



Department
for Education

Championing Kinship Care

The National Kinship Care Strategy

December 2023



Championing Kinship Care

The National Kinship Care Strategy

**Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Education
by Command of His Majesty**

December 2023

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Foreword by the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing

I am delighted to publish the first ever national kinship care strategy: *Championing Kinship Care*. Kinship care can transform outcomes for some of our most vulnerable children and I am committed to championing kinship families so that more children can thrive. In *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, we committed to publish the kinship care strategy by the end of 2023. Today I am proud to have fulfilled that promise and I am pleased to announce that we are investing £20 million of funding in 2024-25 for *Championing Kinship Care*, to help move towards a children's social care system with kinship at its heart.



Kinship carers are often a lifeline to vulnerable children who can no longer live at home. By stepping in, they allow children to grow up within their families and communities. It should be no surprise that, in most cases, children in kinship care have better outcomes than other children living in non-parental care.

I have seen first-hand the positive impact kinship care can have on children's outcomes, including when I had the privilege to mentor a child growing up in kinship care and witness how his life improved. I want to ensure that children are able to enjoy a strong and enduring family life through kinship care, when this is in their best interest.

Despite these positive outcomes, children living in kinship care are still disadvantaged compared to their peers who are not involved in children's social care. Today, we are taking action by expanding the Virtual School Head's role to promote the education of children in kinship care and ensuring more eligible kinship carers are aware of their ability to access therapeutic support for their children.

Whilst no two situations are the same, kinship carers can experience particular challenges and I am determined to improve their experiences. We will launch a Pathfinder programme to introduce a kinship carer financial allowance and publish guidance for employers on how kinship carers can be supported at work.

In my role as Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, I have met many kinship carers who have devoted so much to provide children with safety and love. I want to pay particular thanks to the Kinship Carer Reference Group who have helped to shape this strategy and educate me on kinship care. I am committed to continue working with them on this journey of reform.

Championing Kinship Care is part of a wider, once in a generation reset we are making to the children's social care system. In February 2022, the Department for Education published the *Stable Homes, Built on Love* implementation strategy to respond to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the National Panel Review into the tragic

deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Competition and Markets Authority review into care placement sufficiency. Stable homes, Built on Love defined the government's vision for the children's social care system and started to meaningfully change the lives of children and families who interact with children's social care. This reform was marked by an investment of £200 million to help tilt the system towards more supportive, preventative measures for families.

For the first time, Stable Homes, Built on Love prioritised kinship care as a central pillar for improving support for families. Championing Kinship Care furthers this vision by setting out how we will continue to reform kinship care, in order to keep more children safe and allow them to thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Johnston', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Johnston OBE MP

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing

1. Introduction

Every child deserves to thrive and to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. A key principle of the Children Act 1989 is that children are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives unless this is not safe for them¹.

In *Stable Homes, Built on Love*², our strategy for children's social care, we set out our vision and reinforced children's existing legal rights to a family life wherever possible. We are committed to prioritising a family-first culture that empowers family networks and puts them at the heart of decision making, whilst ensuring children are kept safe and can thrive. Where it is determined it is best for a child to be removed from their parents, kinship carers can provide stability and familiarity by allowing them to be raised in a familiar environment with people who are connected to them.

Kinship care (sometimes known as family and friends care) is the most prevalent form of alternative care for children worldwide³. In 2021, there were more than 130,000 children living in kinship care in England⁴. Children who grow up in kinship care often have better outcomes than children who grow up in other types of non-parental care. Evidence shows that, compared to these groups, children in kinship care:

- are more likely to have stable, permanent homes⁵;
- achieve higher levels of employment later in life⁶;
- have better social and emotional wellbeing⁷ and better long-term physical health compared to children in foster or residential care⁸;
- are more likely to be kept with their siblings compared to those in foster care⁹;
- are more likely to report that they feel loved¹⁰.

Kinship carers provide love, protection, and stability to our most vulnerable children. Despite this, becoming a kinship carer can often be at great personal expense. It is an unfortunate reality that people who provide such vital support to their families often receive very little support themselves. Reforming kinship care is not only central to realising our vision for children's social care but is also a moral imperative. National

¹ [The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations](#)

² [Children's social care stable homes built on love consultation](#)

³ [Recognition of Family Life by Children Living in Kinship Care Arrangements in England \(Shuttleworth, 2023\)](#)

⁴ [Kinship care in England and Wales \(2021 census\) - Office for National Statistics](#)

⁵ [The lifelong health and wellbeing trajectories of people who have been in care \(Sacker *et al.*, 2021\)](#)

⁶ [The lifelong health and wellbeing trajectories of people who have been in care \(Sacker *et al.*, 2021\)](#)

⁷ [Kinship care - What Works for Children's Social Care](#)

⁸ [The lifelong health and wellbeing trajectories of people who have been in care \(Sacker *et al.*, 2021\)](#)

⁹ [Siblings in care \(Family Rights Group, 2015\)](#)

¹⁰ [Kinship Care Leads to Better Outcomes for Children – Chapin Hall, University of Chicago](#)

government, local government and the wider institutions that support children and families must recognise and champion the people who too often feel like they have no voice and little support when trying to do the right thing.

Since June 2022, we have taken steps towards our vision for children's social care reform by:

- Investing over £45 million to reform services that meet the needs of families across the whole of children's social care, in up to 12 local areas through the Families First for Children Pathfinder and in 7 local areas through the Family Network pilot. These programmes will test how to better support and empower families to care for their children.
- Investing £3 million to establish a training, information, and support offer that all kinship carers can access. We will start delivering this new, national service by spring 2024.
- Investing £2 million, through the charity Kinship, to deliver high-quality peer support groups for kinship carers across the country.
- Funding the Family Rights Group's dedicated Family and Friends helpline to ensure that kinship families receive tailored advice and support for their specific circumstances.
- Extending legal aid entitlements to prospective carers making applications for Special Guardianship Orders in private family law proceedings.
- Making children in kinship care with a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order eligible for the Fair Access Protocol for school admissions. This enables some children in kinship care to secure an in-year school placement when they are unable to get a place via other means.
- Strengthening multi-agency guidance on engaging family networks through updates to [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).
- Publishing the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) that reaffirms the expectation that children and young people should be supported by their family network, wherever safe and appropriate.

Through this strategy, we are going further to support kinship families.

We want to champion, support and empower kinship families. Whilst financial investment alone will not deliver this vision, we are investing £20 million to improve the lives of more than 130,000 children who live in kinship care today. This is in addition to the £200 million invested as part of Stable Homes, Built on Love. We will use this investment to minimise the barriers kinship carers face, so that they can more easily provide stable, loving homes for children. We will strengthen guidance and support for local authorities, so they can improve the experiences of carers and children. We will gather evidence and amplify the voices of kinship families to build towards a new system. A system with kinship at its heart.

We will establish the foundations for a future, transformed kinship care system in England. A system that empowers kinship carers and strives for the best, most loving homes possible for children. Championing Kinship Care is the first step towards our long-term vision for kinship care and sets the direction for a system that gives children the best chance of growing up in a stable, loving and nurturing home.

Today we are announcing a package of £20 million in 2024-25 to...

Support kinship families by...

- Launching a kinship financial allowance, paid at the same rate as the fostering allowance, beginning in up to 8 local authorities.
- Expanding the Virtual School Head's role to promote the education of children in kinship care.
- Ensuring more eligible kinship carers are aware of their ability to access the £48 million Adoption Support Fund, by renaming it to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund, as well as analysing the fund's applications and the therapies provided.
- Producing government guidance for employers on how kinship carers can be supported at work. This will include advice on adapting HR policies, signposting to workplace entitlements carers can access and creating a culture of support.
- Introducing a kinship leave and pay entitlement for Department for Education staff (subject to discussions on the detailed arrangements between the department and employee representatives).
- Establishing a training, information and advice offer that all kinship carers will have access to.
- Sustaining the delivery of peer support groups across England for all kinship carers.

Empower kinship families by...

- Creating a new Kinship Care Ambassador role, to work with local authorities and kinship carers to raise standards and share best practice.
- Improving the availability of advocacy services for children in kinship care by updating guidance and standards.
- Establishing the National Kinship Care Advisory Board and extending the Department for Education's Kinship Carer Reference Group.
- Partnering with Foundations - the What Works Centre for Children & Families and the sector to work towards every family being offered high quality family group conferences at pre-proceedings stage.
- Using digital innovation to help social workers have a greater understanding of kinship families.

Help kinship families be understood by...

- Improving the visibility of kinship carers through a new definition of kinship care that will be used in statutory guidance.
- Publishing an updated version of the 2011 Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. This will be called Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and will clarify how local authorities should support kinship families.
- Creating trust between kinship carers and practitioners by improving social worker training and developing a knowledge and skills statement for family help lead practitioners.
- Confirming that Ofsted are updating their inspector training and guidance, so kinship care is well embedded in inspection practice.
- Agreeing work with the Law Commission to review legal orders and statuses for kinship carers and understanding how we can both simplify and streamline these.
- Working with the Ministry of Justice to improve our understanding of kinship care through better data join up.

2. Our vision

We want to build a children's social care system where more children who cannot live with their parents are supported to live with people who are known to them and love them. Kinship care will be the first consideration for a child who can no longer live with their parents. By receiving the right support at the right time, kinship carers will be empowered to provide care for children that allows them to thrive.

“My mum died when I was four and my grandparents took me in and raised me. They had to make huge sacrifices to care for me as they didn't receive any help or support. My Nan had to give up her job as a nurse to look after me and my Grandad worked nights to bring in enough money. They also spent their pensions to help raise me.

Being with my grandparents had vital benefits to my childhood because I was able to completely understand my family values, my purpose and my past, to help me understand myself completely. It was also important that I was around family so I could share grief, as well as happy memories, that I could have easily forgotten. I wholeheartedly appreciate the support and kindness that they gave to me.

I believe that kinship should be the first port of call when it comes to care, to prevent resentment, rejection and not feeling wanted...My grandparents protected and fought for me throughout, without second guessing. Kinship carers like my Nan and Grandad have been taken for granted because they are family and are expected to just get on with it. That's not right or fair.”

Jay Kontzle, actor (currently in Emmerdale)

Championing Kinship Care builds on the children's social care reforms set out in Stable Homes, Built on Love. This strategy set out 6 pillars of reform to rebalance the children's social care system away from costly crisis intervention, towards meaningful and effective help for families, to deliver better outcomes for children¹¹. These pillars are:

- **Pillar 1:** Family help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families.
- **Pillar 2:** A decisive multi-agency child protection system.
- **Pillar 3:** Unlocking the potential of family networks.
- **Pillar 4:** Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care.
- **Pillar 5:** A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one.

¹¹ [Children's social care stable homes built on love consultation](#)

- **Pillar 6:** A system that continuously learns and improves and makes better use of evidence and data.

We will build a system with families at its heart.

Every family is different. The concept of family varies from person to person and between cultures. Although family structures have changed dramatically over recent decades, the essentials of family remain the same: love, protection and enduring relationships. We want to capture and respect this through inclusive terminology:

- **Kinship carer** – this means any friend or family member, who is not a child's parent but raising them for a significant amount of the time, either as a temporary or permanent arrangement.
- **Family network** – a group of people close to a child made up of relatives and non-related, connected people. A family network could include step-parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents or close family friends. They can provide support to enable children to live safely at home with their parents. Family network members may become kinship carers when it is not possible for a child to remain at home full-time with their parents.

There are different types of kinship carers (see Chapter 5 for a full definition) ...

Informal kinship care arrangements are when a close family member or friend look after a child for a temporary or permanent amount of time. This arrangement is agreed privately with the parents and parental responsibility for the child remains with the parents.

Kinship carers with a Child Arrangements Order (CAO). Child Arrangements Orders are granted by the family court and determine who a child can live with and/or who a child can stay with and for how long. The kinship carer shares parental responsibility with the child's parents, or others with parental responsibility, until the age of 18 unless the court states otherwise. In 2014, Child Arrangements Orders replaced Residence Orders and Contact Orders.

Kinship carers with a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) have parental responsibility for a child following an order made by the family court. Kinship carers live permanently with their children but need permission from the court to make important decisions, such as changing the child's surname.

Kinship foster carers look after children who are "looked after" by the local authority following a voluntary agreement, if a child spends more than 24 hours in local authority care under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or if a Care Order is made by the family court.

Children come into kinship care through a variety of circumstances. Often it is in response to a family emergency¹². Sometimes it is a decision made by the court following a process of children's social care engagement. Following the implementation of the reforms set out in Stable Homes, Built on Love, our vision for children's social care is that:

- 1) Children will be supported to stay within their families, where possible. Families will receive the right help at the right time to ensure this.**

Any family experiencing significant challenges that make it harder to provide their children with a safe, stable and loving family life will be able to receive support from family help. Families will be supported by locally based, multi-disciplinary family help teams that work collaboratively with partners to provide welcoming, intensive and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families. This will involve dedicated lead practitioners working closely with children and their families, coordinating support and bringing in additional professionals as needed. Families will have access to a wide range of services, including support provided by universal, community and specialist services, such as health visitors, schools and children and young people's mental health services.

All local authorities will have a family-first culture. Practitioners will prioritise building trusted relationships and working with the whole family to address adversity and trauma. The family network will be brought into decisions that affect how the child will be raised and they will be recognised as a source of support to parents. Family networks will be engaged flexibly, including through family group decision making. These are family-led decision making forums that allow a family network to come together and offer practical support to parents, whilst keeping a child safe. Increased engagement with family networks throughout the decision-making process will allow them to provide support before problems escalate.

- 2) When it is considered that a child is unable to remain living with their parents, family networks will be consulted and have their options explained to them clearly.**

Kinship care will be the first consideration for any child who cannot live safely at home with their parents. If a child is unable to continue living with their parents, family group decision making will be offered. This will allow the family network to make their own plan for keeping the child safe and in some cases, decide who might be able to become a kinship carer for the child, where this is safe and in the best interests of a child.

¹² [Out of the Shadows \(Kinship, 2022\)](#)

Families will be skilfully supported by practitioners to make safe decisions that support them. If a suitable kinship carer can be found, they will receive help to step into this role.

3) When a kinship carer is formally assessed, the assessment process will be reasonable, proportionate and treat family members with trust, whilst prioritising the safety of the child.

Assessments for kinship carers will continue to prioritise keeping children safe. Children's social care practitioners will establish a trusting, supportive relationship with kinship carers to enable this. Carers will not have to jump through multiple, unnecessary assessments and explain their situation to numerous practitioners. The focus of the process will be whether this person can provide a safe, stable and loving environment for the child.

Family networks will be able to access legal aid for advice and representation when assessing their care choices. In both private and public law proceedings, courts will consider the evidence provided to them in relation to the needs of kinship carers. Every decision maker will make balanced decisions that have been informed by family network engagement, always with the child's safety and best interest at heart.

4) Children in kinship care will be supported to thrive. Kinship families will be actively offered support that is tailored to their needs.

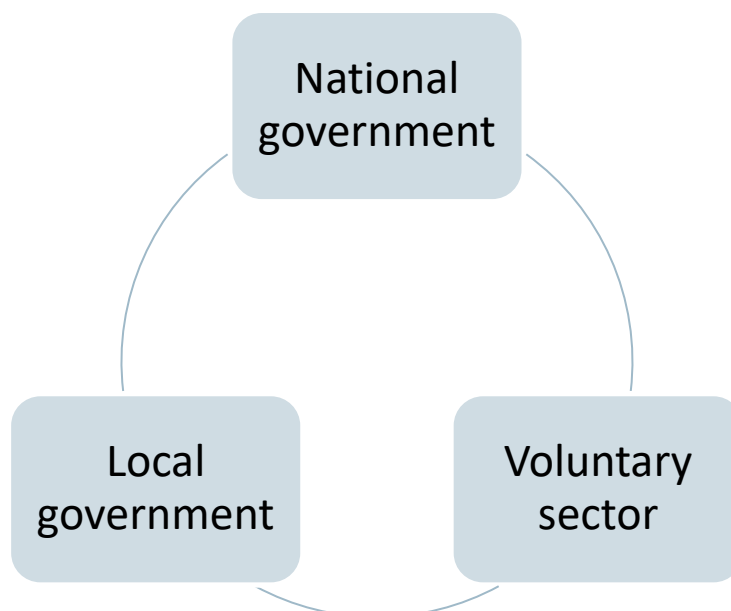
Local authorities, national government and the voluntary, health and education sectors will empower and support kinship carers to provide stable, loving homes for children. This support will be clearly signposted, so that kinship carers are clear on what they and the children they support are entitled to. It will be specific to the needs of kinship families.

Support will be meaningful. If a child in kinship care is dealing with trauma, they could receive therapeutic support. If a kinship carer needs to learn how to change a nappy or how to wean a baby onto solid food, they could receive practical support. If a kinship carer needs help to manage contact with a child's parents, they could receive training and be offered mediation support.

This support will be ongoing and flexible. It will suit the needs of the family depending on their personal circumstances, the age of the child, the child's experiences of trauma and adversity before coming into kinship care and the relationship with the parents. Kinship carers will be able to dip in to support as and when they need; it will be an open-door policy. If circumstances change, the support will adapt to suit this. They will also have access to training and groups that can offer peer support.

The role of different partners

This vision relies on a partnership between every organisation and individual who plays a role in the life of kinship families. Together we will work with kinship carers to deliver radical change that will improve outcomes and experiences for children.



It is national government's role to set a national direction for practice, distribute funding and establish legislation to improve the kinship care system in England. We will design policies that allow children to remain within their family networks when this is safe for them. Through these, we will ensure that kinship care is recognised, understood and respected across all government and public services. We are responsible for ensuring the changes we implement drive improved outcomes for families. We are accountable to families and children for the success of these policies and will take action when the system does not work. We will support local government to unlock the benefits of investing in family networks by equipping them with guidance and sharing best practice that supports this.

Local government design, deliver and fund children's services. Multi-disciplinary teams of dedicated practitioners work daily to ensure that families are kept safe and supported. Local services have a richness of expertise. Skilled professionals tailor their services to the communities they serve and adapt to ever-changing demands. Local councillors with a responsibility for children's social care drive changes in services by determining a local vision. Many pockets of good practice for kinship care have been developed through local passion and commitment and we will support local government to disseminate this. We will work with them in a trusted partnership to ensure that their local policies achieve our shared vision.

Joanne – How Sunderland supports kinship foster carers

(Some details, including Joanne's name, have been changed to protect anonymity).

Joanne began caring for her four grandchildren (ages 3, 5, 11 and 14) due to concerns around their care and safety. Following a positive viability assessment in Spring 2023, Joanne engaged in a connected carer assessment and was subsequently approved as a kinship foster carer for her grandchildren. This was agreed with the court.

During the assessment period, family network meetings were facilitated by the fostering social worker to identify who could support Joanne and how they could do this, whilst considering the big changes for both Joanne and the children. Joanne wanted the children to be in school and to attend on time. Promoting their education was important to her. She identified that it was some time since she had been in education herself and she wanted the children to be supported with homework, so they could do their best. Her daughter, sister and aunt all identified that they could support with these areas. Joanne was supported by her fostering social worker and the local authority helped her financially and practically so that each child could have a bedroom space that was special to them. The children have since made significant positive progress in their education and the fostering social worker has observed how this has promoted their self-esteem and sense of achievement. These positive messages are being passed on to Joanne, so she knows the difference she is making.

The voluntary sector is an integral part of the children's social care system. It provides a foundation of support to kinship carers and routes to access this without requiring kinship families to interact with the state. The voluntary sector is uniquely placed to provide impartial support and advocacy for kinship carers. These organisations have crucial knowledge and experience. They carry out research to inform government policies and can support individuals in moments of crisis. For many years, the voluntary sector has held communities of kinship carers together through peer support groups, provided impartial legal advice to kinship carers and informed the development of national policy. This strategy would not exist without them, and they are crucial to delivering improved experiences and outcomes for kinship families. We are incredibly grateful to both national and local voluntary organisations who are committed to supporting and improving the lives of kinship carers.

We will work in partnership with local government and the voluntary sector to provide valuable services for kinship carers. Local government and the voluntary sector will design and deliver these, sign-posting each other's support. We will listen to local government and the voluntary sector to design a responsive policy landscape that enables them to do their best work. All three partners will work to deliver the best outcomes for kinship families.

Responsibility for supporting kinship families does not end there. The education, health, justice, police sectors and the courts also play a crucial role. These sectors are often the first to know when a child is in a kinship arrangement. They offer support with the complex family dynamics presented by a child living under shared parental care or balancing their week between living at different homes. Practitioners working in these sectors recognise and support children through turbulent and sometimes traumatic situations, with some such as education, being the only constant in their lives. These partners carefully design, commission and deliver multi-agency services that prioritise keeping children safe, whilst enabling them to thrive¹³. We will work with all partners to improve experiences and outcomes for kinship families.

The system will keep improving for kinship carers

Stable Homes, Built on Love focuses on system learning. Pillar 6 of the package of reforms is vital to lay the strong foundations (accountability, inspection, funding and regulation) that are needed to support a new direction of travel for children's social care. We will work to ensure that reforms to kinship care align with and reflect the outcomes of the new Children's Social Care National Framework.

Reforms to kinship care will both complement and be central to wider children's social care reforms. They will not be an add on.

For example:

- [The Children's Social Care National Framework](#) will set direction for multi-agency practice to improve outcomes and emphasise the importance of family networks and kinship carers in supporting children and young people.
- Ofsted inspections will take account of kinship care practice, celebrating what is going well and highlighting where improvement is needed.
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#) will clarify to all organisations working with children and young people that family networks should be considered more often and thoroughly.
- Improved use of data will highlight the needs of kinship families and allow services to design support that meaningfully improves outcomes. Data will allow all parts of the system to learn, adapt and ultimately update practice to better support children and families.

It is important that the policies we implement are supported by evidence. This will ensure they make meaningful improvements to the outcomes of children in the social care system and provide value for money. Many of the reforms in Stable Homes, Built on Love

¹³ [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#)

and Championing Kinship Care utilise a “test and learn” approach to delivery, often through the use of pilots and Pathfinders or gathering evidence for best practice. This will provide the best foundation for delivering long-term and sustained change. Where we use a “test and learn” approach to delivery, we will be transparent about what we are learning, our planned next steps and ensure that kinship carers have a voice throughout the process.

3. Supported

Today we are announcing that:

- We will launch a **kinship financial allowance**, paid at the same rate as the fostering allowance, beginning in up to 8 local authorities.
- We are **expanding the Virtual School Head's role** to promote the education of children in kinship care.
- We will ensure more eligible kinship carers are aware of their ability to access the Adoption Support Fund, by renaming it to the **Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund**, as well as analysing the fund's applications and the therapies provided.
- We will produce **government guidance for employers** on how kinship carers can be supported at work. This will include advice on adapting HR policies, signposting to existing workplace entitlements, and creating a culture of support.
- We will introduce a **kinship leave and pay entitlement for Department for Education staff** (subject to discussions on the detailed arrangements between the department and employee representatives).
- We will establish a **kinship training, information and advice offer** that all kinship carers will have access to.
- We will continue to support the delivery of **peer support groups across England** for all kinship carers.

Our vision

Children in kinship care achieve better outcomes than children in other types of non-parental care. National data indicates that their behavioural and health outcomes are better¹⁴. Children who live with kinship carers are more likely to have higher levels of educational attainment than looked after children¹⁵ and are also more likely to be in employment as an adult compared to children in residential care¹⁶. We want to improve the support available for families, to allow more children in kinship care to thrive.

¹⁴ [Kinship care - What Works for Children's Social Care](#)

¹⁵ [Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 2016](#)

¹⁶ [The lifelong health and wellbeing trajectories of people who have been in care \(Sacker et al., 2021\)](#)

“Kinship carers are unique in the fact that they are already known to the children. Love already exists. They are also unique in the fact that they manage family relationships all of the time as their child’s birth parent is a member of their family.”

A kinship carer

The children’s social care system will offer kinship families the right support at the right time to meet their specific needs. Employers will be encouraged to support employees who are kinship carers so they can continue to have access to and remain in work. Children in kinship care will live without stigma and with a sense of love, belonging and stability throughout their childhood. Their unique needs will be recognised, including the acknowledgment of any trauma or adversity they may have experienced. They will be nurtured and supported to achieve their potential.

Kinship carers will also be able help each other more easily. Through the creation of local and national communities of kinship carers, they will be able to learn from and make meaningful relationships with people who have had similar experiences to their own. These networks will utilise technology to link together kinship carers across the country and will be straightforward for new kinship carers to find. This will help kinship carers to access more support as they navigate their circumstances.

It will be much clearer to both kinship carers and practitioners what support is available and under which circumstances this can be accessed. This will allow kinship families to begin to access the full support that they are entitled to, which in turn will improve the outcomes and experiences of children in kinship care.

Stewart – How support from Newcastle City Council helped a grandparent step into the role of kinship carer for their grandson

(Some details, including Stewart’s and Alex’s names, have been changed to protect anonymity).

“When I became a kinship carer for my grandson, Alex, the local authority financially supported me and I reduced my working hours to focus on Alex during the early months of his placement. I did not want to feel rushed into making an application for a Special Guardianship Order, as I knew I needed further support, training, and guidance to feel confident in this role.

I attended the Kinship support groups regularly which, together with 1-1 support, advice and guidance from social workers, helped me to grow in confidence. The change in Alex’s presentation was significant as he responded to the structure, support and stability that I was able to provide. He began to thrive and his challenging behaviours also reduced. I was supported to facilitate family time between Alex, his parents and his siblings who had been adopted, which is something I was committed to do.

With additional time and support, I felt able to progress a Special Guardianship Order application for Alex. To do this, I completed special guardianship preparation training and helped to make a Special Guardianship Order support plan with the care team, who ensured that every aspect of need was assessed for both Alex and I. In September 2023, I was successfully granted a Special Guardianship Order. The court acknowledged Alex’s progress, the quality of the support plan and the ongoing financial support that I was able to access. Alex’s said that it was the “best decision ever for him to live with his grandad”.

Problem diagnosis

Kinship carers often report that they feel abandoned and alone during what can be the most difficult time in their lives¹⁷. People who become kinship carers often do so at short notice¹⁸ and we sometimes hear that kinship carers are left feeling like they have no idea what to do next and that they are alone in their situation¹⁹. Guidance and support varies locally²⁰ and support that is offered through voluntary organisations is not always clearly signposted.

¹⁷ [Out of the Shadows \(Kinship, 2022\)](#)

¹⁸ [Out of the Shadows \(Kinship, 2022\)](#)

¹⁹ [Out of the Shadows \(Kinship, 2022\)](#)

²⁰ [Understanding the variation in support for kinship carers: A survey of local authorities in England \(Foundations, 2023\)](#)

In 2022, 22% of all children living in foster care in England lived in kinship foster care²¹. The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care noted that sometimes kinship carers can only access financial support by virtue of being a foster carer. In some instances, becoming a kinship foster carer can be the right choice, however, as these arrangements come with additional oversight from the local authority, they can create unnecessary barriers to normal family life if used under the wrong circumstances. Some local authorities provide special guardians with an allowance at the same rate as foster carers, however, many struggle to provide the upfront investment necessary for this. We need to strengthen our understanding of what drives the decision for a kinship carer to become a kinship foster carer instead of an alternative type of kinship arrangement and address any financial barriers that determine these. This will enable us to give greater guidance to local authorities and support decision making that best suits families’ needs.

The decision to become a kinship carer can put a significant financial strain on many families, regardless of their financial situation. Kinship carers who are in employment often report the need to give up work or reduce their hours to be able to care for the children they support. A 2023 survey²² based on more than 500 kinship carers also found that:

- More than 40% of kinship carers who were in employment had to leave work permanently and 45% needed to reduce their hours.
- Over a third of kinship carers experienced an income drop of over 50%.
- 28% of participants were dependent on welfare benefits due to changes in their employment status.
- 68% of kinship carers said that their employer didn’t offer support to kinship carers.

These circumstances can lead to inequalities between children who grow up in kinship care and their peers who grow up in parental care. The 2021 census found that 67% of children living in kinship care are in deprived households²³. This deprivation can threaten the stability of kinship care arrangements. Indeed, a 2023 survey of nearly 1,700 kinship carers found that 12% were concerned about having to stop caring for their children in the next year if their financial situation did not improve²⁴.

Furthermore, there are educational disparities for children in kinship care. Education opens doors; it is the cornerstone of social mobility. A good education is vital for every child but even more so for children who have experienced adversity. Increased

²¹ [Children looked after in England including adoptions, 2022](#)

²² [Forced Out \(Kinship, 2023\)](#)

²³ [Kinship care in England and Wales \(2021\) - Office for National Statistics](#)

²⁴ [Breaking Point: kinship carers in crisis \(Kinship, 2023\)](#)

attainment is associated with higher levels of employment²⁵ and a greater attainment at GCSE is associated with increased lifetime earnings²⁶. Although children in kinship care tend to have better educational outcomes than looked after children, their outcomes fall behind those children with no social worker involvement²⁷.

There are currently many educational entitlements that benefit children in certain kinship care arrangements, however, educational support for these children does not always recognise their specific circumstances and how their needs might differ to those of other disadvantaged children. We have heard from kinship carers that they can find it difficult to navigate the education system and that it is unclear what support children in kinship care are entitled to in order to thrive at school.

“I have experienced many challenges navigating the education system and mostly because of a lack of knowledge and understanding.”

A kinship carer

How we will move towards our vision

We will lay the foundations for more financial and employment support for kinship carers

Financial allowance

A regular and reliable financial allowance for kinship carers will help to reduce the number of children in kinship care growing up in poverty and remove barriers to kinship carers providing stable, loving homes. In Stable Homes, Built on Love, we committed to exploring the case for mandating a financial allowance for all special guardianship and child arrangement kinship carers, in every local authority, equivalent to the corresponding local foster carer allowance.

²⁵ [How does educational attainment affect participation in the labour market? \(OECD, 2023\)](#)

²⁶ [GCSE attainment and lifetime earnings 2021](#)

²⁷ [Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England 2016](#)

In Autumn 2023, Coram-I surveyed kinship foster carers across England to better understand what support could enable kinship carers to look after children through a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order, without them needing to become looked after by their local authority. 479 carers across 87 local authorities responded.

Of these, 49.3% of respondents had been involved in the process of determining whether the child should be taken into care.

When asked which factor had the single biggest influence on whether or not they thought the child should be taken into care (thinking back to the time the order was made), the largest concern reported by kinship carers was worries about finances:

- 30% of respondents reported that the financial impact had the most influence on their opinion,
- 14% reported that concerns around access to support to help meet the child's needs was the single biggest influence,
- 10% cited the child's wishes as the biggest influence,

Other factors reported included worries about non-financial support for the child, concerns about the child missing out on long-term entitlements that children in care are eligible for and worries around being able to support the child after they turned 18.

As part of this survey, kinship foster carers were also asked about the biggest single influence for them in deciding whether to apply for a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order or not:

- 43% of respondents reported that financial support was the single biggest influence in their decision,
- 15% said concern around what support the child would receive had most influence.

Moreover, 52% of respondents said that a guarantee of a financial allowance until their child turned 18 would be sufficient for them to feel confident in applying for a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order to remove the child from local authority care.

This survey indicates that a financial allowance for kinship carers has the potential to unlock savings for local government, improve outcomes for children and provide stability for kinship families.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care estimated that local authorities could achieve significant savings by providing a kinship allowance to reduce the number of kinship foster carers, relative to special guardians and minimise the breakdown of kinship care arrangements. Some local authorities have already successfully reduced their spend by investing in greater financial support for kinship carers, which has also led to positive outcomes for kinship families. To deliver this change at a national level we need

to further understand how a financial allowance would impact both kinship carers and local authorities.

To begin this, we will 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 foster care allowances. Although foster care allowances vary according to age of the child and where they live, on average they provide eligible carers between £154-£270 per week, per child. This Pathfinder will gather robust evidence on how establishing an allowance for new and existing kinship carers will impact both kinship families and local authorities. As part of this, we will work with Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families (subject to funding) to evaluate whether introducing a financial allowance could unlock savings for local government. This programme will be backed by an investment of £16 million in 2024-25 and we will explore expanding eligibility to broader cohorts of kinship carers and all local authorities in the future, subject to the findings of our evaluation. We will share further information on the Pathfinder in Spring 2024, including details on the first wave, which will run from 2024 until 2028.

Liam – How financial allowances for “approved kinship carers” in Leeds help to support children

(Some details, including Liam’s name, have been changed to protect anonymity).

“I am a kinship carer for my grandson, Liam. I currently work two cleaning jobs and live in private accommodation. Because I am an approved kinship carer for Liam, I receive an allowance of £216.76 every week. This is in line with the fostering maintenance allowance in Leeds and is the same amount that a foster carer would receive for caring for a child.

This really helps as I was already living on a budget when Liam came to live with me. The money goes towards food shopping, clothes, any school items that Liam needs or activities that we might do on a weekend. I also use some of this money to give Liam pocket money every week. The kinship team in Leeds helped me get Liam’s room ready for him by ordering a bed, mattress, desk and gaming chair- which Liam was delighted with. I also have just bought a rug for Liam’s room to make it feel warmer. When it was Liam’s birthday, I got some money to help with buying him some presents and during the first week of December, I get some extra money to help towards buying Liam Christmas presents.”

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund provides funds to local authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive children and young people, as well as those with a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order who have previously been looked after. The Adoption Support Fund is available for

children and young people up to and including the age of 21, or 25 if they have an Education, Health and Care plan.

“Having access to the Adoption Support Fund meant our child could receive timely therapeutic interventions... Once therapies had concluded we could see how they had positively impacted our nephew not only emotionally but developmentally too.”

A kinship carer

Recent statistics show that 87% of applications to the fund are made on behalf of adopted children, compared to 13% for children living with a Special Guardianship Order²⁸. Contrastingly, there are more children leaving care through special guardianship arrangements than those leaving care to be adopted; data from 2021 shows that 2,869 children were adopted compared to 3,800 children leaving care into special guardianship arrangements²⁹. This suggests that kinship carers with Special Guardianship Orders for children who were previously looked after could be unaware that they are eligible for this support or that the fund does not offer therapies that are suitable to their needs.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that applications for children in kinship care are more complex than those for adoptive families and that these children also have a different set of support needs. We will commission a formal analysis of the fund’s Special Guardianship and Child Arrangements Order applications, and the therapies provided to better understand how the fund is used. This analysis will provide robust findings that can inform further development of the fund.

Additionally, to ensure it is made clear that carers with a Special Guardianship Order can access the fund, the Adoption Support Fund will be known as the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund. We will support this by raising a greater awareness of this fund amongst special guardians. This change addresses one of the recommendations of the post-legislative scrutiny of the 2014 Children and Families Act that we are taking action on³⁰.

Employment support

Children who live with kinship carers are often removed from their parents at short notice; many have experienced adversity and can often have complex needs³¹. As a result, kinship carers may need to spend significant amounts of time forming a new relationship

²⁸ [Evaluation of the Adoption Support Fund 2018 to 2022](#)

²⁹ [Statistics: England \(CoramBAAF, 2021\)](#)

³⁰ [Government response to Children and Families Act 2014 Committee](#)

³¹ [Kinship care - What Works for Children's Social Care](#)

with children and may have practical needs to attend to, such as taking them to medical appointments or facilitating therapeutic support.

Employers can support kinship carers to provide stability for children, whilst helping them remain in employment. In Stable Homes, Built on Love, we committed to work across government to explore possible additional workplace entitlements for kinship carers. Whilst we continue to explore this, we encourage all employers to be sympathetic to kinship carers' circumstances by providing flexibility.

“When I became a kinship carer, the company I work for was really good to me, offering me flexible hours and paid leave. It made a huge difference to me being able to stay in work while looking after my grandson.

Like most kinship carers, it was a time of family crisis when I stepped up to care for my grandson. It was an overwhelming time, so being given paid time off work, just like adopters would have a right to, and being able to return to flexible hours, enabled me to find and enrol him in a good local nursery and settle him into his new home.

I hadn't known that I was just about to become a 'parent' again, and paid leave gave me the time to go out and buy essentials like cots, beds, nappies and clothes. It also gave my grandson and I the time to bond and develop our new 'parent-child' dynamic, so he could feel safe and secure and know he belonged.

My employer's flexibility allowed me to juggle childcare like any other working parent. It meant I could continue working at a job I loved. Without it, I think I would have been forced to give up my career and income, in order to give my grandson the loving home he needed.”

A special guardian (grandparent) 58, Surrey

Alongside this strategy, we have published [Kinship Carers in the Workplace: Guidance for Employers](#), which sets out best practice for supporting kinship carers at work, including how to adapt internal policies and create a culture of support to best meet the needs of kinship carers. It also highlights existing statutory leave entitlements that kinship carers may already be eligible to access. These include the right to request flexible working, time off for family and dependents and unpaid parental leave. Additionally, the guidance signposts initiatives that could support kinship carers in the workplace, for example Kinship's "Kinship Friendly Employment Scheme"³². This scheme encourages and supports organisations across England and Wales, to ensure that kinship carer employees can access fair, flexible and funded support within a positive workplace

³² [Kinship Friendly Employer Scheme - Kinship](#)

culture that understands and respects their needs. We will also strengthen guidance for local authorities, to help them improve the experiences of kinship carers, which will include how to support them to remain in work where possible.

Whilst every kinship carer's circumstances are unique, many need the flexibility to take periods of leave from work and to be met with understanding when dealing with difficult circumstances. The support that different organisations can offer will vary, however this can benefit employers by allowing them to retain skilled and experienced employees.

Employers have the ability to support employees across their organisation as they see fit and we encourage them to consider how best to do this. The Department for Education will join a small number of private sector employers, including Card Factory, Tesco and John Lewis, in offering a pay and leave entitlement to all eligible staff who become kinship carers (subject to discussions on the detailed arrangements between the department and employee representatives). This will provide more flexibility for eligible kinship carers to support the children they care for.

We will improve training for kinship carers

Training for kinship carers

In Stable Homes, Built on Love, we made a commitment to establish a training, information and support offer that all kinship carers can access if they wish. In October 2023, we announced our partnership with Kinship to deliver a bespoke package of support and training for all kinship carers in England to launch in Spring 2024.

It will provide both online and in-person training sessions for kinship carers, covering topics such as contact with parents, how to register for a new school and support with caring for teenagers.

The service will include:

- a. Information and signposting to other useful resources that will support kinship carers in the first days and weeks of caring for a child, for example how to register for a school place or GP or dentist.
- b. Resources to support carers to understand what kinship care is, including what options are open to them, for example information on the legal routes to permanence and the difference between different types of placements.
- c. Resources and information on issues that impact kinship carers directly, for example, how to communicate with their local authority.
- d. Signposting to other support where relevant, for example the Family and Friends helpline, the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund and peer support groups.
- e. Signposting to further support available through in-person or online training.

Peer support

“Meeting with people who really understand the challenges lifted a weight I had been carrying for so long. Listening to others tell their story as if they were me brought me to tears. Having peer support is extremely valuable.”

A kinship carer

“Peer support groups are really beneficial as they are the only place where kinship carers can truly share their challenges, frustrations and hopes without being scrutinised, judged or have it recorded against them. This makes a huge difference to carers because they often don't have people who truly understand what they are going through. They have often fallen through the gaps or left to it until they participate and they leave with a smile, encouragement, ideas and strategies to cope and the energy to continue.”

A kinship carer

We will also enable all kinship carers, regardless of their Care Order, to better connect and learn from each other by continuing to support the delivery of peer support groups across England. Kinship is responsible for the creation of over 130 peer support groups which act as a vital source of support for many kinship carers. We will invest up to £1.8 million over the next 2 years to continue to support these groups and ensure that all kinship carers have access to peer support across England.

We will improve education support for children in kinship care

We will build on the existing support available for children to improve their educational outcomes. Currently, some children in kinship care benefit from additional educational support, including:

- Children in kinship care who have been entitled to free school meals at any point over the last six years receive pupil premium funding³³.
- Children who have left local authority care through a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order receive pupil premium plus funding³⁴.
- Children in Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order kinship care arrangements are eligible for school admissions through the Fair Access Protocol. This enables some children in kinship care to secure an in-year school placement when they are unable get a place via other means.

³³ [Pupil premium 2023-24: conditions of grant for academies and free schools](#)

³⁴ [Pupil premium: overview](#)

- Virtual School Heads and designated teachers provide advice and information to schools to promote the educational achievement of children who have left local authority care through a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order³⁵.
- As part of their strategic role, Virtual School Heads also promote the educational achievement of:
 - all children in kinship care assessed as being in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and currently have a social worker,
 - children who have previously had a social worker.
- Designated Safeguarding Leads provide help for these children within schools by supportively engaging with parents and carers when families face difficult circumstances or if there are safeguarding concerns and by promoting their education and welfare.

Expansion of the Virtual School Head role

Virtual School Heads play a key part in a local authority's role as corporate parent for looked after children. They seek to ensure that educational achievement is seen as a priority by everyone who is responsible for promoting the welfare of individual looked after children. Virtual School Heads also promote the education of children who are previously looked after, through the provision of information and advice to their parents, educators and others who the Virtual School Head considers necessary. Virtual School Heads have been found to help raise the aspirations and promote the educational achievement of both of these groups of children³⁶. Indeed, Virtual School Head support has been linked to a reduction in permanent exclusions for looked after children and there is evidence to suggest that Virtual School Heads are effective in supporting schools³⁷ (for example, by advising them on how to support previously looked after children to improve their behaviour and help avoid unnecessary exclusions).

In 2021, the Virtual School Head role was extended to include strategic responsibility for championing the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children who have, or have previously had, a social worker, which already serves many children in kinship care. We will expand this so that more children in kinship care will benefit.

We will invest £3.8 million in 2024-25 to expand the role of Virtual School Heads to specifically include championing the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children in kinship care. This will bring greater focus to the distinct needs of children in kinship care, within Virtual School Heads' existing responsibilities.

³⁵ [Revised guidance for Virtual School Heads and designated teachers 2018](#)

³⁶ [Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need review 2019](#)

³⁷ [Timpson Review of School Exclusion \(Timpson, 2019\)](#)

The Virtual School Head strategic role will include:

- a) Raising the visibility of the distinct needs of children in different types of kinship care arrangements and the disadvantage that they can experience.
- b) Promoting practice that supports attendance and engagement in education.
- c) Promoting practice that improves children in kinship care's outcomes to narrow the attainment gap, so that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Furthermore, we will extend Virtual School Heads' provision of advice and information, on request, to all kinship carers with Special Guardianship and Child Arrangements Orders as part of their non-statutory role. This will be an important step in helping more kinship carers to navigate the education system, in turn helping them to advocate for the educational achievement of their children. More children in kinship care will receive the help they need to thrive at school.

4. Empowered

Today we are announcing that:

- We will create a **new Kinship Care Ambassador role**, to work with local authorities and kinship carers to raise standards and share best practice.
- We will improve the **availability of advocacy services for children in kinship care**, by updating guidance and standards.
- We will **establish the National Kinship Care Advisory Board** and **extend the Kinship Carer Reference Group**.
- We will partner with Foundations - the What Works Centre for Children & Families and the sector to work towards **every family being offered high quality family group conferences at pre-proceedings stage**.
- We will use digital innovation to help social workers have a **greater understanding of kinship families**.

Our vision

We will champion kinship families. Kinship carers will have a direct route to influence national government; Ministers and other decision makers will hear directly from them. They will be kept up to date on the policies that affect the children they support and we will continuously promote kinship care to be at the forefront of children's social care reform. We will ensure that the voices of kinship carers and kinship children are built into the policy making process, so that they are targeted towards their needs and long-term success.

Local government will receive support to amplify the voices of kinship families within their services so that they can more easily influence the design and delivery of these. Local services will become more responsive to kinship carer feedback, and in turn, these services will become more tailored to the needs of kinship families. We will enable kinship carers and children in kinship care to more easily access advocacy.

More widely, family networks will be empowered throughout their involvement with children's social care. We will continue to build towards a family-first culture in every local authority through a greater use of family engagement.

Problem diagnosis

Kinship carers are people who want to make a difference. 45% of the respondents to our Stable Homes, Built on Love consultation were kinship carers (the largest single group of respondents). Despite this, many kinship carers do not feel like their voices are being heard.

For many years, the Children Act 1989 has set an expectation for local authorities to provide accommodation that is suitable and tailored to the needs of looked after children. The delivery of local services are rightly tailored to these children and there are many local reference groups to support this. In contrast, local authority support and intervention for kinship care varies across the country and so does the number of local kinship carer reference groups that inform the design of local services for children in kinship care. (The voluntary sector is responsible for much of the existing advocacy for kinship families; through their dedication, the voices of kinship carers are becoming more empowered at both a national and local level.) As this is the first ever government kinship strategy, practice has never before received such attention and coordination at a national level. This has contributed to the variation seen in kinship care practice across the country. Additionally, survey data suggests that not all local services are responsive to the needs of kinship families. Indeed, in 2023 Kinship found that 25% of 1,700 kinship carers reported that the help they had received from children's services as very poor³⁸.

Not only is there scope for kinship carers to be more empowered to inform the design of their services, we must hold more space for family networks throughout decision making in children's social care, so they can use their voices to improve outcomes.

Family networks play a valuable role in supporting families and enabling children to live safely at home with their parents, where this is in the child's best interests. Where a child cannot remain with their parents, involving family networks early in the process can support the transition to kinship care. Social workers often struggle to identify family network members, however. Statutory guidance states that local authorities should consider offering family group decision making as soon as it is identified that a child may need to become looked after³⁹ and that family meetings should be established from an early stage in a referral⁴⁰. In practice, this often happens too late, after issues within the family have reached crisis point, or decisions about the long-term care arrangements for the child have already been made. A 2023 survey of 80 local authorities by Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families found that 93% use a family group decision-making service, but only 22% offer these earlier than pre-proceedings⁴¹.

“Often families in difficulty just need help, role models, encouragement, training and support - something that many of them have never had. By offering these things at the beginning, the relationship with the local authority is based on trust, an opportunity to succeed and a partnership to do what is best for the child.”

A kinship carer

³⁸ [Breaking Point: kinship carers in crisis \(Kinship, 2023\)](#)

³⁹ [Court orders and pre-proceedings for local authorities, 2014](#)

⁴⁰ [Family and friends care: statutory guidance for local authorities, 2011](#)

⁴¹ [Understanding the variation in support for kinship carers: A survey of local authorities in England \(Foundations, 2023\)](#)

How we will move towards our vision

We will advocate for kinship families

Independent advocacy for children in kinship care

Advocacy is an important part of any children's service and ensures that the views of children and young people are heard and acted upon by decision makers. Advocacy services help professionals to listen to children and create a culture of openness where listening and responding to children and young people's concerns becomes an integral part of everyday practice⁴².

We have been working with the sector to update the national standards and statutory guidance for the provision of children's advocacy services. The Advocacy Expert Group first met in November 2022 and, in September 2023, we launched a consultation on the proposed changes to the standards and guidance. We will develop this policy to ensure that a future advocacy service will empower and listen to children and young people in kinship care who are receiving social care services, including those with specific communication needs. This will ensure children and young people understand their rights at pivotal transitions in their life, such as moving into a kinship arrangement.

National Kinship Care Ambassador

In 2017, we appointed the first ever National Implementation Advisor for care leavers. Mark Ridell MBE works closely with local authorities to support them in meeting the duties introduced through the Children and Social Work Act 2017. He has successfully helped councils to develop a stronger local offer of support for care leavers, offering personal advisor services for all care leavers up to age 25 and delivering on their special responsibilities as a 'corporate parent'.

We will recruit the first ever National Kinship Care Ambassador to advocate for kinship carers and work directly with local authorities to improve services. The ambassador will be appointed in 2024 and will support government and local authorities to keep kinship carers at the heart of their services.

The National Kinship Care Ambassador will support individual local authorities to refine their services to improve the outcomes and experiences of kinship carers. Local authorities will benefit from bespoke, constructive advice and they will be able to meaningfully use this resource to make positive changes to their services. The ambassador will speak directly to local kinship carers, utilising existing forums where

⁴² [Providing effective advocacy services for children and young people making a complaint under the Children Act 1989](#)

appropriate, before advising Directors of Children’s Services and other professionals on how they could best improve the experiences of kinship families.

The ambassador will have a deep understanding of kinship care and both local and national government. They will also have a good grasp of local innovation, working with local authorities to implement new ways of working and sharing best practice. They will make a difference to both kinship families and local government.

The Kinship Care Ambassador will also bring the voice of kinship carers into national policy making. They will advise government, using feedback from kinship carers and their experience.

We will amplify the voices of kinship families in national government

Kinship Carer Reference Group and National Kinship Care Advisory Board

We formed the Kinship Carer Reference Group to provide a direct channel for kinship carers to advise on government policy. This group has devoted a significant amount of time to improving the experiences and outcomes of kinship families and been instrumental in informing this strategy. We will maintain the Kinship Carer Reference Group so that they can continue this valuable work.

“[Through the Kinship Carers Reference Group], I have felt empowered to use my voice to be heard and speak up for those kinship carers who have felt invisible to professionals. The experience has continued to be positive throughout and it is encouraging that the Department for Education has allowed members to input without fear of being judged or ashamed of their kinship journey.”

A kinship carer

We will also create a National Kinship Care Advisory Board of sector experts to directly advise the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing on kinship care policy. The board will consist of representatives from organisations with different interests, including the National Kinship Care Ambassador. They will advise government on priorities for both future funding and policy development. They will use their expertise, representing kinship carers, social workers and other agencies, to ensure that government designs and implements policy that will make a real change. We will publish more information about this Board in 2024.

Together the Kinship Care Ambassador, Kinship Carer Reference Group and National Kinship Care Advisory Board will ensure the voices of kinship carers are at the forefront of national policy. They will work together to advocate for kinship families by influencing both local and national policy and delivery.

We will empower family networks throughout the children’s social care system

Family group decision making

Family group decision making is a term to describe family-led meetings that allow a family network to come together and make a plan in response to concerns about a child’s safety and wellbeing. This includes offering practical support to parents, whilst prioritising the wellbeing of the child. These meetings help to ensure a family network is empowered throughout the decision-making process of a children’s social care referral. The Children’s Social Care National Framework and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 both highlight the expectation for family networks to be engaged and empowered from an early point in a referral. The voices of family networks should be prioritised through the use of family group decision making, wherever possible, and children’s services should consider offering these from the earliest point and throughout a referral.

We funded Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families to carry out the first ever randomised controlled trial into family group conferences (a particular model of family group decision making) at pre-proceedings. This trial found that children whose families were referred for a family group conference at pre-proceedings were:

- Significantly (8.6%) less likely to be in care one year later compared to those not referred.
- Spending significantly less time (87 days) in care 6 months later compared to those not referred (115 days).
- Significantly less likely (13%) to have had care proceedings issued compared to those not referred⁴³.

In Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, we will encourage local authorities to use these findings by implementing the family group conference model more widely. We will also partner with Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families and the sector to work towards every family being offered access to high-quality family group conferences at pre-proceedings stage and will seek to monitor the success of this. We will also explore using legislation to mandate the use of family group conferences at pre-proceedings in the future, alongside encouraging their use earlier in the system.

Families First for Children Pathfinder and Family Network pilot

In Stable Homes, Built on Love, we announced £45 million for the Families First for Children Pathfinder programme and Family Network pilot. Through the Pathfinder’s wave 1 areas – Dorset, Lincolnshire and Wolverhampton – we are testing how using family

⁴³ [Randomised Controlled Trial of Family Group Conferencing at Pre-proceedings stage \(Foundations, 2023\)](#)

group decision making at an earlier stage and how implementing Family Network Support Packages can empower family networks and involve them in decisions made about a child, alongside our reforms to family help and child protection services.

The Family Network pilot is testing the impact of introducing Family Network Support Packages at pre-proceedings in 7 local authorities: Brighton and Hove, Gateshead, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hartlepool, Staffordshire, Sunderland and Telford and Wrekin. These packages will provide financial and practical support to family networks to unlock their assistance in enabling a child to remain living safely with their birth parents. Where a child cannot remain with their parents, a Family Network Support Package has the potential to smooth transition into a kinship arrangement, where this is in the best interests of the child.

We will use learning from our evaluation of this pilot to inform future decisions about the wider rollout of Family Network Support Packages and will publish evaluation findings in Spring 2025.

Digital innovation

We have invested in research into how best to support family network engagement before a child is taken into care. Through our Data and Digital Solutions Fund, we have funded North Yorkshire Council to pilot innovative solutions to support social workers to find connected people to children and families quickly and easily, alongside meaningful conversations with families. This pilot aims to create auto-generated “eco-maps” of people who the child considers to be connected to them, in order to help social workers identify more sources of support.

This will save social worker time and help them to make decisions about who may be best placed to support a child and their family. Identifying these family networks is important as they can offer support to help a child to stay at home or provide a kinship arrangement, when this is in their best interests. This will enable more children to remain with people that know and love them.

5. Understood

Today we are announcing that:

- We will improve the visibility of kinship carers through a new **definition of kinship care** that will be used in statutory guidance.
- We will publish an **updated version of the 2011 Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities**. This will be called **Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities** and will clarify to local authorities how they should support kinship families.
- We will create trust between kinship carers and practitioners by **improving social worker training** and **developing a knowledge and skills statement for family help lead practitioners**.
- **Ofsted** are updating their inspector training and guidance, so kinship care is well embedded in inspection practice.
- The **Law Commission will review legal orders** and statuses for kinship carers and understand how we can both simplify and streamline these.
- We will work with the Ministry of Justice to improve our understanding of kinship care through **better data join up**.

Our vision

Kinship families will be visible and understood. Communities and services will understand what it means to be in kinship care and that the circumstances of kinship families can vary widely. Services will recognise the legal responsibilities and authority that kinship carers have and understand that some families can benefit from tailored support.

It will be clear that kinship care is distinct from other types of non-parental care. Every local practitioner, from social care practitioners to teachers and to doctors, will understand the role kinship carers play and how their families might be affected by trauma. They will know what support kinship carers and their children are entitled to and actively seek out opportunities to provide this.

An improved understanding of kinship care will allow support provided by local authorities, schools, health partners and others to be better tailored to the unique needs of kinship families. Practice will be bespoke. We will continue to celebrate the culture of innovation within local government and new supportive policies will be encouraged. Local authorities will support each other to improve their services and government will facilitate shared learning.

Through improved data collection and consultation with kinship families, government will better understand the needs of kinship carers and the children in their care. Investment will then be targeted where kinship carers need it most.

Problem diagnosis

To date, there has been no single definition of a kinship carer. This can lead to challenges for kinship carers being recognised in their parenting role by schools, hospitals and other agencies⁴⁴. Family Rights Group research found that this lack of definition contributes to kinship carers feeling overlooked and undervalued. Agencies who interact with kinship families are often unclear about what a kinship carer is and what rights kinship carers have. This has led to kinship carers frequently having to explain themselves and make the case that the children they care for are entitled to support⁴⁵.

A lack of understanding about kinship care can lead to significant consequences for kinship families. A 2014 survey of 2,500 kinship carers found that:

- 28% of kinship carers felt like they had been treated badly by a social worker.
- 16% of kinship carers said that they felt like they had been discriminated against within their community.
- 22% of respondents felt like they were stigmatised at school by other parents.
- Some carers reported that they felt their children were isolated and prevented from socialising with other children⁴⁶.

In this survey, some kinship carers reported that they felt social workers can be judgemental towards them and that they sometimes felt blamed for their family's situation. Other research suggests that, as kinship carers are usually related to the family a child has been removed from, they can sometimes be assumed to have been involved or be responsible⁴⁷. Social workers act with the best intentions to avoid unnecessary risk to the child and there are many examples of practitioners working hard to deliver the best outcomes and experiences for children and families. However, a lack of specific training on kinship families available to social workers can sometimes lead to misunderstanding and can result in kinship carers reporting a negative experience⁴⁸.

Kinship families can also often feel invisible within the system. This is ultimately due to a lack of national direction set by government for kinship care. For example, whilst statutory guidance for Family and Friends Care exists, it has not been updated since 2011. This means it does not include the most up-to-date evidence which limits its usefulness for practitioners. It is unclear what the best practice is for kinship care and there is little data to effectively link practice with outcomes.

⁴⁴ [Time to define kinship care campaign- Family Rights Group](#)

⁴⁵ [Time to define kinship care blog \(Family Rights Group, 2023\)](#)

⁴⁶ [Disadvantage, discrimination, resilience: The lives of kinship families \(Kinship, 2014\)](#)

⁴⁷ [Out of the Shadows \(Kinship, 2022\)](#)

⁴⁸ [Practising in kinship care: The perspectives of Specialist Social Workers \(Hunt, 2021\)](#)

The different orders that allow kinship carers to provide care for children are also complex to navigate and there is regional variation in the number of different types of kinship care arrangement⁴⁹. Research suggests that kinship carers can find navigating these orders confusing and that they do not feel confident that the order underpinning their arrangements is right for their circumstances. In one survey, only 55% of respondents felt that the legal order underpinning their arrangement was the most appropriate⁵⁰.

Whilst we know many local authorities provide comprehensive and bespoke support for kinship families, Kinship have found that 36% of surveyed kinship carers did not feel adequately supported by their local authority⁵¹. This survey also found that if a carer needs help from their local authority, many do not know who to call or how to find out. Additionally, 84% of kinship carers who responded to this survey reported that they did not get the advice or information they needed when they took on the role.

Many local authorities are making great strides in championing their kinship families, but their practice is not always highlighted or disseminated. This places a burden on local authorities to find out information that they do not know exists. National government could play a useful role in sharing this information.

Furthermore, despite a longstanding history of kinship care in England, up-to-date data on the number of kinship carers across the country is incomplete. This is in stark contrast to the data collected on children in foster care and adoption. Data shows that there is considerable regional variation in the number of kinship foster carers and kinship carer special guardians, for example there are fewer black and Asian children placed in formal kinship arrangements compared to other ethnicities⁵². Although we are committed to understanding this further (for example through upcoming research by Kinship and The University of Oxford's Rees Centre, that seeks to understand the specific experiences and needs of black and Asian kinship families⁵³), we do not know enough about the reasons behind this. A lack of data has made it difficult to understand the local trends in kinship care arrangements, which in turn has limited the effectiveness of national policies that are designed to support kinship families.

⁴⁹ [Understanding formal arrangements of kinship care in England: analysis of administrative data \(What Works Centre for Children and Families, 2022\)](#)

⁵⁰ [The contribution of supervision orders and special guardianship to children's lives and family justice \(Harwin *et al.*, 2019\)](#)

⁵¹ [The Cost of Loving: Annual survey of kinship carers \(Kinship, 2022\)](#)

⁵² [Understanding formal arrangements of kinship care in England: analysis of administrative data \(What Works Centre for Children and Families, 2022\)](#)

⁵³ [Understanding and responding to the needs of kinship families from black and Asian communities \(Kinship and The Rees Centre, University of Oxford\)](#)

How we will move towards our vision

We will improve the visibility of kinship carers

A government definition of kinship care

Today we are publishing our definition of kinship care, following consultation in Stable Homes, Built on Love. A clear definition will help to reduce barriers to kinship carers accessing services and support by creating a common understanding of what kinship care means. Publishing this definition will help prevent kinship carers needing to repeatedly explain their situation and circumstances to services.

“Most importantly [a government definition of kinship care will] be the start of creating a fair and transparent system for professionals to identify and better support kinship families. It would ensure that all kinship families, whether formal or informal arrangements, [are] clearly defined as an alternative care arrangement ... to recognise that children in kinship care arrangements have suffered an early traumatic experience.”

A kinship carer

To be useful in every situation, a definition needs to encompass the varied circumstances families find themselves in. It should create an understanding of all arrangements. This definition covers the whole spectrum of kinship care: from informal arrangements unknown to children’s social care, to formal arrangements made in court. It shows how complex kinship care can be.

We have worked with kinship carers to create this definition. In our consultation on Stable Homes, Built on Love, 405 kinship carers responded to our draft definition. 86% of all respondents were supportive of this definition, with some citing that it would improve the support they accessed. Following feedback, we held a workshop with our Kinship Carer Reference Group to refine this definition. We have also worked closely with the Family Rights Group and Kinship, who both represent the interests of kinship carers across the country.

Definition of kinship care

1. Kinship care is any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term.

2. The following are all types of kinship care arrangement, however this list is not exhaustive:

- a. Informal kinship care arrangements (not approved foster care) including:
 - i. A private family arrangement in which a close relative who does not hold parental responsibility, raises the child and
 - the local authority has had no major role in making the arrangement for the child; and
 - where a Family Court has not made an order in respect to the care of the child.
 - ii. Where a child under the age of 16 is being provided with accommodation for less than 28 days by an individual in their own home who is not a close relative
 - iii. Where a 16 or 17-year-old is being provided with accommodation by an individual who is not a close relative in their own home
- b. A private fostering arrangement in which someone who is not a close relative* of the child looks after the child for 28 days or more** (as per section 66(1)(a) and (b) of the Children Act 1989)***
- c. Where a 'lives with' Child Arrangements Order**** has been granted in respect of the child, in favour of someone who is a friend or family member but is not the child's parent (see glossary regarding who is a parent).
- d. Where a Special Guardianship Order has been granted appointing a friend or family member as the child's special guardian.
- e. Where a child is a 'looked after child' by virtue of either an Interim or Final Care Order or being accommodated by the local authority (usually under section 20 of the Children Act 1989) and each of the following apply (this may be described as 'kinship foster care' or 'family and friends foster care'):
 - i. The child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent, and
 - ii. The friend or family member is approved as a local authority foster carer either on a temporary basis or following full assessment.
- f. Where an Adoption Order has been granted in respect of the child and, prior to the making of the order, the adopter was a friend or family member.

* In relation to private fostering, "relative" has the meaning given in section 105 of the Children Act 1989. It includes only the following: grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership), and stepparent (a married stepparent, including a civil partner).

** For the purposes of this kinship definition, the term private fostering arrangement includes only individuals accommodating a child. It does not apply to organisations or bodies.

*** 16- and 17-year-olds who are disabled will be deemed to be in a private fostering arrangement.

**** Pursuant to section 8 of the Children Act 1989.

Although this list is not exhaustive, we have set this definition out in statutory guidance, including Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and also the new Children's Social Care National Framework, to give practitioners more clarity over what a kinship carer is. We will replace use of the term "family and friends care" with kinship care in future government guidance.

We will support local authorities to improve their practice

Local authority guidance

We are setting national direction for the whole of the children's social care system through the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#), which will be supported by Practice Guides that will offer high-quality evidence for achieving positive outcomes. The Children's Social Care National Framework describes these outcomes. Outcome 2 outlines that children and young people should be supported by their family network. There are also expectations for practice for senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners in how they should work with children, young people, kinship carers and family networks.

Specifically, it states that:

- Assessments for kinship carers should be proportionate.
- Practitioners should help kinship carers to access financial support.
- Kinship carers should have the opportunity to inform the delivery and design of children's services.

Any future guidance for local authorities will align with the outcomes and principles set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework, so that the system is easier to understand and the quality of practice is more consistent across different local authorities.

We also commit to publishing specific statutory guidance for local authorities on kinship care. This will be an update to the 2011 Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. We will rename this guidance Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. This guidance will be strengthened to improve standards and consistency in practice by setting out clear advice and expectations. It will also reaffirm expectations set out in the 2011 guidance that every local authority should publish a policy setting out its approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of children living with kinship carers (whether or not they are looked after). It will reiterate the requirement for this policy to be clearly expressed, regularly updated, made freely and widely available and publicised by relevant means, such as websites and leaflets. The National Kinship Care Ambassador will support local authorities to design and deliver these policies effectively.

Sharing best practice

We want to champion innovation and embed a culture of evidence-based practice and learning across local authorities so that they can share their expertise. We are already seeing pockets of great support happening across the country.

Holly – How a kinship family's advocate in Gateshead helped a child in kinship care to understand her history

(Some details, including names, have been changed to protect anonymity).

Sharon and Paul were granted a Special Guardianship Order for their niece, Holly (10 years old) in 2015. When Holly began to ask questions about why she was living with Sharon and Paul and not with her Mum, Sharon asked for support from her local authority on how best to communicate this information.

Mark, the family's advocate in the kinship team, discussed with Sharon and Paul how he could offer support. He began facilitating some sessions with Holly in the family home, which then moved onto sessions in school that Sharon was able to participate in. These sessions were all about Holly's life story and gave her a way to help her make sense of what had happened to her. They helped explain to Holly why she shouldn't blame herself and ensure that any gaps in knowing what happened to her didn't prevent her from making relationships and feeling secure.

Whilst this was happening, Holly was diagnosed with autism and Mark supported Sharon as Holly's behaviours became heightened during this period. Sessions with Holly progressed to talking about her emotions and how to manage these. Mark adapted these activities to meet Holly's needs and made a chest of drawers for Holly that contained 3 drawers. The drawers were for Holly to put her worries, wishes and dreams in.

Mark then developed some additional sessions for Holly, to cover the timeline from when she was born until she was 10 years old. These stories included photos of Holly over this period and explained why she was living with Sharon and Paul and who had been part of making those decisions.

She still has this information as a reference point and it can be updated as she gets older. The work also helped Sharon to understand the importance of Holly understanding why she was not living with her mum and who had made those decisions.

We recognise that local authorities need flexibility to innovate and tailor their services to the unique needs of their kinship families and their broader chosen practice model. To do this, we will commission evidence gathering for best practice and ensure this is shared regularly and openly with senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners.

In Stable Homes, Built on Love, we committed to establish learning loops so senior leaders, practice supervisors, practitioners and those with personal experience could provide feedback on what is working effectively in practice. We want to foster a culture where practitioners who are experienced in supporting kinship carers can share their expertise and where there is a wider use of evidence-based interventions to achieve better outcomes for children, young people and families. We will use learning events and forums to embed practice, as described in the Children's Social Care National Framework, including by bringing focus to areas such as carer identification, carer assessment and carer support.

Early Career Framework for social workers

We are reforming social worker training. In Stable Homes, Built on Love, we committed to publishing an Early Career Framework for social workers. We consulted on the priorities for this reform and ensured that the voices of kinship carers were heard through this process.

The Early Career Framework will set out the detailed, comprehensive skills and knowledge at both practitioner and expert levels needed to support and protect vulnerable children, families and carers. This will include kinship families and will align with the Children's Social Care National Framework to include the skills and knowledge needed to make a reality of our reform priorities.

So that social workers can better support kinship carers with sensitivity to their culture, the Early Career Framework will specifically upskill social workers to understand strengths-based and relationship-based work with families from different cultural or religious backgrounds. The framework will build upon the professional standards set out by Social Work England, which states that social workers must recognise differences across diverse communities and challenge the impact of disadvantage and discrimination on families. It will also carefully consider how trust can be established between practitioners and families, whilst keeping the safety of the child a priority⁵⁴.

Knowledge and skills statement for the role of family help lead practitioner

When a family accesses early help, lead practitioners coordinate whole family assessments to better understand the family's needs and identify the most appropriate support for the child, young person or family.

In Stable Homes, Built on Love, we announced plans to build on the strengths of current early help services through the implementation of family help. As part of this, we committed to publishing a knowledge and skills statement for family help lead

⁵⁴ [Professional standards - Social Work England](#)

practitioners in the family help system. The knowledge and skills statement will set out a standard of skills and knowledge for the role of lead practitioner. This will ensure they hold the skills needed to successfully meet the often-complex needs of the families they support. It will also reflect whole family working and consider the role of kinship care to meet the holistic needs of the family.

We will work closely to align this with the Early Career Framework and the Children's Social Care National Framework. It will be underpinned by research and be developed by engagement with key stakeholders, including experienced professionals, experts and those with personal experience. Developing a knowledge and skills statement for this significant role will further strengthen the quality of the workforce and improve the services provided to vulnerable families, so that they get the right level of help and support at the right time.

Ofsted

Ofsted play a key role in the children's social care system. The Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework is used by Ofsted to inspect local authorities and sets out the expectations for a strong local authority. Ofsted highlight where local authorities are doing well and where they can go further in improving the progress and experiences of children and families. Kinship care is already within the scope of the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework and Ofsted will reflect and report on how well the increased emphasis on kinship care impacts the experiences of children and their families. We will work with Ofsted to gain a better understanding of which local authorities are leading the way in supporting kinship families and which may need additional support.

To make sure their reporting is well-informed and focuses on the things that matter for children in kinship care, Ofsted have committed to provide inspectors with some additional, specific training. Ofsted will also review their published guidance to make sure that references to kinship care are clear in guidance and they will ensure that strengths and weaknesses in practice are captured in their reports.

We will improve our understanding of kinship care

Review of legal orders

The Law Commission has agreed to carry out a review into the legal statuses and orders for kinship carers, to ensure that the legislative framework is fair, modern, and meets the needs of its users. The Law Commission is an expert body and will make recommendations to government on how this legislation could be both simplified and streamlined. The review will seek to understand how current legislation can lead to a variation in rights and entitlements for families and also the services provided for them. Simplifying legal orders available for kinship carers will increase both transparency and

accountability of the system and make it easier for kinship carers to know what they are entitled to.

Investing in data

Having a better insight into the needs and situations of kinship carers is essential for designing national policies that are effective in improving the outcomes and experiences of kinship carers. We are committed to linking the Ministry of Justice's family courts data with the Department for Education by including it in the next iteration of the Ministry of Justice - Department for Education data share in order to understand the national picture of permanent kinship care arrangements. In the longer term, we will test the feasibility of making data available to local authorities to allow them to have a greater understanding of who in their area has a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order. This information could be used to help target investment more meaningfully towards the right services for kinship families.

As part of the Children's Social Care National Framework, we are also developing a Dashboard. The Dashboard is a learning tool, designed to support local authorities to understand their progress towards the outcomes set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework. This will support local authorities and the Department for Education to understand how children and young people are supported by their family network. Moving forwards, we will be able to better understand where challenges lie, locally or nationally, collectively helping us learn and work towards our shared ambition of improving the lives of vulnerable children and families.

We will continue to invest in national research to inform both future government policy and the delivery of kinship care. This includes funding Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families to carry out a systematic review into kinship care that will be published in Spring 2024. This will identify interventions for kinship families that improve outcomes for children. It will consider the barriers and enablers to successful implementation of these interventions and enable local authorities to commission services that are designed according to evidenced best practice. This will ensure resources are focused on interventions that make a positive difference to children and families.

We have also commissioned Ecorys UK, in partnership with the Rees Centre, University of Oxford, and Ipsos, to deliver the Family Routes study; a longitudinal study intended to track the needs, experiences and outcomes of children leaving care on a Special Guardianship Order or Adoption Order. The overall aim is to improve the understanding of the long-term outcomes of different routes to permanence and what influences the support needs and outcomes for these families.

This work will generate a better understanding of the needs of kinship families across the country and will form a vital foundation for kinship care reform.

6. Conclusion and next steps

Children have better outcomes when they are raised by people who know and love them. When it is not in a child's best interests to live with their parents, it is important to preserve their close relationships and consider if they can remain within their family network.

Kinship care allows children to benefit from the stability and familiarity of being raised within their family networks. Although it may not be appropriate for every child, we want to allow more children to grow up in kinship care. To achieve this, we must support kinship carers and these announcements will enable them to provide a safe and stable home for children in their care.

Today we have published the first ever national kinship care strategy. *Stable Homes, Built on Love* recognised kinship care as a priority pillar of the children's social care system and *Championing Kinship Care* sets out how this will operate. The reforms outlined today will begin to shift the dial and implement the most effective policies that have been directly shown to improve outcomes for children in kinship care.

Today we have committed to invest a further £20 million in 2024-25 to directly improve the lives and experiences of kinship families. We have announced the first ever government definition of kinship care, an extension to educational support for children in kinship care and a financial allowance for some kinship carers in up to 8 local authorities.

We will take advantage of every opportunity to champion the voice of kinship families in emerging national and local policy. We will use our Kinship Carer Reference Group, our National Kinship Advisory Board and our Children's Social Care National Implementation Board to develop these policies and as we begin to implement them, to ensure they lead to a positive change for children. We will transform this vision into a sustainable and lasting change.

All children deserve to be nurtured in safe and stable homes. When a child cannot stay with their parents, kinship carers provide this to children out of love. For too long they have had no voice or recognition. Today this changes. *Championing Kinship Care* is a commitment. It is our pledge to support and empower kinship families, so that children can have the best chances in life. So that they can do more than just get by. So that they can thrive.

Our plan for implementation

Stable Homes, Built on Love set out how reform to children's social care will be phased. Phase One will last until March 2025 and involves pivoting the system to ensure children and families are at the very centre. Following March 2025, we will move on to implement

Phase Two of our reform: embedding reform everywhere. We will seek to embed the most effective policies more widely so that more children in kinship care can benefit.

This strategy is the first step in our journey to reform kinship care. We are committed to improving outcomes for children and kinship carers. We will monitor our progress against the following outcomes.

We will begin to implement reforms to kinship care over the next 2 years

Outcome	What we have already delivered	What will we do next
Children in kinship care are supported to achieve better outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added children in kinship care who have a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order to the eligibility for the Fair Access Protocol for school admissions. Made certain cohorts of children in kinship care eligible for Virtual School Head support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the role of the Virtual School Head to include championing the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children in kinship care specifically. Ensure more eligible kinship carers are aware of their ability to access the Adoption Support Fund by renaming it the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund, as well as analysing the fund's applications and therapies provided.
Kinship Carers receive more support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invested £3 million to establish a training, information, and support offer for kinship carers. Invested £2 million, through the charity Kinship, to deliver high-quality peer support groups for kinship carers across the country. Funded the Family Rights Group's dedicated Family and Friends helpline. Published Kinship Carers in the Workplace: Guidance for Employers to help employers support kinship carers at work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch a Pathfinder to give eligible kinship carers in up to 8 local authorities a financial allowance paid at the same rate as the fostering allowance. Introduce kinship leave and a pay entitlement at the Department for Education (subject to discussions on the detailed arrangements between the department and employee representatives).
Kinship families are empowered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up the Kinship Carer Reference Group to give kinship carers a direct channel of communication into the Department for Education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a new Kinship Care Ambassador role, who will work with local authorities and kinship carers to raise standards and share best practice.

Kinship families are understood

- Announced the first ever government definition of kinship care.
- Publish an updated version of the 2011 Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities.
- Work with the Law Commission to review the existing landscape of legal orders and statuses for kinship carers.
- Improve social worker training and develop a knowledge and skills statement for family help lead practitioners.
- Pilot a join up of the Department for Education’s and the Ministry of Justice’s family courts datasets, to better understand the national picture of permanent kinship care arrangements.
- Ofsted will update their inspector training and guidance, so kinship care is well embedded in inspection practice.

Engaging family networks earlier and overcoming barriers to them providing support

- Invested over £45 million to reform services that meet the needs of families across the whole of children’s social care, in up to 12 local areas through the Families First for Children Pathfinder and in 7 local areas through the Family Network pilot.
- Strengthened guidance on engaging family networks through updates to Working Together to Safeguard Children.
- Published the Children’s Social Care National Framework that reaffirms the expectation that children and young people should be supported by their family network.
- Work towards every family being offered access to high-quality family group conferences at pre-proceedings stage.
- Use learning from the evaluation of the Family Network pilot to inform future decisions about wider rollout of Family Network Support Packages.

- Supported sector development of digital innovation that can help social workers identify people in a child's network who might care for them.

Key milestones for kinship care reform

	2023	2024	2025 Mar	
Support for Kinship Families	Championing Kinship Care publication Publication Dec 2023			
	Financial allowance Pathfinder Delivery plan finalised Spring 2024			
	Expansion of Virtual School Head	Publish updated guidance Dec 2023	Publish local authority funding allocations early 2024	Delivery commences Sept 2024 – Mar 2025
	Peer support groups	Bid window opens Dec 2023	Handover period new supplier Summer 2024	
	Family and Friends helpline	Ongoing delivery		
	Rebranding of the Adoption Support Fund	Go live with new name (portal) Jan 2023		
	Guidance for employers	Live - in public domain from Dec 2023		
	Training, information and advice offer	Live from Spring 2024		
Empowerment of Kinship Families	Kinship Care Ambassador Begin recruitment Spring 2024			
	Update national advocacy standards Publication of revised standards and guidance Spring 2024			
	National Kinship Care Advisory Board	Publish more information May 2024		
	Kinship Carer Reference Group	Ongoing delivery		
	Work with Foundations	Ongoing delivery (March 2025)		
	Family Network Pilot and Families First for Children (FFfC) Pathfinder	Family Network Pilot wave 1 implementation Jul 2023	FFfC Pathfinder wave 1 moving to delivery Dec 2023	Family Network Pilot wave 2 implementation Summer 2024
Help Kinship Families to be Understood	New definition of kinship care Live - in public domain from Dec 2023			
	Updated statutory guidance for local authorities Publication Spring 2024			
	Early Career Framework for social workers Consultation Apr 2024			
	Knowledge and skills statement for lead practitioners Publication Dec 2024			
	Joining up DfE and MoJ datasets + TBC			

How different kinship families will benefit from Championing Kinship Care

A kinship carer is any friend or family member, who is not a child's parent but raising them for a significant amount of the time, either as a temporary or permanent arrangement. There are different types of kinship carers, including informal kinship carers, kinship foster carers, kinship carers with a Child Arrangements Order and kinship carers with a Special Guardianship Order (please see the Glossary for a full definition of these).

Whilst all kinship families will benefit from our reforms, some of the announcements in Championing Kinship Care are targeted towards kinship families in certain arrangements. This reflects our overarching objective to rebalance the children's social care system away from costly intervention and deliver better outcomes for children.

The announcements in Championing Kinship Care will benefit kinship families in 2 main ways:

- 7 out of 18 announcements will **directly benefit** kinship families, either by improving support that is offered to them or by increasing their rights and entitlements.
- 11 out of 18 announcements will **provide benefit** to kinship families through improvement made to the children's social care system. Although these announcements are critical to building a children's social care system with kinship at its heart, they do not target particular groups of kinship families.

Announcement	Who will benefit from this announcement?	When and where will eligible carers benefit?
Launching a kinship financial allowance, paid at the same rate as the fostering allowance, beginning in up to 8 local authorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special guardians who care for previously looked after children. • Following the first wave, we will explore expanding eligibility to broader cohorts of kinship carers and all local authorities in the future (subject to the findings of our evaluation). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the first wave, up to 8 local authorities will participate in the Pathfinder. • The department has not yet selected the local authorities participating in this Pathfinder programme. • We will share further information about the first wave in Spring 2024.
Expanding the Virtual School Head's role to promote the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children in kinship care, regardless of legal status, will benefit from the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This change will apply nationally (in all local authorities in England) from September 2024.

<p>education of children in kinship care.</p>	<p>adaptation of the strategic Virtual School Head's role. Although this does not involve direct intervention with children in kinship care, all children will benefit from this system wide approach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinship families with a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order, regardless of whether children were previously looked after, will benefit from advice and information from the Virtual School Head to help them navigate the education system. • Virtual School Heads are not expected to provide information and advice to kinship carers with informal arrangements. 	
<p>Introducing a kinship leave and pay entitlement at the Department for Education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible carers who are employed by the Department for Education. • Exact eligibility will be confirmed when the Department for Education pay remit negotiations conclude. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is subject to discussions on the detailed arrangements between the department and employee representatives and will be confirmed in due course.
<p>Establishing a kinship training offer that all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All kinship carers will benefit from the training offer regardless of legal status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will be delivered nationally from April 2024, through the charity Kinship.

kinship carers will have access to.		
Sustaining the delivery of peer support groups across England.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All kinship carers can access peer support regardless of legal status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer support groups are delivered nationally.
Improving the availability of advocacy services for children in kinship care, by updating guidance and standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people in kinship care, who are receiving children's social care services or are care leavers and who wish to access advocacy must be provided with advocacy services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated advocacy standards and guidance will be published in early 2024 and will apply to all local authorities in England.
Improving the visibility of kinship carers through a new definition of kinship care, to be included in statutory guidance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All kinship carers, regardless of legal status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This change will apply nationally (in all local authorities in England).

Glossary

Care order - A care order is made by a court. It places the child in the care of a local authority. Under the Children Act 1989 a court can make a care order if a child is suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm, which is attributable to the care being given to the child or the child being beyond parental control.

Care proceedings - When a local authority need to get involved with a family to keep a child safe they may initiate court proceedings, known as care proceedings.

Child Arrangements Order - An order from court which details the arrangements for a child, including where and with whom the child will live, and who else they will spend time or have contact with. A Child Arrangements Order is usually used to determine arrangements between parents but can also be used to order that a child lives with, or otherwise has contact with, another person, such as a family member or friend.

Child - Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.

Children's social care - Children's social care exists to support children, young people and families, to protect children and young people by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

Children's Social Care National Framework - The Children's Social Care National Framework is statutory guidance for local authority children's social care. It sets out the purpose and principles of children's social care and the outcomes that should be achieved for children, young people and families so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

Early Career Framework for Social Workers - The Early Career Framework sets out what early career social workers are entitled to learn about, and learn how to do, when they start their careers.

Families First for Children Pathfinder - A programme announced in Stable Homes Built on Love, which will test reforms to family help, child protection, family networks and safeguarding partner arrangements.

Family group decision making - An umbrella term for family-led decision-making forums, where a family network has all the resources, adequate preparation, relevant information, a safe and appropriate environment, and private family time to make a plan to response to concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing. At pre-proceedings, successful family group decision making also includes having an independent coordinator. Family group decision making can take different forms; family group conference is one model. The Department for Education does not prescribe a specific

model, but a process which follows the steps set out here.

Family Help - A service that is coordinated by local authorities for families who need a higher level of support than can be provided solely through universal services and where it is beneficial for the child and family to work closely with a Family Help Worker. This service will be for families to engage with and will support children and families that are currently in targeted early help, child in need (including disabled children) and child protection. For more information see chapter 2 of [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#).

Family network - A group of people close to a child, made up of relatives and also non-related connected people (where connected people has the same definition used in The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 in addition to close family friends who have a connection with the child). A family network could include step-parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, or close family friends.

Family Network pilot - A pilot aiming to test the effectiveness of new Family Network Support Packages in seven local authorities.

Formal kinship care arrangement - The following are all types of a formal kinship care arrangement:

- a. Where a 'lives with' Child Arrangements Order*** has been granted in respect of the child, in favour of someone who is a friend or family member but is not the child's parent (see glossary in annex 2 regarding who is a parent).
- b. Where a Special Guardianship Order has been granted appointing a friend or family member as the child's special guardian.
- c. Where a child is a 'looked after child' child under either an Emergency Protection Order, Interim Care Order, Care Order or voluntary arrangement (under section 20 of the Children Act 1989) and each of the following apply (this may be described as 'kinship foster care' or 'family and friends foster care'):
 - i. The child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent, and
 - ii. The friend or family member is approved as a local authority foster carer either on a temporary basis or following full assessment.
 - iii. Where an adoption order has been granted in respect of the child and, prior to the making of the order, the adopter was a friend or family member.

Foster care - When children become looked after and are placed with another adult by children's social care services who is an approved foster carer. This adult will have responsibility to care for the child and must be approved by the local authority or an independent fostering agency. Foster care is a broad term for different types of fostering arrangements.

Friend and family members (as they relate to the definition of kinship care) -

Research, practice and families tell us that the categories of friends and family that are often kinship carers include:

- a close friend of the child, or of the child's parent(s)
- a 'close relative' of the child (this includes anyone who is defined as a relative under the Children Act 1989 that being 'a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt - whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership, or step-parent', and includes someone who is the child's great aunt, great uncle or cousin).
- a close friend of the child's 'close relative'.
- a 'close relative' of the child's half blood⁵⁵ brother or sister someone who was formerly the child's step-parent⁵⁶ (they may or may not have parental responsibility for the child).
- someone who was previously in a cohabiting relationship with the child's parent and whose relationship with the child was like that of a child of the family.
- a person with a prior connection to the child who does not otherwise fall within one of the other categories above (for example, a teacher, youth worker, childminder or former foster carer).

Informal kinship care arrangement - When a close family member or friend looks after a child for a temporary or permanent amount of time. This arrangement is agreed privately with the parents and parental responsibility for the child remains with the birth parents. An informal kinship care arrangement is made between the child's parents (or someone else who has parental responsibility for them) and the relative who is looking after them. They are not "looked after" by the local authority. Parents can delegate day-to-day decision making to the kinship carer but will have to consent to major decisions such as (non-emergency) medical treatment, schooling and travel abroad. Parents can decide to end the arrangement at any time and without notice. Sometimes there is not a clear agreement – for example, a parent may have left the child with relatives and failed to return for them.

Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework - The framework for inspecting local authority children's services.

Kinship care - A broad term that refers to any situation in which a child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent for a significant amount of time. The arrangement may be temporary or long term (please see page 44 for a full definition).

Kinship family - A family that includes a child living in kinship care, that could be formal or informal.

Law Commission - The statutory independent body created by the Law Commissions

⁵⁵Adopted from the terminology used in the Children Act 1989

⁵⁶ A step-parent means a person who is married to, or in a civil partnership with, a parent who has parental responsibility for the child

Act 1965 to keep the law of England and Wales under review and to recommend reform where it is needed.

Looked after child - A child is looked after by a local authority if they are provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours (section 20 Children Act 1989) or are subject to a care order (defined in section 22(1) Children Act 1989).

“Major role” of the local authority - As established in the case of London Borough of Southwark v D [2007]⁵⁷, where the local authority has a major role, the arrangement will not be a private family arrangement, it will be kinship foster care under section 20 Children Act 1989.

If children’s services are instead simply assisting in arranging informal family care, then they must be explicit with those involved about that.

This includes giving clear information about who will be financially responsible for the child. Only on receipt of such information can a potential kinship foster carer give informed consent to accept the child on an informal family care arrangement instead.

Ofsted - The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills, who inspect services providing education and skills, and inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people.

Parent - the definition of parent includes:

- ‘Any birth parent, with or without parental responsibility for the child’, ‘Any step-parent, with or without parental responsibility for the child, who is in a subsisting relationship with the birth parent’.
- Any adoptive parent.
- Any parent by virtue of section 42 or section 43 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, whether or not they have parental responsibility for the child.
- Any parent by virtue of section 42 or section 43 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, whether or not they have parental responsibility for the child.

Peer support groups - Groups for kinship carers to connect with one another.

Pre-proceedings - Pre-proceedings is the stage where children’s services consider what should happen before the initiation of public law proceedings under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 to apply for a care or supervision order. Pre-proceedings is the last opportunity for parents to make improvements to their parenting before care proceedings are issued.

⁵⁷ London Borough of Southwark v D [2007] EWCA Civ 182

Previously looked after child - Previously looked-after children are those who:

- are no longer looked after by a local authority in England and Wales (as defined by the Children Act 1989 or Part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014). An 'eligible' child is a child who is looked-after, aged 16 or 17 and has been looked after by a local authority for a period of 13 weeks or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, which began after they reached 14 and ended after they reached 16 because they are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order; or
- were adopted from 'state care' outside England and Wales. 'State care' is care provided by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other organisation whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

Private fostering arrangements - For the purposes of the kinship care definition, the term private fostering arrangement includes only people/individuals. It does not apply to organisations or bodies.

"Raised in the care of" /" Raising a child" - Our definition of kinship care requires a child to be with the carer on an ongoing basis. This may be a short, medium, longer term or permanent arrangement. This can include kinship carers raising children as part of a shared care arrangement.

Special Guardianship Order - A Special Guardianship Order is a private law order (under section 14A Children Act 1989) appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian'.

Virtual School Head - Virtual School Heads are responsible for promoting the educational achievement of children who are looked after by their local authority and the educational achievement of previously looked after children who live in their local authority area.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (Working Together) - Working Together to Safeguard Children is the statutory guidance that sets out expectations for the system that provides help, support and protection for children and their families, giving practitioners clarity about what is required of them individually and how they need to work in partnership with each other to deliver effective services. Working Together applies at every level from senior leaders to those in direct practice with families and across all agencies and organisations that come into contact with children.



Department
for Education

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