, had established a relationship with them and was familiar and comfortable around them and their home environment. In all the circumstances, including following the obtaining of appropriate background checks, there were perceived to be no issues regarding registration as link carers and the child was noted by the Children's Hearing to flourish within their care.

The relevant North Ayrshire Council Service later became aware of BR's conviction. The young person was known to have left the care of BR and his partner on [REDACTED] 2006 and a warning note had been placed contemporaneously on file following the allegations of abuse made by that young person. Said warning note served as an alert to services that the couple should not be considered as carers in the future.

It is unclear to The North Ayrshire Council when the police investigation into BR commenced. No approaches were made to the authority by Police Scotland in the course of their later criminal investigation. The North Ayrshire Council can confirm that they have not placed any other children within the care of BR beyond that which is known to the inquiry.