



General Election 4 July 2024

Getting started with contacting your MP candidates

GENERAL ELECTION 101: THE BASICS



A General Election has been called on the 4 July and we're calling on all MP candidates to make a commitment to kinship families.

Candidates standing to be your next MP are now clamouring for your votes. They want to represent you and you have the opportunity to make them listen. We need to keep the urgent lack of support for kinship families struggling every day in their own constituencies at the forefront of their minds. We need to make kinship families impossible to ignore.

This is a short guide to getting started, what we know now and how you can make sure kinship care is on your candidates' radar during the General election.

WHY SHOULD I GET INVOLVED?

The polls suggest that 2024 is likely to be a **change election** – even if the political party in power doesn't change, there will be a substantial shift in favour of new MPs, so it's especially **important we get in with candidates early**.



If you don't know
which constituency
you are in, you can
find out at:
[members.parliament
.uk/constituencies](https://members.parliament.uk/constituencies)

It is likely that there will be many new MPs being elected, so it is **important to raise awareness of kinship care now, before they are in office**. This will make sure they enter Parliament with some existing understanding of the issues affecting kinship families in their area so they can start to lobby for change much quicker once they are an MP. Securing their commitment to supporting kinship families before the election also means they are accountable to you and their constituents to follow through on these promises once they are elected.

It is especially **important you get involved if you are in what is known as a “swing” or “marginal” seat** – where the party your MP is from often changes or where your MP was elected by a very small number of votes. A marginal seat is a powerful place to be at election time. But all MPs will be fighting for their seat in this election.

Since candidates will be trying to win every vote they can, they will be more likely to support causes such as kinship care, which isn't usually considered an election issue, as they will be trying to gain as much support as possible.

HOW DO ELECTIONS WORK?

Each party has its own selection process for candidates who will then stand in the election to become (or stay) MP. They are called **Prospective parliamentary candidates** (or 'PPCs') . **There is more information on finding your candidates below.**

For General Elections that elect MPs in Westminster, we use an electoral system called **First Past the Post**. First Past the Post provides each voter with one vote to select an MP in their constituency and most usually guarantees a two-horse race between the top two parties: the Conservatives and Labour. In some constituencies, Liberal Democrats and the Green party also appear. **In this system, the candidate with the most votes wins.** However, other parties can still have an impact by acting as possible coalition partners for a main party if it fails to gain a majority in Parliament.



WHAT SHOULD I ASK MY CANDIDATES FOR?

As an individual

Ask for an individual, face-to-face meeting where you can share your experience as a kinship carer and ask them to support the **#ValueOurLove** campaign calls. These are:

1. **Equal financial allowances** between foster and kinship families
2. **Equal access to training and support** between kinship carers and foster carers
3. **Equal leave** between adoptive and kinship families
4. **Equal support for children** in kinship care and those in care

As a group

If you are part of one, **ask your candidates to attend a local kinship carer support group**. This could also be an opportunity to connect your candidates with other kinship carers in your area, to share your experiences, and start to build a relationship with your candidate. You could also bring kinship carers you know together for a one-off meeting if there isn't a regular meeting in your area.



Use Kinship's **Policy Tracker** to find out more information on any recent changes to kinship care-related policy.

HOW CAN I FIND MY LOCAL CANDIDATES FOR THE 2024 ELECTION?

It may take a few weeks for all candidates to be officially announced so keep a look out for our online tool which will help you to find your candidates and contact them . But in the mean time you can engage with candidates that have been announced. by visiting the 'Who can I vote for?' webpage below.

Who Can I Vote For?: If you input your region, this site shows candidates standing in the upcoming General Election for your constituency. Be aware that this site is a collection of public knowledge available so far, and not all parties will be shown yet. A quick search on Google or social media (especially Twitter/X) should bring up contact details for the candidate/s you're interested in.



Kinship is a politically neutral organisation and doesn't support any political party. To achieve change for kinship families we work with all the mainstream political parties We recommend that you engage with every MP candidate in your area from the mainstream political parties.



Make sure that your campaigning activity remains politically neutral. When representing Kinship (eg. wearing a T-shirt or holding a sign with our logo) you should not be seen to be endorsing that candidate or encouraging votes for them. You can do this by making sure any photos you have taken with your candidate don't include any vote me signs etc.

Now you've brushed up on your election knowledge, here's a **template email** to help you get started!

Dear [Candidate]

My name is [name]. X years/months ago I took on the care of my [child relationship] to keep them out of the care system and became a kinship carer. A kinship carer is any family member or close family friend who raises a child when their parents are unable to.

The love in kinship families gives children certainty. Love reduces stress, anxiety, and fear; love allows children to concentrate on schoolwork and build friendships; love grows confidence, self-esteem, and happiness. That is why children do better when they are kept within their families. This love is the reason I stepped in to raise my [child relationship].

More than 141,000 children are living in kinship care in England and Wales – more than double the number in foster care – although this figure is likely an underestimate. Yet kinship families are unfairly blocked from the essential support that children in care and those looking after them can get.

We are not being given the financial, practical, and emotional support that we need and deserve. I would love to meet with you in person to talk about the challenges and lack of support myself and other kinship carers in [your area] face and to discuss how you can advocate for and support kinship families to urgently improve support as we head into a General Election.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.



TOP TIPS FOR WRITING TO YOUR CANDIDATES

1. **Always sign off with your full name**, street address, and email address so that candidates know you live in their constituency.
2. **Personalising the template** more can help make an impact on your candidates. If you want to, you can add points such as:
 - A specific challenge that you have faced since becoming a kinship carer
 - Ways you believe that being in kinship care (instead of local authority care) has positively impacted your child
 - Your personal priority for change (for example, financial support or therapeutic services)
 - Statistics relevant to your argument - you can **check out our research and survey findings on our website for ideas**.
3. **You can use slightly different messaging** depending on the candidate's political party - see more below.



LABOUR PARTY MESSAGING

Labour aims to support the working-class voter; the party was founded by the trade union movement. Therefore, mentioning support for worker's rights and how this links to our campaigning for paid leave for kinship carers (and our Kinship-friendly employer scheme) fits in with the party's wider priorities. The Labour party's 2023 policy handbook promises to "address issues in the [children's] social care workforce as well as supporting the vital contribution of kinship carers" under Mission number 4. As well as this, Labour's 2024 Missions include equal opportunities for children, including early years childcare and education, which is a great place to start when discussing the needs of Kinship families.

CONSERVATIVE PARTY MESSAGING

The Conservatives' current focus is on economic challenges. This means that focusing on the long-term cost-savings that kinship carers make to local authority budgets by keeping children out of the care system might land well with Conservative candidates. 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 the Government saves £40million and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20million. You could even use research from our report 'The economic case for kinship care'.

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT PARTY MESSAGING

The Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey is a big supporter of kinship care, having grown up in kinship care himself, and one of the current Parliamentary champions for kinship care (Munira Wilson MP) is a Liberal Democrat so this is good to remind Lib Dem candidates about. A main priority for the Lib Dems is advocating for "Fair access to good public services and a strong social safety net" and they should know the role that kinship carers play within this system.

LET US KNOW HOW YOUR CAMPAIGNING JOURNEY GOES!



If you have any questions about this toolkit

and how we can support your campaigning activity, or would like to tell us about campaigning you've been doing please email:

kelly.taylor@kinship.org.uk

LET THE LOCAL MEDIA KNOW

A great way to raise awareness and put pressure on MP candidates running for election to respond is to tell local media about your campaigning. You should be able to find their email addresses on their websites (a 'Contact Us' link is usually at the very bottom of every page). Please contact **Kelly.taylor@kinship.org.uk** for a template press release you use to send to local newspapers, village newsletters or local radio stations..

Once you've reached out to a journalist, they may contact you and ask you questions about your own personal journey with kinship care or ask you to take part in a live radio interview.

For this reason, before you contact media you should think about the following:



You decide what you say - Think about what your 'key messages' are – for example, the lack of support you received or what you want your MP candidates to do for kinship carers – and try to stick to those areas of conversation, rather than being led off-topic into areas that feel too personal or you feel uncomfortable sharing. "I don't want to answer that" is always okay, even in a live interview.



Is it safe for you? Think carefully about whether your name or photo appearing in a local newspaper or radio station will cause any issues. How will the various members of your wider family react? What will the effect be on the child in your care? Please do not take part in any media work if you have concerns.



Clarify boundaries - Tell the journalist from the start there will be off-limits subject areas for the child's protection and wellbeing. Do not talk about the circumstances that brought the child into your care, or the child's parents, or contact arrangements/issues. Do not offer the names of the children in your care and tell them if you would rather use your first name only ('Dolly, 64, from Stoke').



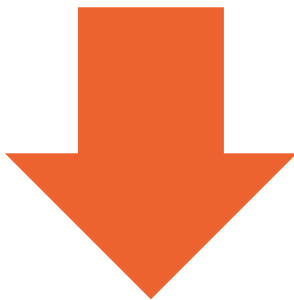
Make clear your views are your own – You are a kinship carer campaigning for change. You can say you have been supported by Kinship or are part of the **#ValueOurLove** campaign, but please ensure journalists understand you are not a spokesperson for the charity Kinship.



Stick to local media, like local papers and radio stations. If you are keen to take part in wider, regional media (eg. BBC North East TV News), please contact Kinship's media manager at **media@kinship.org.uk**



Show your MP candidates that you support kinship families by printing out the poster to display in your window.



**This General Election
I'm supporting 141,000 children
being raised in kinship care by a
relative or family friend**

