

## NCC Briefing 2

### Summary: National Kinship Care Strategy summary

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The [first ever National Kinship Care Strategy for England](#) has been published, setting out the Government's plans for kinship care, including new commitments and £20 million investment over 2024-5. The Government committed to delivering a dedicated kinship care strategy in February 2023 when it published its *Stable Homes, Built on Love* plan for children's social care.

Each of the new commitments made in the Strategy is outlined below.

#### Financial allowances pathfinder

A 4-year trial of financial allowances will be carried out in up to **8 local authorities**, backed by £16 million investment for the first year. This will provide special guardians who care for previously cared for children with a financial allowance, paid at the same rate as the foster care allowance. An evaluation will determine whether wider rollout of financial allowances for kinship carers could unlock savings for local government.

**Participating local authorities are not yet known. Further information will be published in Spring 2024.**

#### Extended educational support for kinship children

£3.8 million will be invested to expand the role of Virtual School Heads, with delivery commencing between September 2024 and March 2025. This will include championing the educational attendance, attainment and progress of all children in kinship care, regardless of legal order (or lack thereof). In addition, kinship carers with a special guardianship order or child arrangements order, regardless of whether or not the child was previously cared for, will be able to access advice and information from the Virtual School on request.

KINSHIP (charity) advised that approx. 5000 children left care last year via an SGO/child arrangements/residence order, most being kinship cases.

Grant determination letters will be sent out for 2024-25 and will be distributed with the section 31 children with a social worker funding. The support will not involve direct intervention with children and their families (much like the children with a social worker duty).

We are waiting for clarification from the Department for Education (DfE) as to whether the cohort is children living in our local authority or going to school in our local authority (like to be the latter).

#### Guidance for employers on supporting kinship carers at work

[New Government guidance has been published](#) which sets out best practice for supporting kinship carers at work, including how to adapt internal HR policies and improve cultures of support. It encourages employers to take steps to better support their kinship carer employees, and signposts to the [Kinship Friendly Employer](#) scheme.

In addition, the DfE will introduce a new leave and pay entitlement for kinship carers in its own workforce, although further details are yet to be confirmed.

## A renamed Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

The existing Adoption Support Fund will be rebranded from January 2024 as the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund. This funds local authorities or Regional Adoption Agencies to pay for therapeutic support for kinship families where the child was previously cared for with a special guardianship or child arrangements order. No changes to eligibility or scope of the Fund have been made.

In addition, an analysis of the Fund's applications and the therapies provided will be carried out to understand how it is being used by kinship families, informing future development.

## Information, training and support for kinship carers, including peer support

Although announced previously, the Strategy reaffirms the Government's commitment to establishing a new national offer of training and support for kinship carers. Kinship has been awarded a £3 million contract [to deliver a bespoke package for all kinship carers in England](#), including informal carers, launching in Spring 2024.

Kinship has been funded over the past two years to [establish more than 130 peer support groups for kinship carers](#) across England. The Strategy commits to investing £1.8 million over the next two years to ensure these groups, available to all types of kinship carer, continue to operate.

## National Kinship Care Ambassador

A new National Kinship Care Ambassador will be appointed in Spring 2024 to advocate for kinship carers and work with local authorities to help them improve their services and support. Part of the Ambassador's role will be to speak with kinship carers and ensure their voices help shape local authority and national policymaking.

## National Kinship Care Advisory Board and Kinship Carer Reference Group

A National Kinship Care Advisory Board of sector experts will be established to advise the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing on the Government's policy development and future funding for kinship care. Further information will be published about this Board in May 2024.

In addition, the existing Kinship Carer Reference Group – a group of kinship carers who have advised the DfE on its work around kinship care – will be maintained.

## Engaging and supporting family networks earlier

Updated local authority guidance will encourage local authorities to implement *family group conferences*, and the DfE will work towards every family being offered access to a family group conference at pre-proceedings stage. The Government will explore using legislation to mandate this in the future.

Although announced earlier this year, the Strategy notes the Government's ongoing [Families First for Children Pathfinder and Family Network pilot](#) and suggests the DfE will publish evaluation findings for the latter in Spring 2025 to inform future decisions about the wider rollout of Family Network Support Packages.

The Strategy also highlights a digital innovation pilot aiming to help social workers more easily and quickly identify family networks who could help to support children.

## Updated statutory guidance for local authorities

New statutory guidance on kinship care will be published in Spring 2024, titled '*Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*'. This will update existing Family and Friends Care guidance from 2011 and will seek to improve standards and consistency in local authority practice. The Strategy notes the guidance will reaffirm expectations that every local authority publishes a policy setting out its approach to supporting all kinship families.

## A definition of kinship care

Following a consultation earlier this year, the Government has published a definition of kinship care which aims to improve visibility and understanding. This has been set out in new statutory guidance. More widely, Government will replace use of the term 'family and friends care' with kinship care.

## Improving local authority practice in kinship care, including with Ofsted

Ofsted will provide inspectors with additional, specific training around kinship care, and will also review their published guidance to ensure references to kinship care are clear and that local authorities' strengths and weaknesses in kinship care practice are captured in their inspection reports.

The Strategy notes that ongoing Government work to introduce a new Early Career Framework for social workers will clearly set out the skills and knowledge needed to support kinship families well. A knowledge and skills statement for lead practitioners in family help, to be published in December 2024, will also consider the role of kinship care. Practitioners will be supported to share best practice around kinship care through events and forums, including in areas such as carer identification and assessment.

## Independent advocacy for children in kinship care

The Government is delivering ongoing work to update national standards and statutory guidance for the provision of children's advocacy services. The Strategy commits to developing policy to ensure a future advocacy service considers eligible children and young people in kinship care (i.e. those receiving social care services) and helps them understand their rights and entitlements.

## Law Commission review of legal orders

The Law Commission will carry out a review into the legal statuses and orders for kinship carers and make recommendations to Government on how the legislative framework could be simplified or improved.

## Data on kinship care

The Strategy outlines ongoing work to link family court data from the Ministry of Justice with Department for Education data to understand more about formalised kinship care arrangements (i.e. families secured by a special guardianship or child arrangements order). This will be used to see if, in the future, this data could be made available to local authorities to help them target support.

The Strategy also notes existing research work to build a better picture of kinship care, including a systematic review of what works to improve outcomes for children in kinship care, to be published in Spring 2024.

## DfE implementation Plan

Stable Homes, Built on Love set out how reform to children's social care will be phased. This strategy is the first step in our journey to reform kinship care. We are committed to improving outcomes for children and kinship carers. DfE will monitor progress against set outcomes (see [appendix 1](#)).

### **In response to the kinship strategy, we are already making progress.**

- ❑ We are already considering kinship placements well, which we know because we have seen an increase in viability assessments and SGOs being granted.
- ❑ The KAST have attended a national event with Coram Voice to share ideas and thinking about the new kinship strategy.
- ❑ The KAST will continue to offer their support offer for Northumberland kinship carers, which includes preparation training and coffee mornings in Blyth and Ashington.
- ❑ The KAST accept the wider definition of Kinship Care as highlighted in the Strategy and Working Together to Safeguard Children.
- ❑ The KAST hold regular community events at half term for Kinship Families to enable them to come together as a group and celebrate key events - Christmas, Halloween, Easter etc.
- ❑ The KAST work closely with the national charity, Kinship, regularly linking in and utilising the online training and support groups available through Kinship Compass to help develop and strengthen kinship placements.
- ❑ The KAST work closely with Family Hubs to strengthen the skills and develop Kinship Carers, often addressing common issues of isolation whilst developing networks and access to lifelong training and supports.
- ❑ KAST are advocates for Kinship Carers in the region, with empathy and understanding of their needs and experiences, the team strives to widen the universal support offer to Kinship Carers, a recent development being the extension of Northumberland Active access to Special Guardians.
- ❑ In Spring 2024 the KAST are launching the foundation for attachment training for Kinship Carers, via NEWST.
- ❑ The KAST are working with regional colleagues to understand how they are using the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund. This learning will be used to make better use of the fund in Northumberland.
- ❑ The Virtual School (VS) already has a successful infrastructure in place to manage change through a system wide approach that makes groups of children with specific needs visible. This has embedded a 'business as usual' approach to the education of children with a social worker.
- ❑ For previously cared for children and children with a social worker, the VS provides advice and guidance to raise awareness of their needs, actively promotes practice to improve attendance and engagement in education and provides support and challenge to education providers to improve achievement.
- ❑ Since 2011, the VS has worked with education providers and partners to embed strategies to improve the educational attainment of children who have experienced ACEs and instability in their family lives. This is delivered through the skill and expertise of the VS education support team and includes a comprehensive training programme for professionals and carers.
- ❑ A unique feature of Northumberland's VS is leadership and management of the attendance support- or Education Welfare team. This high performing team successfully improves the attendance and engagement of cared for children, previously cared for children and children with a social worker.

**We are in a strong position to build on what we already do well. What we need to think more about:**

- ❑ The KAST manager is attending a national event with the Kinship charity to discuss the training and support offer for kinship carers. We want to use this to actively contribute ideas and experiences but to learn from other Local Authorities.
- ❑ The KAST want to explore how to expand their support offer to Kinship Carers. For example, consistency for training and support groups across the county and including the experiences of carers, as well as offering carer support during assessments and when there are concerns about the stability of kinship placements.
- ❑ The KAST want to explore a local kinship care support offer for children to meet their needs, like a kinship youth group or establishing links with Voices Make Choices (VMC).
- ❑ The development of a clear process for the adoption and special guardianship order fund.
- ❑ How to ensure family group conferences are used effectively, especially during pre-proceeding work.
- ❑ To meet the anticipated requirements of the new VSH duty, we will need to think more about:
  - The capacity of the VSH to deliver on the duty
  - The capacity of the ESLAC team to deliver on the duty
  - Developing the training programme to make this group of children visible, including training with Designated Safeguarding Leads and kinship carers
  - Identifying who our kinship families are
  - Developing an effective communications strategy
  - Developing clear impact criteria to know we are making a difference to kinship carers
- ❑ Incorporate the new duty into the existing Virtual School Improvement Plan and the KAST development plan. This will be evaluated through the VSH Annual Report and QPAG process.

## Appendix 1: DfE Implementation

The DfE will begin to implement reforms to kinship care over the next 2 years and will monitor progress against the following outcomes:

Outcome	What we have already delivered	What will we do next
<p><b>Children in kinship care are supported to achieve better outcomes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Made certain cohorts of children in kinship care eligible for Virtual School Head support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand the role of the Virtual School Head to include championing the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children in kinship care specifically.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Kinship Carers receive more support</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invested £3 million to establish a training, information, and support offer for kinship carers.</li> <li>• Invested £2 million, through the charity Kinship, to deliver high-quality peer support groups for kinship carers across the country.</li> <li>• Funded the Family Rights Group's dedicated Family and Friends helpline.</li> <li>• Published Kinship Carers in the Workplace: Guidance for Employers to help employers support kinship carers at work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Kinship families are empowered</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up the Kinship Carer Reference Group to give kinship carers a direct channel of communication into the Department for Education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a new Kinship Care Ambassador role, who will work with local authorities and kinship carers to raise standards and share best practice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Kinship families are understood</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Announced the first ever government definition of kinship care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish an updated version of the 2011 Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities.</li> <li>• Work with the Law Commission to review the existing landscape of legal orders and statuses for kinship carers.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve social worker training and develop a knowledge and skills statement for family help lead practitioners.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Ofsted will update their inspector training and guidance, so kinship care is well embedded in inspection practice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Engaging family networks earlier and overcoming barriers to them providing support</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Strengthened guidance on engaging family networks through updates to Working Together to Safeguard Children.</li> <li>• Published the Children's Social Care National Framework that reaffirms the expectation that children and young people should be supported by their family network.</li> <li>• Supported sector development of digital innovation that can help social workers identify people in a child's network who might care for them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work towards every family being offered access to high-quality family group conferences at pre-proceedings stage.</li> <li>• Use learning from the evaluation of the Family Network pilot to inform future decisions about wider rollout of Family Network Support Packages.</li> </ul>

## 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		
Empowerment of Kinship Families	Training, information and advice offer Live from Spring 2024			
	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			