



For family or friends who  
step up to raise a child.

# Designing a new right to paid leave for kinship carers – December 2025 update

## The story so far

Kinship has led the campaign to secure greater employment support for kinship carers for more than a decade. Earlier this year, our [\*Making work pay for kinship carers\*](#) research found that nearly half (45%) of kinship carers in work stopped working when they took on the care of a relative or friend's child. The vast majority (80%) have not returned to any form of paid work since.

Insights from our [\*sector-leading surveys\*](#) and advice and support work illustrate the devastating impacts this can have for kinship families. The absence of any statutory pay and leave entitlement unnecessarily pushes them into poverty and the benefits system, and robs children of the stability they need after experiencing significant trauma, separation and loss.

We've also identified the [\*significant consequences for employers and the state\*](#) associated with this gap in the law, which prevents valuable colleagues in our hospitals, schools and communities from remaining in the labour market when they're able to.

Together, we've been able to make some meaningful change. Since 2023, our [\*Kinship Friendly Employer scheme\*](#) has supported leading employers such as Tesco, John Lewis and B&Q to deliver paid leave policies for kinship carers in their workforces, and our [\*#ValueOurLove campaign\*](#) has continued to mobilise thousands of kinship carers across the country to push for change. However, despite the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and several parliamentary committees [\*backing our call for a new right to paid leave\*](#) for kinship carers, government action to date has been limited.



## A new opportunity

Following our campaigning, the [\*needs of kinship carers were included\*](#) by the government alongside other working parents for the first time in the scope of its [\*review of the parental leave and pay system\*](#). This launched in July 2025 and is expected to last for 18 months.

The [\*terms of reference\*](#) confirm the review will consider “*building a fair system, between... different types of parents (such as birth, single, adopters, kinship)*” and will explore “*whether support available meets the needs of other working families who do not qualify for existing leave and pay entitlements, such as kinship carers*”.

To support the review, we're continuing to build the evidence base on the impacts which the current absence of any paid leave entitlement has for kinship families, employers and the state. We've also started a new phase of participatory policy development and campaigning activity on this issue to ensure the government's review delivers a roadmap to a new statutory right to pay and leave for kinship carers.

## Our policy hackathon

On Monday 17 November, we hosted an innovative policy hackathon event in London, bringing together kinship carers, employers, local authority colleagues, government officials, unions and sector experts to co-design what paid leave for kinship carers could look like.

The event aimed to tackle some of the more challenging policy design questions around how a new right to pay and leave could work, recognising the complexity of kinship family arrangements and circumstances, and understanding how the needs, experiences and strengths of kinship carers may differ from other groups such as new adoptive parents.



The agenda included 3 facilitated ideation 'sprints' to define the problem, collaborate to offer solutions, and refine group proposals based on feedback.

- **Sprint 1:** What's different about kinship care leave and what challenges does this pose? If we were to mirror another form of parental leave, why might this *not* work?
- **Sprint 2:** What could a working policy for kinship care leave look like? How might we overcome the challenges identified earlier? Which features can be borrow from other forms of employment leave?
- **Sprint 3:** What can we learn from everyone's ideas to refine proposals and outline the key characteristics of a new right to kinship care leave?

## Key takeaways

Some key considerations or principles which emerged across the ideation sprints included:

- recognition of the **unique but common features of kinship care** compared to circumstances for parents or adopters. These included how kinship care often begins following an emergency and without notice or preparation, the ongoing complexities of navigating family relationships, how it can straddle significant child welfare intervention and private family life, the different of types of kinship arrangements with varying levels of parental responsibility and support, and typical early uncertainty around the future.
- the unavoidable **need for some flexibility** rather than a 'one size fits all' approach to legislation and practice, recognising the diversity of kinship arrangements and situations. Participants landed on a 'phased' or 'modular' approach to how this should be structured.
- **balancing the needs and requirements** of kinship carers, employers, local authorities and government. Given the above, participants were challenged to design a model which was bespoke and flexible enough to be useful for kinship carers, but also practical and simple enough to be a realistic proposal for government and employers to implement.
- seeking **fairness and equity** with entitlements available to other working parents to best align with the overall objectives of the government's review; kinship carers deserve no less than parents or adopters would expect to rightly receive.
- **clearly defining** who would be eligible and considering this in the context of providing evidence, for example, linking up with relevant systems and data held elsewhere in government.

- the importance of accompanying **employment protections** associated with forms of parental leave too (e.g. right to return to the same job or suitable alternative).
- acknowledging the current context of **low public and employer awareness** of kinship care. To be most effective, any new right to pay and leave for this group would require accompanying training, promotion and other activity to improve understanding.
- aligning any new right to paid leave with **wider ongoing policy and practice reforms** around kinship care and family networks, avoiding the risk of unintended consequences and making the most of a renewed government focus in this area.

## Towards a proposed model

Over the course of the day, participants coalesced around a model for kinship care leave with three core elements:

1. **'Breathing space':** A shorter period of flexible paid leave, available without notice following an emergency situation or change of circumstances, open to all kinship carers and without firm evidentiary requirements, to give them the time and space they need to get advice, consider their options and deal with what is likely to be an immensely difficult period. This could be based on the existing neonatal pay and leave entitlement (i.e. up to 12 weeks, which can often be taken in separate blocks of at least one week at a time).
2. **Equalised with parental leave:** A longer period of paid leave equivalent to that available for new parents and adopters (i.e. up to 52 weeks) for situations where kinship carers are committing at that point to care for a child on a long-term or permanent basis, to give families ongoing financial security and the space to settle into the new arrangement.
3. **Ongoing entitlements alongside other 'parents':** Access to the same ongoing parental leave entitlements, rights and protections as other working parents. Beyond the standard entitlements needed by all families, those raising children in kinship are more likely to need additional time off and/or flexibility on an ongoing basis to accommodate a range of appointments and commitments, including meetings with children's services, family court proceedings, and to secure therapeutic and educational support for their child.

## Next steps

Since the hackathon, we've hosted two further participatory workshops with kinship carers to further test and refine the model above. We've also [launched a new petition](#) calling on the UK government to introduce a new right to statutory pay and leave for kinship carers, and [shared a quick poll](#) with our Kinship Community and on social media for those who were in work when they took on the care of a relative or friend's child.

There's still lots to work through, and we're planning additional consultation with kinship carers, [Kinship Friendly Employers](#) and others throughout January 2026 to further develop our proposals for government. We plan to publish a new paper outlining these in February 2026.

For more information on this work, please contact Sam Turner, Associate Director of Policy and Public Affairs, at [sam.turner@kinship.org.uk](mailto:sam.turner@kinship.org.uk).

