



Independent Review of Children's Social Care

Briefing for debate led by Lord Watson of Invergowrie on Thurs 8 Dec

Summary

- The Review's recommendations marked a pivotal moment for kinship care and recognised the need to improve support for kinship families, particularly by introducing a financial allowance, kinship care leave, and improved access to peer support and training for kinship carers.
- Our #ValueOurLove campaign is pushing the Government to respond boldly to the Review's recommendations and introduce a first ever kinship care strategy that equalises support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families.
- There's an urgency: our survey shows 78% of kinship carers are not getting the support they need to meet the needs of their children and most are struggling with the rising cost of living.
- Investing in kinship care makes sense – it is better for children, families and the public purse.

The Review's recommendations on kinship care

Overall, the Review's final report included a strong focus on kinship care and on *"unlocking the potential of family networks"*. It said that the *"thousands of grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters who care for their family members"* have for too long been a *"silent and unheard majority"* in children's social care who now deserve *"far greater recognition and support"*.

The Review's recommendations included:

- provision of a non-means-tested financial allowance that matches the minimum fostering allowance and the introduction of kinship leave on a par with adoption leave for all special guardians and kinship carers with a child arrangements order looking after children who would otherwise be in care.
- extended access to legal aid for prospective and current kinship carers, introducing a legal definition of kinship care, as well as improved peer support, preparation and training offers from local authorities for all kinship carers (including those caring informally for a child).
- a requirement for local authorities to use 'family group decision making' to better identify kinship arrangements earlier, and establishing 'Family Network Plans' to more flexibly and intensively support and fund kinship arrangements to prevent children from entering local authority care.

[Click here to read our **summary of the Review's recommendations on kinship care**](#)

Our verdict

The Review marked a pivotal moment for kinship care and for the thousands of kinship carers who have long been overlooked and undervalued. Many of the Review's recommendations represented significant wins for Kinship and the policy asks we campaigned for, but others lacked sufficient detail to know how they might impact on kinship families or simply failed to recognise kinship carers and their children.

[Click here to view our detailed **kinship care policy tracker**](#)



Significant progress

We were particularly delighted to see the evidence from our [financial allowances surveys](#) of kinship carers recognised in the Review's recommendation to introduce a **financial allowance** for some kinship carers, along with **paid leave** from employment and expanded **legal aid support**. We also welcome the Review's recommendation to improve **peer support** and **training** for all kinship carers, regardless of legal order or lack thereof.



In the right direction

Too many of the Review's significant recommendations (e.g. financial allowances, kinship leave) restrict eligibility to kinship carers with a legal order and where the child 'would otherwise be in care'. **Informal kinship carers** must not be unfairly locked out of support and should be included within an inclusive and functional **definition of kinship care**.



Missing the mark

We were disappointed the Review did not make a stronger case **for children in kinship care** to be eligible for additional support like that provided to looked after children (e.g. Pupil Premium Plus eligibility and Virtual School support) despite their similar needs.

Progress to date

To date, the Government has:

- established the [Children's Social Care National Implementation Board](#) which includes representation from kinship carer and Kinship trustee, Janet Kay;
- extended funding for Kinship's national [Peer-to-Peer Support Service](#) until December 2023; and
- introduced [legal aid changes](#) which fulfil the commitment made by the Ministry of Justice in 2019 to extend eligibility to special guardianship orders in private law cases.

#ValueOurLove campaign

Through our #ValueOurLove campaign, we want to see the Government respond boldly and positively to the Review and **commit to a first ever kinship care strategy** which includes these four urgent changes so that kinship families are entitled to the same support as foster and adoptive families.



1. **Equalise allowances between foster and kinship families:** All kinship families should receive the financial support they need, when they need it. This should include a financial allowance that matches the current minimum fostering allowance to help them cover the unexpected costs of caring for a child.
2. **Equalise access to training and support between kinship carers and foster carers:** Kinship carers should have access to information, advice, practical and emotional support from the point they take on a child, including free legal advice, preparation and training, therapeutic and peer support.
3. **Equalise leave between adoptive and kinship families:** Kinship carers should receive kinship care leave on a par with adoption leave when the child first moves into their care to allow the child to settle in.
4. **Equalise support between children in kinship care and those in care:** Children in kinship care should have extra support in school and access to health and therapeutic support to help them deal with the impact of abuse, trauma and loss.

To date, the campaign has received **over 10,000 signatures** and supporters have written letters to **every single MP in England and Wales**. You too can lend your support, learn more about the campaign, and **find out more about kinship families in your local area** by visiting:

ValueOurLove.Kinship.org.uk.

Our evidence

Kinship's new report – [The Cost of Loving](#) – explores the experiences of 1500+ kinship carers and finds that:

- 78% of kinship carers are not getting the support they need to meet the needs of their children, and 36% of this group are worried the lack of support might mean they have to stop caring for their child in the future – this would be disastrous for children, their families and for the state.
- 98% of carers believe their child would have gone into or remained in local authority care had they not stepped up to look after them.
- 17% had been unable to take on the care of a sibling due to a lack of support.
- nearly half had given up work at some point to care for their children, and 7 in 10 had been forced to spend their savings or pension pots (most kinship carers are older grandparents).
- 4 in 10 are skipping meals, using food banks or buying less food to cope with an increasing cost of living, and 6 in 10 had borrowed money or taken out a short term loan in the last year.

[Click here to read an executive summary of *The Cost of Loving*](#)

Key talking points

Peers should use the debate to highlight the significance of the Review's recommendations for kinship care and push the Government on its commitments to kinship families ahead of its forthcoming response (which the Department for Education has said it will publish early in the new year).

1. Given Kinship's evidence which demonstrates the substantial impact a [lack of support](#) and the [rising cost of living](#) is having on kinship families, the Government must value the love of kinship carers and **introduce a kinship care strategy that will equalise support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families.**
2. In a time of constrained budgets, choosing not to value the love of kinship families risks the futures of thousands of children but is also economically short-sighted. Love provides the best value to children, society and the economy – [the love and sacrifice of kinship carers saves the public purse millions a year by preventing children from going into the care system.](#) For every 1000 children that are raised in kinship families rather than the care system it [saves the Government £40 million](#) and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20 million.
3. There's a scale to kinship care which often goes overlooked. **More than 162,000 children** are being raised by kinship carers across England and Wales – more than double the number in foster care. Peers can learn about the numbers in their local area by visiting our [kinship care constituency map](#).

Suggested questions

1. Will the Government listen to the calls made by kinship carers and over 10,000 supporters as part of Kinship's **#ValueOurLove** campaign and commit to a kinship care strategy which equalises support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families?
2. In its forthcoming response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, will the Government commit to valuing the love of kinship carers and invest in delivering the financial, practical and emotional support they need and deserve?
3. Does the Government agree that investing in kinship care makes economic sense, and will they value the love of kinship carers and ensure that more children can grow up within their family networks?

About Kinship

Kinship is the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We offer kinship carers financial, legal, practical and emotional support and understanding from the moment they need it, for as long as they need it. We want every kinship family to be recognised, valued, and supported. For more information, please visit kinship.org.uk or contact Sam Turner, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, at sam.turner@kinship.org.uk.