



Department
for Education

Improving the Kinship Local Offer and Approach to Kinship Care

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Foreword: National Kinship Care Ambassador



For many families, kinship care begins during times of disruption, grief, and uncertainty. In these moments, family and friends step forward to provide children with love and stability. As National Kinship Care Ambassador, I have met children and young people, parents, carers, local authorities, and voluntary and community organisations across the country. Their commitment to doing what is best for every child was evident, as was their determination to improve a system not originally designed for kinship families¹.

In our conversations, children and young people described the need for clarity, stability and the opportunity to influence decisions about their lives. Kinship carers spoke about assuming responsibility overnight, rearranging work, housing and finances to provide stability while navigating assessments and processes that were often unclear. Parents spoke about the challenge of maintaining connection with their child and wider family network trying to demonstrate progress in complex circumstances, and of wanting to be supported to remain part of their child's life.

These engagements reinforced a key insight: **kinship care is not solely a decision about where a child should live, it is a whole-family transition that requires a coordinated, whole-system support.**

Local authorities are navigating this complexity within systems largely designed around fostering and adoption. Kinship care sits alongside these pathways but is not consistently understood as its own practice domain. Where local authorities positioned kinship care within early help or family support structures, families experienced more coordinated, preventative and proportionate responses. This report will highlight that kinship pathways and expertise tend to be positioned within permanence or fostering functions: this raises important questions about the extent to which kinship care is understood and considered as a mechanism to support families much earlier in our systems, such as family help.

However, it is important to recognise the balance between extending our focus on kinship care and respecting the boundary between state interest and private family life. While systematic identification of family networks can help children access support, we must also acknowledge

¹ For the purpose of this report, "kinship families" includes children, their kinship carers, parents, and wider family and friends who might be considered part of the family network.

that increased scrutiny may deter some families from stepping forward or seeking help. This tension deserves to be named and explored, as finding the right balance is critical to building trust and encouraging support from and within family networks.

With the wider children's social care reform programme, there is a real opportunity for change for kinship families. Through the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme, backed by a total of £2.4b in funding over this Spending Review period, the government is giving families and children access to better local support services to break the cycle of late intervention and help more children and families to stay safely together. Multi-disciplinary family help teams will operate in the heart of communities, providing access to a range of services to meet the needs of children and their families, with dedicated lead practitioners building strong relationships to support sustainable change. The Family Network Pilot, together with the FFP programme, aims to strengthen the use of family networks by identifying and involving them earlier in decision-making, and by, providing practical and financial support through family network support packages to help keep children safe at home.

The government has announced the Kinship Zones pilot, which will primarily test the impact of providing a weekly financial allowance to kinship carers in a number of local authorities. I will be working with participating local authorities to develop their delivery plans for the pilot, including how they could repurpose any existing expenditure on allowances towards support for family networks and to develop their kinship local offer. Kinship Zones will bring together efforts to provide clear information, early help and consistent support for kinship families. The pilot will help identify the types of support that make the biggest difference for these families, ensuring future decisions are based on strong evidence. Together, these initiatives aim to deliver tangible benefits for the families who most need support.

This year also brings significant opportunities to learn more about the needs and experiences of kinship children and young people. Firstly, the Department for Education is planning to add kinship to the school census: in time this will provide us with better data on the number of children in kinship care, as well as provide a useful mechanism for schools to get to know their kinship children better. Secondly, I have created the Department's first Kinship Children and Young People Board, which reports to my National Kinship Board. Finally, I am launching national research into the experiences of kinship children and young people; this will be published late summer.

As for the kinship local offer itself, the requirement, through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, for every local authority to publish their kinship local offer represents a significant opportunity. A documented offer will not solve every challenge, but it will create transparency for families and accountability for systems. It also creates the conditions for a shift in practice:

from reactive responses to proactive, whole-family support, an expectation clearly set out in the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#).

This report does not prescribe a single model. Instead, it highlights the characteristics of promising practice and the considerations needed to design kinship support that is coherent and deliverable. It also identifies system gaps, including variability in safeguarding oversight, the lack of visibility for informal kinship families, and children's limited involvement in planning and review.

Kinship care succeeds where it is seen as a crucial part of the wider CSC reform, and the whole system is aligned to support it. It should be recognised as:

- a think-family response that keeps children central
- a family support intervention that addresses more than just the long-term plan for a child's upbringing (also known as a permanence option); one which also considers temporary and short-term arrangements that can provide stability and support during times of need, and considers the potential opportunity for reunification
- a shared responsibility across the multi-agency network

In 2026, I will publish national kinship standards to shape how kinship care is understood and delivered across the country. Positioned within the Kinship Care Statutory Guidance, these standards will set out the core values, expectations and principles that should underpin the approach to kinship care and the kinship local offer in all contexts. While they may not remove the natural variation in the types of support or services that local areas provide, the standards will offer a consistent and measurable framework to guide practice, inform quality assurance, and support national oversight.

The purpose is to strengthen the shared understanding of what good kinship care looks like and provide clarity for children, families and practitioners about the level of quality they should expect across all aspects of kinship care.

Kinship care keeps children and young people connected to the people in their family network. Our systems must make that possible consistently, confidently and without unnecessary barriers.

Jahnine Davis

National Kinship Care Ambassador

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Executive Summary

This report summarises learning generated from September 2024 onwards through engagement with kinship carers, parents, children and young people, 12 local authorities, 10 voluntary and community sector organisations, the ADCS and the National Association of Virtual School Heads to inform the development of kinship local offers. It outlines key themes and considerations that stakeholders identified as relevant when designing a kinship local offer that is clear, accessible, and aligned with existing local systems.

Local authorities currently determine what support is provided to kinship families and how this is communicated. Whilst the [Kinship Care Statutory Guidance](#) sets out expectations for what kinship local offers should include, support differs between areas in terms of scope, eligibility, and visibility. Informal kinship families, who account for a substantial proportion of kinship arrangements and are more likely to be from a minoritised ethnic background, are rarely systematically identified and may be outside existing support pathways, as reported in Foundations' 2023 report.²

The introduction of the statutory duty to publish a kinship local offer represents an opportunity to increase transparency and support consistency in access to information. Engagement activity highlighted several recurring themes across local areas:

- **Awareness and accessibility:** Families do not always know what support is available or recognise themselves as “kinship families.” Communication approaches that rely solely on digital channels may not reach all carers, with three fifths of children living in kinship care with at least one grandparent³; some local areas have developed printed materials to support accessibility.
- **Variation in scope and eligibility:** In some areas, access to support is linked to legal status, such as whether a kinship carer has a Child Arrangements Order (CAO) or Special Guardianship Order (SGO), rather than assessed need. This can result in kinship children living in the same household receiving differing levels of support.
- **Visibility of informal kinship care:** Informal kinship arrangements are often not routinely identified within local authority systems, limiting opportunities for early help and proportionate support.

² Foundations, 2023: <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/understanding-variation-in-support-for-kinship-carers-report-1.pdf>

³ [Kinship care in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

- **Clarity of responsibility across agencies:** Kinship support may be perceived as the responsibility of children’s social care alone, despite the need for involvement across education, health, housing and wider partnership structures.
- **Safeguarding expectations:** There is variation in how safeguarding roles and responsibilities are communicated to families, particularly where legal permanence orders are granted.

Stakeholders also reflected on recent sector developments designed to support improved practice. The [Foundations Practice Guide \(2024\)](#), while not specifying the content of a kinship local offer, summarises the best available evidence supporting the design and commissioning of services, which point to some of the themes below:

- providing support for kinship carers that takes their specific needs and strengths into account
- one-to-one relationships at the heart of support for kinship families
- clear communication on support families is entitled to and active work from local authorities to address barriers to accessing support.

The insights from this report can be used in tandem with the Practice Guide to support decision-making.

Promising practice was observed across different aspects of kinship support, such as early help integration, proactive identification of informal kinship arrangements, co-production with families, or clear communication approaches. Taken together, these examples indicate that effective kinship local offers reflect local context while sharing common characteristics: accessibility, clarity, proportionality and alignment with the wider children’s services system.

The report concludes with insights for implementation, setting out the elements stakeholders consistently described as important to kinship local offer development and delivery. These insights are intended to support local authorities to design kinship local offers that are transparent, equitable and responsive to the needs of kinship families.

Purpose and audience

The report is intended to support:

- local authorities as they design and publish their kinship local offer,
- partner agencies involved in supporting children and families,
- national policy teams overseeing kinship care reform.

The report does not propose a single model for the kinship local offer. Instead, it identifies features, approaches and considerations that came through consistently as important to developing a kinship local offer that is clear, accessible and aligned with existing family help and children's services pathways.

Introduction

Kinship care describes arrangements in which children and young people who cannot live with their parents are cared for by members of their wider family or by family friends. These arrangements vary. Some are formal, where carers acquire a legal status such as a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), Child Arrangements Order (CAO) or approval as a connected persons/family and friends/kinship foster carer. Others are informal, where families make private decisions about who will care for the child without involvement from the local authority (LA). Some private fostering arrangements, where a child under the age of sixteen is cared for and provided with accommodation by someone other than their parent, someone with parental responsibility, or a relative in their own home for 28 days or more, can also be described as informal kinship arrangements.

In 2021, there were more than 130,000 children living in kinship arrangements in England⁴. DfE estimate there were 12,500 children in family and friends foster care placements and 46,000 previously looked after children living in kinship care on a permanence order, on census day 2021.⁵ The remaining 74,000 children, over half of the kinship population, are thought to be mostly informal arrangements who are largely hidden from the view of the state.⁶ Kinship's 2021 survey of kinship carers found that 54% of respondents reported children were unable to live with their parents due to parental drug or alcohol misuse, although other reasons include bereavement, imprisonment, parental abuse or neglect and parental ill-health.⁷ As many as one in two placements are arranged without notice as a result of an emergency.⁸

Evidence indicates that kinship arrangements have greater stability than mainstream foster care and support positive long-term outcomes for children. Kinship care can also reduce the need for children to enter formal care when support is provided early and proportionately. However, the support available to kinship families varies across local areas. In the absence of national minimum expectations, Local authorities currently decide what to include within their support offer and how it is communicated. This has resulted in variation in the type, level and accessibility of support.⁹ Informal kinship arrangements, the largest proportion of kinship care, often have limited visibility to services and may not be included in local support frameworks.

Through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, the Department for Education is seeking to create a requirement for local authorities to publish a kinship local offer; this aims to improve transparency, ensure that information is accessible to families, and enable greater consistency in support across England.

⁴ [Kinship care in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#). 130,000 includes children in kinship care in households of 6 and more. Does not include arrangements where the kinship carer is not a family member.

⁵ See Annex C: Methodology for kinship population estimates

⁶ See Annex C: Methodology for kinship population estimates

⁷ Kinship, 2021, [Kinship-State-of-the-Nation-2021-FINAL-1.pdf](#)

⁸ Grandparents Plus, 2019, [State of the nation survey 2019.pdf](#)

⁹ Foundations, 2023, <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/understanding-variation-in-support-for-kinship-carers-report-1.pdf>

To help local authorities reflect on their existing kinship local offers in anticipation of the Bill being enacted, this report brings together insight from virtual meetings, in-person visits, a roundtable, and focus groups with:

- children and young people with lived experience of kinship care
- kinship carers and parents
- 12 local authorities across the country
- representatives from 10 key voluntary and community sector organisations; and sector partners, and
- the ADCS and National Association of Virtual School Heads.

It also reflects learning from recent sector activity, including insights from engagement events and roadshows held with local authorities over 2024–25.

The Kinship Landscape

Kinship care enables children to remain within their family networks when they cannot live with their parents. It preserves identity, relationships and continuity, factors consistently linked to improved long-term outcomes across employment, housing and health. A longitudinal study by UCL found that 69% of adults who experienced kinship care were in employment, compared to 59% and 48% for those with a history of fostering and residential care.¹⁰ Yet, despite its significance, kinship care has historically operated at the intersection of several systems without a single point of ownership. Support has too often depended on individual professional decisions rather than clear pathways and entitlements.

While kinship care arrangements have been a hugely important part of the care system and the reality of family life for decades and beyond, it is only in very recent years that a more concerted effort has been made to improve the system for kinship children and families in national policy. As the system has developed, kinship care policy evolved to fit within an existing system historically designed for fostering and adoption rather than as a system in its own right that has some areas of overlap with these policies, but also its own distinct requirements. As a result, national policy, data collection and funding arrangements have tended to focus on those areas where children are formally looked after. Unlike fostering or adoption, where there are some statutory requirements and frameworks for support to adoptive and foster families, there is currently no statutory definition of what a kinship local offer must include; the [Kinship Care Statutory Guidance](#) sets out examples of services that local authorities may offer rather than creating a requirement to do so. This has resulted in considerable variation across the country in the type and level of support available to kinship families.

Local authorities currently have flexibility to determine their own kinship support offers. This flexibility is important as it allows local authorities to design services that reflect local needs, demographics and demand. For example, recent analysis by Foundations found that the proportion of CYP placed in kinship foster care ranges from 4% to 39% across local authorities.¹¹ However, without statutory expectations, this flexibility can lead to significant variation between neighbouring areas, contributing to what stakeholders describe as a “postcode lottery of support”.

The introduction of a statutory duty through the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill provides the opportunity for a step change. For the first time, local authorities will be required to publish

¹⁰ Sacker A 2021: [The-lifelong-health-and-wellbeing-trajectories-of-people-who-have-been-in-care.pdf](#)

¹¹ https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/WWCSC_kinship_care_report_FINAL_accessible-v2-Feb-2024.pdf

a kinship local offer, which should ensure transparency for families and enable greater consistency nationally. The intention is not to prescribe a uniform model, but to provide a clear baseline of expectations so that all kinship families understand what support is available to them, regardless of where they live or their legal arrangement.

This report aims to support local authorities to design kinship local offers that are consistent, transparent and centred on the needs and experiences of children, young people and their families.

Promising Practice and Challenges in the Kinship Space

This section explores elements of promising practice and current challenges in the kinship space, based on our engagement with stakeholders. It also provides prompts to support the development of robust local kinship offers

Local authorities highlighted that kinship reform is being introduced into pressurised systems; factors such as limited capacity, workforce instability, and reform programmes that are seen as competing are affecting both the pace and ambition of delivering local kinship offers.

In addition, activity has focused primarily on the needs of kinship carers, including the financial impact of assuming care unexpectedly, access to training and support, and addressing the isolation many carers experience. Engagement with local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and experts by experience has highlighted a broader set of systemic challenges that affect both kinship families and the services supporting them.

This engagement has also highlighted a number of approaches currently being used across local areas that are relevant to the development of the kinship local offer. These approaches illustrate different ways in which support for kinship families is being organised and communicated within existing systems. These vary by local context and organisational structure, with no area demonstrating all elements concurrently.

Developing and communicating kinship local offers

Across engagement, local authorities recognised that aspects of kinship support already exist within services. However, these were not always clearly described, routinely communicated across departments and partner agencies, or consistently known about by families themselves. In several areas, development of the kinship local offer was being led primarily within kinship, fostering or permanence teams. It was not always clear how awareness or responsibility extended to early help, education, housing, health or wider partners.

Early thinking about the kinship local offer primarily focused on carers, particularly SGOs. This reflected where most existing activity and post-order support currently sit, rather than the breadth of kinship arrangements in practice. It was therefore necessary to reiterate that **a kinship local offer must reflect all kinship arrangements including informal care, CAOs, SGOs and connected persons fostering rather than primarily those subject to SGOs.**

“I had a look at our local authority's website yesterday. Kinship care isn't even on the A-Z of our local authority. You have to put in special guardian. You eventually find a bit about special guardianship. And it's mixed in with foster carers and adopters. And it then says, ‘See the special guardianship leaflet’, which there isn't a link to. You then type into the Council website ‘special guardianship leaflet’ and it takes you back to the website you were just looking on. So, you know, actually finding the local offer, I think, is the first challenge we all face.” - *Kinship Carer*

Local areas highlighted that publishing information about the kinship local offer does not guarantee that families will be aware of it. Approaches described included testing the accessibility of written information with kinship families, removing technical language and providing information in different formats. Some authorities develop printed materials for distribution through Family Hubs, schools, health settings and other community venues, recognising that some kinship carers may not access online information or use the term “kinship” to describe their situation.

Communication that is accessible, clear, and available in multiple formats supports the visibility and usability of the kinship local offer.

Language and Cultural Understanding

A consistent challenge identified across local areas was the lack of a shared and widely understood definition of *kinship care*. The term is not universally recognised by families or professionals in partner agencies. Some families do not identify as kinship carers and therefore do not seek support. Stakeholders noted that terminology used in policy and practice, such as *kinship carer* or *birth parent* does not always align with how families describe their relationships.

Local authorities reported that in some communities, including those from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, family care arrangements are understood as part of wider collective responsibility and are not commonly distinguished using specific terms. In these contexts, caregiving may be shared across extended family or community networks, and the term *kinship* may not be widely used in certain languages, which can affect how visible the Kinship local offer is to families.

Stakeholders reflected that technical or unfamiliar terminology may create barriers to engagement and may lead to support only being accessed when needs escalate. Some local authorities are testing communication approaches that describe situations rather than relying on the term *kinship*, such as: “*Has a child in your family come to live with you unexpectedly or*

on a full-time basis?” This could enable families to recognise their circumstances without needing to understand or use specific terminology.

Clear and accessible language may support recognition of kinship arrangements and improve access to information about support through the Kinship local offer.

Developing Holistic and Whole-Family Support

Some local authorities are developing approaches that reflect the interconnected needs of the child, the kinship carer, and, where appropriate, the parent. Support described includes emotional and practical support for carers, therapeutic input for children, relationship-based or mediation support between carers and parents, and pathways for parents to remain appropriately involved. These approaches align with the expectations set out in the CSC National Framework regarding whole-family and relational working.

Local authorities demonstrated varying approaches to the frequency and purpose of reviews for children and their families, some conducted annual reviews, while others only acted when carers requested them. Carers, particularly those with (SGOs), reported that the support plans established when a child first moved into their care were rarely revisited or updated. As a result, carers felt their own needs, including access to financial support were often unmet, impacting the children they care for as a consequence. It was observed that opportunities to explore the potential for reunification was reduced due to infrequent review points,

In some areas, reunification is starting to be considered within planning, rather than only as a later-stage option. Local authorities described using review points to assess whether circumstances had changed and whether reunification was now appropriate to consider. Relational or therapeutic approaches were used to support communication between carers and parents and to maintain clarity around expectations. This reflects recognition that kinship care exists within ongoing family relationships and that planning may need to adapt over time.

How services consider pre-birth assessments and the first 1,001 days of a child’s life was identified as an important factor in determining how parents, particularly those whose child is entering a kinship arrangement, are supported by agencies and the wider family.¹²

Local authorities should consider whether their kinship local offer incorporates ongoing review and signposting rather than being a single point-in-time intervention.

¹² Foundations, [Parenting Through Adversity Practice Guide](#)

Local examples (illustrative and anonymised):

- **Local Authority 1** reported that its Connecting Families team works with families before legal orders are made, with a focus on maintaining family relationships and considering reunification where appropriate. The team uses family network meetings to review plans and provides access to programmes supporting parents where their children move into kinship arrangements. Peer support groups were routinely offered (evidence in Foundations' Practice Guide suggests that peer support can improve kinship carers' emotional health and wellbeing).
- **Local Authority 2** described a model offering emotional and practical support to kinship carers, training on kinship-related issues, and access to in-house therapeutic support for children and carers. Relationship-building, including consideration of contact and reunification, is embedded within planning.
- **Local Authority 3** reported that it remains involved with families from assessment through to post-order support. The local authority described providing assistance with legal processes and access to multi-disciplinary support, including involvement from mental health services and the Virtual School Head.

These examples show how whole-family support can be reflected within a kinship offer, while allowing for variation in local systems and structures.

Family Group Decision Making

The Department for Education will place a duty on local authorities to make the offer of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meeting at the pre-proceedings stage to parents, or those with parental responsibility for the child through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill where that is in the child's best interests. This is to ensure that more families are empowered to find their own solutions. Guidance will be published to support local authorities with the implementation of this duty.

We have good evidence of the impact in avoiding care when family group conferencing (a model of FGDM) is used at the pre-proceedings stage. Several areas reported using FGDM earlier and at multiple points to plan, review progress and support family involvement in decision-making.

Using FGDM in this way provides a structured mechanism for clarifying expectations, planning support, and considering what may be required to sustain kinship care or, where appropriate,

to explore reunification. This approach aligns with whole-family planning and transparency, which may support the clear articulation of roles and support pathways within the kinship local offer.

Local authorities should assess whether FGDM is being used at the earliest opportunity and to its greatest effect.

Children and Young People's Experiences

Whilst the voices and experiences of children and young people in kinship care are increasingly central to policy discussions, including those relating to the kinship local offer, it appeared that children's views had not been consistently sought or used to shape planning, review or support. This may be because, to date, offers have tended to centre on the needs of kinship carers, specifically those with legal orders, and so consultation of these groups has taken precedence.

While some data exists on educational outcomes, there is limited understanding of children and young people's emotional wellbeing, identity, family relationships and day-to-day experience of kinship care. This is particularly the case for those living in informal arrangements, who may have no ongoing professional oversight.

Children and young people may experience different levels of support within the same household. Families described situations in which support was determined by legal order rather than need, for example, where a child subject to a Special Guardianship Order has access to services that are not available to a sibling living informally with a relative. This variation can create uncertainty and may influence how children understand their circumstances.

"I've got one [kinship child] who was looked after previously, one that wasn't and the oldest one... It's really important that...every child, where there's a need [gets] the same support, [that the system] recognises...the young people's experiences, and supports them rather than depending on what order they're [under]...The interesting thing for me is I'm now a foster carer for my younger [kinship child], who's one...The support is just completely different and there's so much more support and I think it's really unfair in that all the statistics show that children are better off being with family." - *Kinship Carer*

Local authorities should consider how to ensure siblings living in the same kinship household or elsewhere receive the right support, regardless of their legal order, or

whether clarity over differences in support plans is required, ensuring children, their kinship carers, and their parents understand.

While some emerging kinship local offers describe engagement with carers, this was not reflected in relation to children and young people. Their perspectives are not routinely incorporated into the design of the kinship local offer or into decisions about support.

"I feel misunderstood." - Young Person who is only attending school two days each week

"I'm tired of repeating my story." - Young Person who shared frustration of having to tell different professional networks about their experience

"I'm upset by changes in my life." - Young Person moving away and worried about losing important relationships

"It's important that we understand what a kinship offer is and it's meaningful to us." - Young Person

Ensuring that children and young people have appropriate opportunities to express their views, and that these views inform support, may help local authorities design kinship local offers that reflect children's needs and experiences directly.

This aligns with the expectations set out in the *Children's Social Care National Framework*, which emphasises the importance of children and young people being heard and actively involved in decisions that affect their lives.

Children and young people's needs will vary, with some having developmental needs alongside experiences of trauma. Some local authorities offered carers parenting courses to help them better understand the complex experiences and behaviours the children in their care may exhibit from a trauma-informed perspective.

Supporting Informal Kinship Families

In some informal kinship families, children live with relatives or family friends for practical reasons, such as a parent's work-related travel, and these arrangements often remain private and outside statutory processes. However, a proportion of children in informal kinship care might otherwise be in care but have not come to the attention of local authorities or other services; this section focuses on those children and families.

Informal kinship care is more prevalent among Black, Asian and other minoritised ethnic families, and research highlights why these arrangements can be harder to identify and support: cultural stigma around seeking help; mistrust of statutory services; experiences of racism; assumptions by professionals about extended family support. Additional barriers for some families include insecure immigration status and “no recourse to public funds” (NRPF), which increase risks of poverty, housing instability and reluctance to engage with services. Learning from the work of organisations such as Families in Harmony¹³ and the report [Raised by Relatives](#)¹⁴ underlines these themes: carers reported feeling judged, encountering cultural insensitivity, and not being offered help when requested.

There was limited knowledge of private fostering arrangements where they intersected with informal kinship arrangements. Few local authorities considered this group in the development of their local offers and data.

Several local authorities described actions to increase visibility and support for informal kinship arrangements (children cared for by relatives or friends without a legal order). Although such arrangements are not always known to services, authorities are beginning to identify families through Early Help and Family Hubs, working with schools, health partners and the voluntary and community sector.

Support described includes access to advice, discretionary financial assistance, emotional or therapeutic support, and signposting into wider services. These approaches acknowledge that informal kinship carers assume responsibilities comparable to those of formal carers but typically do not have equivalent access to support.

Increasing visibility of informal kinship arrangements helps ensure that the kinship local offer reflects the full scope of families who may require information or assistance.

Complex Family Relationships

Kinship care takes place within existing family relationships, which can be complex, emotionally charged and subject to change over time. Local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations reported that kinship carers often assume multiple roles simultaneously: caring for the child on a day-to-day basis while maintaining ongoing relationships with the child’s parents, who may themselves require support.

Kinship carers and parents described uncertainty about expectations relating to contact, decision-making and communication. In some situations, kinship carers are required to

¹³ <https://familiesinharmony.org.uk/>

¹⁴ Kinship 2024, Raised by Relatives

manage contact arrangements without structured support or agreed parameters, and parents may be unsure about their role once legal permanence has been established. Both groups expressed that, without clarity, conversations about contact and safeguarding can be difficult to navigate.

“My relationship with the special guardianship is pretty good. I think I'm really lucky, but I still don't feel like I have the authority to assert myself around certain things that I have concerns about with my child. I don't know how involved I'm allowed to be with the school. Scared to push too hard because that might annoy her. And if it does, I don't see my daughter.” - *Parent*

Family dynamics can also shift over time. New relationships, changing parental circumstances or wider family involvement may alter what support is required. In some situations, siblings may be living in different households under different legal arrangements, and their relationships are not always considered within planning or review processes.

“Yeah, I think also something that definitely should be offered in a in a local offer is what happens with amongst the siblings because as well as parents getting left out, you know you also have the siblings that get left out. Like I said, I've got two little ones that live at home with me. However, because of the family dynamics and break up that happen, I have a daughter that doesn't feel very included with her other siblings. And how do I navigate that when I have such a complexity? We had a death in the family and that was when the first time my children were all brought together... And it's like death seems to be the thing that brings my children together. And there's no support around. OK, actually...you may have said that I'm not capable of looking after my child, but what happens to the siblings and how is that managed?” - *Parent*

Greater clarity around expectations such as roles, contact arrangements, and access to support like mediation or facilitated conversations, may help families navigate the relational aspects of kinship care with more confidence. This may be particularly beneficial for informal kinship care arrangements where the courts have not been involved.

Incorporating consideration of wider family relationships into planning, including through the development of the Kinship local offer, aligns with the emphasis in the *Children's Social Care National Framework* on working with the whole family system.

Approaches to Safeguarding in Kinship Contexts

Safeguarding did not consistently feature in local authority discussions about kinship care or in the development of kinship local offer. This absence may reflect an assumption that kinship care is inherently safer, or that safeguarding is sufficiently addressed through the legal order process. While kinship arrangements often provide stability and love, it is essential that safeguarding remains a core consideration for children's services to ensure children's safety and wellbeing. As noted in the [2025 Family Routes study](#), concerns identified by social workers prior to children re-entering care from a special guardianship order related to harms such as neglect, drug and alcohol misuse and domestic abuse.

The focus on post-order safeguarding concerns in this section is not intended to place SGOs under scrutiny but rather reflects the information local authorities provided: support overwhelmingly focused on SGO arrangements in comparison to others, which received less consideration and visibility.

Post-order safeguarding responsibilities

Where safeguarding was explored, it was recognised that kinship arrangements can involve ongoing relationships with adults where safeguarding concerns have previously been identified. However, there was variation in how responsibility for safeguarding is understood once a legal permanence order is granted.

Kinship carers described becoming responsible for:

- managing contact,
- monitoring potential harm either to themselves or the children they care for, and
- making safeguarding decisions,

without ongoing professional involvement or clear routes back into support. Parents also described uncertainty about expectations and boundaries post-order.

“But like, sometimes...I don't feel like [kinship carers'] responsibility, is fully discussed with them, or disclosed to the parents.

And sometimes kinship carers, maybe as parents, you know my parent or the parent of another person who has substance use issues or whatever it is, they've parented that child like they've got their own issues. They may have issues with alcohol; they may have all [...] these other things that are not looked at as a safeguarding thing because it's like we're so desperate to put the child somewhere. This is a better solution than adoption, which of course we don't want, you know, but that's not discussed. And I think that's another safeguarding issue.” - *Parent*

Once permanence orders such as SGOs are granted, professional oversight generally reduces or ends, and kinship households may no longer be visible to services unless difficulties escalate. This reduction in oversight was reported even when there had previously been high levels of involvement.

“The other key thing for us was that we had supported parental contact in a secure unit. [...] We were told that you can't do it, can't do weekends, can't do this. But when we told them, [...] well, we're not doing [this] anymore. Then they found a way of doing it with me. So really, we're in a good position now, but that's only because [Kinship Carer], mainly; she's got sharp, so sharp, sharp shoulders and strong character, which made it happen. I do worry about the couples and the individuals who haven't got that courage or the facility to be able to do that.” - *Kinship carer*

Some local authorities noted that private fostering arrangements, which may present similar vulnerabilities, are not always consistently identified or monitored. This may pose important questions about safeguarding and assurance that we know where these children live and that they are safe and well.

Safeguarding challenges experienced by kinship families

While safeguarding was not raised proactively by local authorities, kinship carers and parents described safeguarding experiences unique to kinship care, including:

- proximity to previous sources of harm due to existing family networks,
- conflict or tension relating to contact,
- kinship carers experiencing threats, coercion or domestic abuse from a parent or family member.

The [Family Routes](#) study identified safeguarding concerns as a factor associated with kinship placement breakdown¹⁵. While the research does not detail the full context of those concerns, it highlights the need for clarity and support where safeguarding remains relevant beyond the point of permanence.

Safeguarding Through Relationships

Some local authorities described safeguarding approaches that balance procedural requirements with relational engagement and proportionality. Practitioners emphasised that kinship arrangements can involve ongoing contact with family members and that safeguarding decisions may therefore require consideration of relationships, family dynamics and context.

These approaches recognise the need for clarity regarding expectations and communication within the kinship local offer.

Kinship arrangements may require a distinct approach to safeguarding considering the complexity kinship families have to navigate.

Regulatory Barriers

Local authorities described that existing regulatory processes could create challenges when considering kinship arrangements. These barriers relate to how regulation is interpreted and applied, rather than concerns regarding kinship care itself. Safeguarding was consistently stated as the primary consideration in decision-making.

The **Kinship Care Statutory Guidance** and fostering regulations already allow for flexibility and proportionality when assessing connected persons under Regulation 24. However, local authorities reported variability in confidence and interpretation. Three themes were identified:

- 1. Flexibility within guidance is not always utilised**

Some local authorities reported uncertainty about how far discretion can be applied in kinship cases. Although guidance permits proportionate assessment, processes were often experienced as aligned to mainstream fostering standards.

- 2. Confidence to exercise professional judgement**

Practitioners described hesitancy to apply discretion where indicators of potential harm are present but manageable, particularly when decisions may later be scrutinised. This sometimes resulted in procedural compliance taking precedence over proportional assessment.

¹⁵ Family Routes longitudinal study, 2025: [Family Routes: children who returned to care - GOV.UK](#)

3. Cultural change is still developing

Despite national messaging encouraging flexibility, local authorities reported that internal culture, including fostering panel expectations, takes time to adjust.

Local authorities described situations where fostering panels did not approve kinship carers, despite professional agreement that the placement was appropriate and safe. In these cases, children remained in unapproved arrangements while processes continued, not because of concerns regarding the carers' suitability, but because regulatory steps could not be concluded within the required timeframe.

Where kinship arrangements involve more than one local area, differing interpretations of regulation can create uncertainty about which authority holds responsibility for assessment, oversight and support.

Overall, local authorities expressed that safeguarding remains the primary driver for decision-making, and that the challenge relates not to regulation itself, but to confidence and consistency in applying *proportionate* processes where kinship carers are assessed as suitable.

Clear information about pathways, expectations and responsibilities may help families understand processes and reduce uncertainty. Local authorities also noted that transparency about available support, including during assessment and post-order, could help set realistic expectations and minimise confusion where regulatory steps take time.

Partnership Working

Multi-agency involvement in kinship care varied across local areas. While most local authorities recognised that support for kinship families requires contributions from education, health, housing, voluntary and community sector, and faith-based organisations, this was not always evident in local arrangements or in the development of the kinship local offer.

Local authorities recognised the importance of working with voluntary and community sector and faith-based organisations in particular for building relationships with kinship families, especially those who may feel unable to access services or who may not be aware of the support available to them.

Local authorities reported that awareness of kinship care outside children's social care is inconsistent. In several areas, other services including schools, health professionals and Family Hubs were not routinely informed that a child was living in a kinship arrangement and did not always recognise their role in supporting the family.

In some local areas, the development of the kinship local offer was held primarily within a single team (usually the kinship, permanence or fostering service). In these areas, support was often delivered through commissioned provision from specialist charities and national organisations rather than in-house. Commissioning was not an issue in itself; rather, it created two interrelated challenges:

- **over-reliance on specialist organisations (e.g., charities)** to provide support to kinship families, where local authorities were not always able to articulate how external expertise and learning were being captured, embedded back into local authority practice, and shared consistently across teams to strengthen internal capability.
- **limited internal ownership across the local authority**, where not all services understood the purpose or relevance of the kinship local offer, potentially weakening local authorities' overall oversight and accountability for the support offer.

Some local authorities acknowledged that they had not yet considered how front-door or family help services identify kinship families consistently. Without systematic identification, kinship families may not access support early, particularly in informal arrangements where they are not already known to statutory services.

Local authorities described challenges that arise when kinship arrangements involve more than one local area. When a child moves to live with relatives in another locality, there is no statutory requirement to notify the receiving authority, which means families may remain unknown to local systems and miss available support.

Some authorities described involving the Virtual School Head in kinship support activities. This included providing guidance to schools on identifying kinship arrangements, offering briefings to designated safeguarding leads and contributing to multi-agency planning. This involvement increases visibility of kinship arrangements within education settings and supports schools to connect families to relevant support.

Where partnership working was more embedded, local areas described deliberate actions such as:

- raising awareness of kinship care across internal departments (including early help and front-door services).
- working with schools and education leads to help identify children in kinship arrangements.
- involving voluntary and community organisations in shaping the local approach, not holding the knowledge on behalf of the local authority.

Across discussions, a recurring theme was that partnership working requires not only willingness from external agencies, but intentional internal coordination within local authorities to ensure kinship care is recognised as a shared responsibility across the system.

Engagement of Virtual School Heads may assist in ensuring that the educational component of the kinship local offer is clearly articulated and understood across local systems.

Integration of Kinship Services Within Local Authority Structures

Where kinship support sits within organisational structures influences the type and timing of help families receive. In many areas, kinship functions are located within permanence or fostering teams, which can mean the focus is on crisis intervention or long-term care planning. This raises important questions about how children and families in informal kinship arrangements can access early help and preventative support, and how professionals across services can be equipped to identify these families and ask the right questions regardless of where kinship expertise is placed.

The positioning of kinship support is therefore critical when considering a local offer. If services are concentrated in permanence teams, families may only come into view at the point of crisis, limiting opportunities for early intervention and holistic support. Aligning kinship functions with wider children's services such as housing, education, health and community provision can reduce the need for families to navigate multiple service boundaries and enable a local offer that reflects whole-system pathways and promotes stability for children.

Local authorities should reflect on how the positioning of their services and kinship support teams within their structures impacts their ability to deliver a holistic kinship local offer.

Summary

Engagement highlighted gaps that prevented local areas from offering a more holistic approach to supporting kinship families or characterised ways in which kinship local offers could go further. These insights also indicate that the value of the kinship local offer lies not only in the published document itself, but in how it prompts:

- shared understanding of kinship care across services,
- alignment of pathways,
- clarity on roles and responsibilities.

The process of developing the kinship local offer can therefore act as a mechanism for strengthening the local system response to kinship care.

Across the examples of promising practice, common characteristics included:

- recognition of the range of kinship arrangements, including informal care,
- alignment with wider Early Help and family support systems,
- use of FGDM at various points throughout a child's journey,
- whole-family and relational approaches,
- accessible communication and clarity about how to access support.

These approaches demonstrate that kinship support can be organised in different ways locally while maintaining clear pathways into information and support through the Kinship local offer.

Developing a Good Kinship Local Offer

The development of kinship local offers is still at an early stage across the country. In developing their kinship local offer, local authorities should consider their approach to supporting kinship families as well as how they use the kinship local offer as a mechanism for making support visible, understandable and accessible.

A kinship local offer can support transparency, improve equity and provide a clear point of accountability within local systems. Therefore, rather than a prescribed template, engagement indicated that, as a minimum, a kinship local offer should clearly set out:

- **scope** — who the offer applies to (including informal kinship families),
- **access** — how families can access help and at what point,
- **support** — what is available locally and which services provide it,
- **responsibility** — how contribution is shared across the system, not held solely by children’s social care,
- **routes back into support** — how families can seek help if circumstances change.

Beyond this, several other themes emerged from engagement with kinship families and sector partners that local areas could begin to consider as underpinning principles for how a kinship local offer could be designed and delivered. These reflect some of the principles in the Foundations Practice Guide, including relationship-based practice, strengths-based support and multi-agency coordination.

The National Kinship Care Ambassador will be developing national kinship standards in 2026, co-produced with children, parents, kinship carers, local authorities and sector partners. The insights summarised below may inform the development of those standards.

An approach to supporting kinship families

Engagement with voluntary and Community Sector organisations, kinship carers, and parents highlighted the belief that kinship local offers must be seen as an approach to supporting kinship families, rather than as a standalone document listing local support services. The following principles were identified as core elements of this approach.

1. Coherence within the Local System

Kinship support may be most effective when embedded within existing early help, family help and support services, and safeguarding pathways, rather than positioned as a separate or specialist function. Where kinship sits within wider system planning, families experience smoother transitions between support and fewer barriers linked to legal status.

2. Co-production with Kinship Families

Local areas described the value of working with kinship carers, parents and (where appropriate) children and young people when shaping the kinship local offer. Co-production helped test accessibility, reduce jargon and ensure the offer addressed real rather than assumed needs.

3. Clear, Accessible and Proportionate Information

Families repeatedly stated that support is only useful if they can *find it, understand it and act on it*. Accessibility related to both language and format. Some carers reported that digital information alone was insufficient, and that printed materials or support via community organisations helped improve reach. Using plain language rather than relying on the word “kinship” alone supported wider recognition of the offer.

4. Continuity Rather Than One-off Intervention

Families described that their needs change over time. Local areas emphasised the importance of structures that allow families to re-enter support when required, rather than limiting the offer to a fixed point such as assessment or legal order.

5. Whole-Family, Strengths-Based Practice

Where kinship support was aligned with strengths-based, relationship-focused practice, children, carers, and parents reported feeling better understood. Practitioners noted the importance of avoiding assumptions about parents or carers and maintaining openness to change.

These emerging principles align with the practice direction within the Children’s Social Care National Framework and with the emphasis within the Foundations Practice Guide on tailored, relational and multi-agency working.

Elements of a Whole-Family Kinship Offer

As aforementioned, engagement highlighted that kinship care works best when support reflects the needs of the *whole family system*, not only the carer. This aligns with the ambition of the national children’s social care reform programme to ensure earlier, relationship-based support that prevents escalation to higher levels of intervention.

Some variation in what is offered between areas is to be expected and is appropriate where it reflects different demographics and service configurations. A meaningful kinship local offer

communicates what exists locally and nationally, how it can be accessed and who is responsible for delivering or coordinating support.

However, while support will vary according to local context and resources, several core elements were also consistently referenced as necessary for a meaningful kinship local offer. These are not standards or requirements. Instead, they reflect recurring ideas raised by local authorities, families and sector partners about what helps make support coherent, accessible and meaningful.

1. Support for Kinship Carers and Parents

Kinship arrangements often involve complex family dynamics. Families described the value of practical guidance and relational support that enables them to navigate changing roles and responsibilities. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of support that is accessible to both kinship carers and parents, including:

- opportunities for facilitated conversations or mediation,
- access to peer support networks and community-based groups,
- emotional or reflective support,
- information on navigating contact and family relationships.

Such support was viewed as helping prevent conflict, reduce isolation and sustain arrangements.

2. Therapeutic and Identity-Focused Support for Children and Carers

Children and young people may experience loss, uncertainty or divided loyalty when moving into kinship care. Some local areas described access to therapeutic services, life-story work and reflective support for carers. Where this was available, children and carers valued the opportunity to understand and make sense of their experiences. Parents supported trauma-informed¹⁶ approaches to practice. In some places, therapeutic support could be provided without the need for a formal diagnosis or meeting the CAMHS threshold.

3. Integrated and Multi-agency Support Around the Family

Kinship care can intersect with issues such as parental mental health, substance misuse, housing insecurity or financial stress. Local areas noted that kinship families can be required to navigate multiple services at once, often without a coordinating professional. A whole-family kinship local offer should make clear:

- how families access early help, family hub and universal services,

¹⁶ [Working definition of trauma-informed practice - GOV.UK](#)

- how specialist services (such as domestic abuse or mental health support) can be accessed,
- who holds responsibility for coordination.

Several areas highlighted that coordination, rather than volume of services, made the biggest difference to family experience.

4. Support for Young People as They Approach Adulthood

Children and young people described the difficulties created by not knowing what support they were entitled to when they turned 18, for example, homelessness, and the impact of having to move into semi-independent living without being emotionally prepared for the change. They also highlighted the potential strain this transition can place on family relationships, whether between the young person and their carer and/or between the young person and their parents, and the difficulties of managing changing expectations, boundaries and contact arrangements at the point of leaving care. This mirrors concerns raised across the wider care-experienced cohort.

Others highlighted how transitions into adulthood can create uncertainty about entitlements within kinship care, where support may depend on looked after or previously looked after status. Carers emphasised that young people should be able to remain in their kinship home where this is in their best interests, and benefit from clear, consistent information about the support available for education, employment, housing and independence. There should also be guidance to help families navigate relationship changes safely and sustain stability through the transition.

“Regarding the support for like 16, 17-year-olds. So ... for most of these children, they have had several million adverse childhood experiences throughout their lifetime. But you know can we not like raise because they only support us until they're 18. So, can we not be supported until they're at least 25? Because some of these children are going to have additional learning needs and they are not going to be able to make them decisions or reach their education goals by 18.” - *Kinship carer*

Some local authorities described arrangements like “staying put,” achieved through local flexibility. Kinship carers highlighted reasons why support that goes into adulthood may be beneficial, including educational needs and preventing young people from “re-entering the system”.

“I think life skills training, pathway planning and a staying put-style arrangement must be made available to kinship youth when they turn 18. I think it's really important because ultimately that would stop them going back into the system if you like. We're finding in my borough is that lots of those young people [leaving care] are having to stay in temporary accommodation, which then has lots of other issues.” - *Kinship carer*

Conclusion

Engagement across local authorities and partner organisations indicates that kinship care is increasingly recognised as a core part of children's social care practice. Some areas are taking active steps to position kinship care within early intervention and whole-family support, rather than solely as a permanence option. Where this was the case, kinship care was understood as part of the broader system that helps children remain safely within their family networks.

However, kinship support was still frequently organised around the kinship carer and around SGOs rather than around the child and wider family system. Support offers were often structured around post-order provision or financial assistance, and less so around sustaining relationships, supporting parents, or recognising the needs of siblings and other family members. In many areas, kinship children were not routinely included in support planning or in the development of the kinship local offer.

The structural location of kinship services within local authorities also shaped family experience. Where kinship was positioned alongside fostering, adoption or permanence functions, families sometimes experienced kinship care as a placement outcome rather than a family support intervention. In these areas, access to early help or community support depended on referral routes or thresholds, and other parts of the local system were not always aware of the breadth of kinship support needed. Conversely, where kinship was positioned within early help or whole-family pathways, oversight was broader, coordination was clearer, and families experienced fewer points of handoff between teams.

Safeguarding and oversight following legal orders remains an area where clarity is still developing. Families described that once legal orders are granted, support can reduce quickly, and expectations regarding ongoing safeguarding responsibilities may not be consistently understood. Some local authorities expressed uncertainty about how to maintain proportionate oversight without recreating statutory involvement.

Across engagement, a consistent theme was that kinship care functions effectively when the system around the family is connected, coordinated and confident in its purpose. The kinship local offer creates a mechanism to make this visible. Its value lies not only in what is written, but in how it prompts local areas to consider:

- how kinship care is understood across their system,
- how families access support when circumstances change,
- how different agencies contribute to sustaining family networks.

In developing their kinship local offers, local authorities and their partner agencies should consider the following:

- Kinship local offers must reflect all kinship arrangements including informal care, CAOs, SGOs and connected persons fostering rather than primarily those subject to SGOs.
- Increasing visibility of informal kinship arrangements helps ensure that the kinship local offer reflects the full scope of families who may require information or assistance.
- Ensuring that children and young people have appropriate opportunities to express their views and that these views inform support may help local authorities design kinship local offers that reflect children's needs and experiences directly.
- Communication that is accessible, clear, and available in multiple formats supports the visibility and usability of the kinship local offer.
- Clear and accessible language may support recognition of kinship arrangements and improve access to information about support through the kinship local offer.
- Local authorities should consider whether their kinship local offer incorporates ongoing review and signposting rather than being a single point-in-time intervention.
- Local authorities should assess whether FGDM is being used at the earliest opportunity and to its greatest effect.
- Local authorities should consider whether to align arrangements for siblings living in the same kinship household or elsewhere, or whether clarity over deliberate differences in arrangements is required, ensuring children, their kinship carers, and their parents understand.
- Kinship arrangements may require a distinct approach to safeguarding considering the complexity kinship families have to navigate.
- Clear information about pathways, expectations and responsibilities may help families understand processes and reduce uncertainty.
- Greater clarity on expectations regarding roles and contact, and access to support such as mediation or facilitated conversations where required, may help families navigate the relational aspects of kinship care more confidently.

- Partnership working requires both willingness from external agencies and intentional internal coordination within local authorities to ensure kinship care is recognised as a shared responsibility across the system.
- Engaging with Virtual Schools can help local areas clearly set out and communicate the educational support available within their kinship local offer. Working closely with Virtual School Heads also supports the identification of children living in kinship care, helping to ensure they receive the right educational guidance and support.
- Local authorities should reflect on how the positioning of their services and kinship support teams within their structures impacts their ability to deliver a holistic kinship local offer.

Kinship care is not simply a legal or placement outcome. It represents a family transition, often taking place at a point of disruption or uncertainty. A clear and coherent local offer can help ensure that families are supported across that transition, and that children remain connected to the people and relationships that matter to them.

Annex A: Glossary

Child protection - Part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.

Early help - Support for children, young people, and families as soon as needs emerge, aiming to prevent problems from escalating into more serious issues, covering universal services (schools, health) and targeted help (parenting groups, debt advice) for various challenges like mental health, behaviour, or family breakdown. It's a voluntary, tiered system, often involving a lead professional coordinating support from various agencies.

Early intervention – See 'early help'.

Family help - Integrated, multi-agency support services (like Family Hubs) offering early, preventative help for families with multiple needs, connecting them to resources for parenting, health, housing, or domestic abuse, to help children thrive and stay together, bridging the gap between universal services and statutory child protection.

Family network - A group of people close to a child made up of relatives and 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 stepparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, godparents, or close family friends.

Kinship care - 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. More details are set out in Annex B.

Pathways - Defined journeys or processes for support, often involving the Children's Social Care National Framework (for overall support). These pathways guide how services respond to different levels of need, from universal support (like health visiting) to specialist safeguarding, ensuring integrated help through agencies like schools, health, and social care, aiming for children to thrive.

Permanence - making a long-term plan for how a child will be cared for which lasts throughout their childhood. There are a range of options for permanence, inside and outside of the care system. Permanence options for children include: returning home to their families; living with kinship carers, including special guardians; living with adoptive families; living with long-term foster carers; or living in residential care. They also include where an existing short-term placement is being made permanent.

Relational practice and support - An approach focused on building trusting, respectful connections to empower individuals, prioritising "doing *with* others" rather than *to* or *for* them and shifting focus from behaviour to the underlying relationships for positive change and improved outcomes. It involves shared understanding, co-created plans, and fostering a sense of belonging, often linked with restorative practices to create safer, more effective systems.

Safeguarding - Defined for the purposes of this guidance as:

- providing help and support to meet the needs of children as soon as problems emerge
- protecting children from maltreatment, whether that is within or outside the home, including online
- preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care

Strengths-based approach - Focuses on a person's abilities, assets, and community networks rather than their deficits, aiming to build independence and wellbeing by working *with* individuals as experts in their own lives, promoting choice and control, and finding solutions collaboratively to help them achieve their desired outcomes. It shifts focus from "what's wrong" to "what's strong," using personal strengths and community resources to meet needs.

Virtual School - the local authority's function for promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children. For looked-after children, it monitors their progress as if they attended one school and provides support and oversees Pupil Premium Plus funding to improve educational outcomes. For previously looked-after children, its role is to provide information and advice to parents, carers and schools, upon request. The Virtual School also has non-statutory strategic duties towards children with a social worker and children in kinship care, which focus on improving visibility, strengthening multi-agency partnerships and promoting better educational outcomes across these cohorts. We are now making these duties statutory through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Whole-family approach - A strategy for public services to support families holistically by coordinating services around the entire household, not just one individual, focusing on shared strengths, interconnected needs (health, crime, education, finances), and building resilience to prevent crises, often using one assessment and plan for the family with a lead professional, ensuring children aren't overburdened as carers.

Annex B: Resources available to local authorities and kinship families

Below is a non-exhaustive list of resources and services available that local authorities may consider signposting to kinship families or incorporating into their kinship local offer. Also included is research to inform and guide local authorities and their partner agencies.

Organisations

Adfam:

[Resources - ADFAM](#) - Adfam is the leading families and addiction charity in England. They are support people affected by someone else's drinking or drug use. These people are children, parents, friends, partners, siblings and grandparents.

Coram BAAF:

[Kinship local offer community of practice | CoramBAAF](#) – Coram BAAF is the UK's leading membership organisation for professionals working across adoption, fostering and kinship care.

Families in Harmony:

[Families in Harmony - home](#) – Families in Harmony is the leading specialist kinship care organisation in the UK founded to serve Black African, Caribbean and dual heritage kinship carers.

Family Rights Group:

[Kinship care - Family Rights Group](#) – Family Rights Group (FRG) provides free, independent and confidential advice for parents, kinship carers, relatives and friends of children who are involved with children's services in England or need their help. They support families to work with social workers and understand the law, their rights and options. This webpage includes information and advice about kinship care, as well as details of the FRG's free, confidential advice line.

Foundations:

[Who we are - Foundations](#) – Foundations' mission is to generate and champion actionable evidence improves services to support family relationships. They focus on children who need

targeted support to address family-level risks, children experiencing harm or abuse in the home and children in care and care leavers.

[Kinship Care Practice Guide](#)

[Mentoring and Befriending Practice Guide](#)

[Kinship Care Mediation Report](#)

[Parenting Through Adversity Practice Guide \(0–10\) Practice Guide](#)

[Parenting Through Adversity \(11–18\) Practice Guide](#)

Kinship:

[Kinship: Home | The Kinship care charity | England and Wales](#) – Kinship is the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. They support kinship carers to access the advice, support and information they need to help provide a stable, loving home for the children they care for.

[Peer support groups - Kinship](#)

[Free training and events for kinship carers | Kinship](#)

[Kinship Training and Support Service | Free for kinship carers](#)

Kinship Carers Liverpool:

[Home - Kinship Carers](#) – Kinship Carers Liverpool is a kinship charity based in Liverpool. They offer a number of different services for children and kinship carers, including providing help and advice, signposting to helpful and relevant services, connecting kinship families, and a free activities programme for kinship families.

[Liverpool Kinship Charter - Kinship Carers](#). This is Liverpool's framework which guides the way the local authority works with kinship families.

Kinship Carers UK:

[Kinship Carers UK | kinship](#) – Kinship Carers UK is a national charity that supports and advises kinship carers. Their aim is to build a strong community that can support a carer from the start to the end of their kinship journey.

Pause:

[Pause – Creating Space for Change](#) - Pause is a national charity that works to improve the lives of women who have had – or are at risk of having – more than one child removed from their care, and the services and systems that affect them.

[In a Mother’s Mind: Birth mothers’ experiences of having children in kinship care.](#) – Podcast

Research

[Children's social care](#) – this page gathers all of Birth Companions’ social care research and articles. Birth Companions is a charity dedicated to supporting pregnant women, mothers and babies, protecting their rights, sharing their voices and improving their care.

[Family Routes longitudinal study - GOV.UK](#) – this is a longitudinal study intended to track the needs, experiences and outcomes of children leaving care on an adoption order or special guardianship order in England. Key reports published so far focus on children who returned to care, making decisions about children’s care, and exploring needs, experiences and outcomes among young people growing up in adoption and special guardianship.

[Listening to Children about Kinship Care, Child Welfare, and Permanence - A Child-Centred Approach to Navigating Relational Spaces](#), by Paul Shuttleworth.

Annex C: Methodology for kinship population estimates

Data sources

Estimates of the kinship population derived from the [Children looked after annual return](#) collected by the Department for Education, and compared to

[Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021](#) data collected and published by the Office for National Statistics

Methodology

Reference date

All population estimates are produced for March 21st 2021 to enable comparison with the ONS Census 2021 analysis of Kinship care in England.

Permanence order population estimate

Those estimates were derived using the following steps:

1. Counted all children that left care under on a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangements Order (CAO).
2. Removed children who subsequently returned to care and remained looked after on 21st March 2021.
3. Removed young people that were aged 18 or over on 21st March 2021.

Using this approach, DfE estimates that 46,000 previously looked after children were living in kinship care under a permanence order on census day 2021.

Family and friends foster care estimate

Those estimates were derived by counting all children in family and friends foster care on 21st March 2021.

12,500 children were living in family and friends foster care on census day 2021. This is slightly higher than 12,430, the published figure for 31st March 2021, due to the difference in reference dates¹⁷.

Informal kinship care estimate

¹⁷ The published figure corresponds to the sum of rows 1a. and 1b.1 in the children looked after statistical tables available at [Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

Those estimates were derived using the following steps:

1. Combined the permanence order and family and friends foster care population estimates.
2. Subtracted this total from the ONS census estimate of all children in kinship care on 21st March 2021.

Using this approach, DfE estimates approximately 74,000 children were living in kinship care arrangements that are not captured by DfE administrative data, assumed to be mostly informal kinship care.

Limitations and caveats

The ONS Census estimate of kinship care does not include arrangements where the carer is a non-relative.

The permanence order population estimate only includes children who were previously looked after.

Children who ceased to be on an SGO or CAO before 21st March 2021, but neither returned to care or reached age 18, remain included in the permanence order estimate.

The ONS Census and children looked after annual return use different definitions, coverage and collection methodologies therefore the informal kinship care estimate should be interpreted as an indicative figure.

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Annex D: Overview of different legal orders and statuses associated with kinship arrangements

The table below sets out a comparison of different kinship care arrangements.

Table 1. Comparison of different legal arrangements relevant to kinship care

Private family arrangements (informal kinship care)	Kinship Special Guardians and those with a Child Arrangements Order (permanence orders)	Kinship foster carers / Family and friends foster care (child looked after)
<p>Can be unknown to local authorities. When the carer is not a close relative, there is a duty to notify the local authority and this is known as private fostering.</p>	<p>These orders are granted by family courts. This can be granted in private law cases or public law cases (in the context of ongoing care proceedings).</p>	<p>This happens when a child could not remain at home and a local authority played a major role in making the arrangement</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No formal court order • Birth parent retains parental responsibility • Carer can seek support under s17 (“children in need”) but many do not • Carer not generally eligible for other types of financial support available to some kinship carers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental responsibility is shared with parents but, in the case of special guardianship, this is “enhanced” parental responsibility • Children are only eligible for education entitlements and access to therapeutic support through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund if they were previously looked-after. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child is looked after, and the kinship care is a foster carer. • If the child is looked after through a Care Order, parental responsibility shared between local authority and birth parent. • Kinship foster carer may have delegated authority to make day-to-day decisions (for example, haircuts) but this is often limited.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children not eligible for education entitlements • Children not eligible to access therapeutic support through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to other types of support varies but is often limited to those who were previously looked after. • Special Guardians (SG) are eligible for financial support under the S.14F CA this support is means tested and the amount can vary though local authorities are asked to consider the amount a SG would receive had the child been in foster care. CAOs can be offered financial support from their LA, though this is discretionary, via s.17 CA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children eligible for education entitlements • Like mainstream foster carers, kinship foster carers are eligible for a weekly fostering allowance to cover the cost of caring for the child, and in some cases will receive a skills and time related fee.
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