



Support for kinship carers

Briefing for Westminster Hall debate led by Munira Wilson MP

Thursday 14 September 2023, 1.30pm

Summary

- The Government's renewed focus on kinship care is welcome, but it must go much further and faster to ensure all kinship families get the financial, practical and emotional support they need. The forthcoming National Kinship Care Strategy offers an opportunity to do so.
- This Strategy should commit to introducing a mandatory, non-means tested financial allowance for kinship carers, as well as a right to paid kinship care leave on a par with adoption leave, and improve educational and therapeutic support for children in kinship care.
- The situation for kinship families is growing ever more urgent and inaction risks kinship carers being unable to continue caring for their children. This would lead to more children entering an already overstretched care system, with devastating consequences for children and the state.

What is kinship care?

Kinship care is when a child lives full-time or most of the time with a relative or close family friend, usually because their parents are not able to care for them. There are more than 162,000 children in kinship care across England and Wales – that's more than double the number in foster care. Grandparents are the most common kinship carers, but older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and people who know the child well can also take on the role.

[Click here to learn more about kinship care](#)

What is happening now?

In February 2023, the Government published its children's social care implementation strategy – *Stable Homes, Built on Love*. The strategy marked a significant moment for kinship care; it finally recognised that "kinship care has received little national policy attention" and that "too little support is given to extended family members who play a caring role for their young relatives".

The strategy made a number of welcome commitments to kinship families, including to:

- publish a dedicated National Kinship Care Strategy by the end of 2023;
- invest in a new national offer of support and training for kinship carers; and
- test and pilot new family network support packages, providing local authorities with additional funding and flexibility to support earlier kinship care arrangements.

However, the strategy did not go far enough. It only committed to "exploring the case" for introducing greater financial support, additional workplace entitlements and extensions of legal aid for kinship carers, falling short of the recommendations made by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in May 2022. It also did not extend any further educational or other support to children in kinship care.

[Click here to visit our kinship care policy tracker](#)

What should happen next?

The forthcoming National Kinship Care Strategy, due by the end of 2023, offers another opportunity for the Government to deliver the financial, practical and emotional support which kinship families need and deserve. Our **#ValueOurLove** campaign has continued to push the Government to:

1. Introduce a mandatory, non-means tested financial allowance for all kinship carers which is equivalent to the national minimum fostering allowance.

Unlike foster carers, the vast majority of kinship carers are not entitled to a minimum financial allowance to help them cover the costs of raising someone else's child. Current financial support for kinship carers is inadequate and extremely variable, reflecting not the needs of the kinship family but instead a legal and postcode lottery. This is a barrier to permanence; the system currently perversely incentivises kinship carers to become foster carers given this is the only route by which they can access guaranteed financial and other support, even though this often isn't in the best interests of the child or their family.

The impact of a lack of financial support is devastating for families and the state. Our 2022 annual survey report – [The Cost of Loving](#) – revealed that 6 in 10 kinship carers had borrowed money, taken out a short term loan, or used credit cards for everyday purchases in the last year. Taking on the care of a child further destabilises kinship carers' already precarious financial position; 76% of kinship children [are growing up in a deprived household](#).

Last year, more than one-third of kinship carers not getting the support they needed [told us they may not be able to continue caring](#) for their children as a result. Inaction risks many more children entering local authority care, with significant consequences for children's experiences and outcomes, and for the public purse. For every 1000 children raised in kinship families rather than in local authority care, [the state saves £40 million](#) and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20 million.

[Click here to read our full briefing on financial allowances for kinship carers](#)

2. Deliver a right to paid employment leave for kinship carers on a par with adoption leave.

Unlike most adoptive parents, kinship carers do not have a right to a period of paid leave from employment in order to help a child settle into living with their new family after experiencing trauma, separation and loss. The result is significant and often permanent unemployment and underemployment for kinship carers; more than 4 in 10 kinship carers [told us they had to leave work permanently](#) after taking on their caring role.

“A year of paid leave would have given me chance to settle and bond with a traumatised child and to work out how to continue in work. I just had no time for anything.”

Kinship carer, aged 25-34

The result of this forced and unnecessary withdrawal from employment is often significant financial hardship and poverty for kinship families, poor health and wellbeing, and reduced stability for children. It also comes at significant cost to the state; [28% of kinship carers were pushed into claiming benefits](#) when they stepped up to care for a child. Prior to this, kinship carers are also overrepresented in the health, education and social care sectors, and so their labour market withdrawal is likely exacerbating significant workforce challenges in our schools, hospitals and communities.

[Click here to read *Forced Out: delivering equality for kinship carers in the workplace*](#)

3. Improve educational and therapeutic support for children in kinship care.

Our evidence suggests that children growing up in kinship care have [very similar needs and experiences](#) to those who enter local authority care. However, most kinship children are not entitled to comparable support to help them achieve well in school and address challenges with mental health.

The National Kinship Care Strategy should extend eligibility for support from the Virtual School and designated teacher, backed by funding through Pupil Premium Plus, to all children in kinship care, and ensure they have priority status within the School Admissions Code. The Government should also deliver a bespoke version of the Adoption Support Fund for kinship families in mind, ensuring those that need it can access whole-family therapeutic and other emotional support which recognises the complexity of kinship arrangements.

In addition to the above, the Government should:

- extend access to legal aid and ensure all kinship carers can access tailored advice, information and support, including peer support, to help them in their caring role;
- ensure local authorities have a sufficient, long term funding settlement to deliver their children's social care functions and support wider family members to care for children when in their best interests;
- provide updated statutory guidance to local authorities on how to deliver kinship care and, together with Ofsted, hold them to account for their performance and support leading practice;
- boost understanding of kinship care across Government and public services to improve awareness and recognition within other important policy areas (e.g. housing); and
- ensure all kinship families – included those informal arrangements – benefit from improved support; this is particularly important as we know children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented in formalised kinship care arrangements.

For a more detailed exploration of what's happening now and what should happen next across each policy area, [please visit our kinship care policy tracker](#).

Kinship families in your constituency

Kinship's #ValueOurLove campaign has already secured first-ever major Government commitments to kinship families, including a dedicated kinship care strategy. But there's still much more to do.



To date, the campaign has received over 12,500 signatures and supporters have written letters to every single MP in England and Wales urging them to write to the Secretary of State for Education. **You can and learn more about the #ValueOurLove campaign and about kinship families in your constituency by visiting the [#ValueOurLove kinship care constituency map](#).**

Key talking points and evidence

MPs should use the debate to welcome a renewed focus on kinship care, but push the Government to go much further and faster in its commitments to kinship families and highlight the urgency of the need for change. The forthcoming National Kinship Care Strategy offers an opportunity to deliver on the ambitions of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and commit to introducing financial allowances and a right to paid leave for kinship carers.

Kinship families have been overlooked for decades, and they need the Government to value their love and deliver the support they need and deserve. If they don't, this risks more children entering local authority care which comes with devastating consequences for children, families, local authorities and the public purse.

- Nearly 8 in 10 kinship carers weren't getting the support they needed to meet their child's needs. 6 in 10 kinship carers had borrowed money, taken out a short term loan, or used credit cards for everyday purchases in the last year ([The Cost of Loving](#)).
- 44% of kinship carers could not pay all their household bills, 26% could not always afford food for their families, and 35% could not afford clothes for their children ([2022 Financial Allowances Survey](#)).
- More than 4 in 10 kinship carers said they had to leave work permanently after becoming a kinship carer. 28% were forced to claim benefits due to a change in their employment status ([Forced Out](#)).
- It makes sense to invest in kinship care. For every 1000 children raised in kinship families rather than local authority care, the state saves £40 million and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20 million ([Kinship Care: The Opportunity](#)).

Suggested questions

1. Will the Government listen to the more than 12,500 supporters of Kinship's #ValueOurLove campaign and commit to equalising support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families?
2. The Scottish Government has recently announced it will introduce a new standard national allowance for both foster carers and kinship carers. Will the Government commit to introducing a similar national allowance equivalent to the minimum fostering allowance for kinship carers in England?
3. Kinship's *Forced Out* report, published in June, found that more than 4 in 10 kinship carers were forced out of work after taking on their caring role, and 28% were pushed into the benefits system. Will the Government's forthcoming kinship care strategy commit to introducing paid leave for kinship carers like that given to adoptive parents?
4. In a survey of more than 1,500 kinship carers last year, the charity Kinship found that more than one-third of kinship carers not getting the support they needed worried about continuing to care for their children. Does the Minister recognise the risk of delaying reforms which would provide security for kinship families today, given the significant personal and economic costs associated with increasing numbers of children entering the care system in the future?
5. What assessment has the Department for Education made of extending educational entitlements such as Pupil Premium Plus and support from the Virtual School to all children in kinship care?
6. Future legislative change will take some time, but kinship families – including those in my constituency – desperately need support today. Within the forthcoming National Kinship Care Strategy, what will the Government do to hold local authorities to account and ensure they are better supporting kinship families in their areas right now?

About Kinship

Kinship is the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We're here for all kinship carers – the grandparents and siblings, the aunts, uncles, and family friends who step up to raise children when their parents can't. We want every kinship family to have the recognition, value and support they need and deserve.

Learn more about [our policy and research work](#) and [Kinship Compass](#): our independent advice, information and support hub for kinship families in your constituency.

Contact

Sam Turner, Head of Policy and Public Affairs
sam.turner@kinship.org.uk