

Scotland's Vision for Kinship Care: Our Offer of Support for Families

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1. MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

I want to start by expressing my thanks to every one of you who has contributed to shaping our National Vision for Kinship Care over the last nine months or so. This work simply wouldn't have been possible without the insight and honesty of kinship carers, children and young people, and the many practitioners and partners who support them. I have been genuinely moved by the compassion, energy and commitment in Scotland's kinship community.

I also want to take a moment to recognise the significant work that has already been done across Scotland over many years to support kinship families. We have come a long way. Through the collective dedication of everyone involved, Scotland has steadily built a stronger, more compassionate approach to kinship care. The Vision honours the progress achieved, acknowledges the challenges that lie ahead, and recognises the collective determination that has brought us this far.

Today I am proud and delighted to share with you Scotland's National Vision for Kinship Care and our offer of support for families. Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, loving, and stable home, and kinship carers are a crucial part of making this possible – often stepping in at a moment's notice to provide care, security, and continuity for children within their family and friend network. Our vision is underpinned by our commitment to Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and our pledge to Keep The Promise, as well as the central mission of this Government to tackle child poverty.

Research shows that kinship care is often the best way to maintain a child's sense of identity, belonging and connection with their family and community. But we also know that carers face unique challenges: financial pressures, emotional strain, and navigating complex systems. That must change. Publishing this Vision and our offer to kinship families will make a difference but implementation is key.

I acknowledge that there are financial and workforce challenges – some of which we are addressing through the new National Social Work Agency – but this means we cannot deliver everything straight away or at the same time. We must be realistic about what we can do. The Government is committed to working alongside partners and kinship families to produce an implementation plan with clear timescales, funding and sequencing of work which takes account of other major reforms, including those as a result of The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill 2025. We also want to work with you to work out the detail of some of our offer, drawing on all the skills, expertise, knowledge and lived experience held across Scotland.

Finally, as some of you know, I am stepping down after the Scottish elections in May so I want to end by personally thanking all the kinship carers, practitioners and the wider workforce across Scotland, many of whom I have met and who have helped shape my thinking in relation to this national vision. I have been truly impressed by your dedication and commitment to making a positive difference for children and young people facing difficulties and challenges, and providing them with safe and nurturing homes that can change lives.



Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Scottish Government believes that every child in Scotland should grow up feeling loved, safe and respected, with rights upheld and relationships nurtured.

Key to this is The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Scotland) Act 2024 which strengthens the protection of children's rights in Scotland. In particular, it affirms every child's right to preserve their identity and family relationships without unlawful interference. This includes babies and infants, whose needs must be actively recognised and evidenced in decision-making about their care.

Our overarching ambition – in line with The Promise – is to keep families together where it is safe, and to provide the support that is needed to make this happen. Where that is not possible, our legislative framework and The Promise is clear that kinship care should be actively explored as a positive place for children to be cared for, along with the right family support in place. This approach aligns with our work on Whole Family Wellbeing and Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26, recognising that resilient family units, with the right support, contribute to improved outcomes and reduce child poverty.

Our work on The Promise is underpinned by Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) which is Scotland's approach to supporting all children and young people. GIRFEC makes it everyone's responsibility to ensure children grow up safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible, and included. The GIRFEC National Practice Model helps practitioners assess and respond to the needs of children in kinship care, ensuring support is tailored and holistic. It makes it clear that all children should benefit from a coordinated system where health visitors, mental and physical health services, and local authorities collaborate seamlessly to provide support when needed. For pre-school children, this includes recognition that the Health Visitor is the Named Person for most under-5s.

We also recognise the importance of early childhood development. Positive experiences in the first 1,001 days (conception to age 2) and through the 0–3 stage lay the foundations for later life. Latest ECD analysis indicates looked after children are significantly more likely to present developmental concerns than non-care-experienced peers. Supporting babies, infants and their carers within kinship arrangements early and proportionately is therefore critical.

The link between kinship care and poverty is well established. Many kinship carers, often grandparents or extended family members, step in at short notice, during times of crisis, frequently without preparation or financial support. They may face increased costs, reduced income, complex benefit interactions and limited access to resources, all while providing full-time care.

The broader actions and commitments to deliver The Promise, reduce child poverty and reform public services are set out in our Keeping the Promise Implementation Plan Update, and Plan 24-30. This Vision sits alongside that wider programme of reform.

The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill 2025 is currently progressing through the Scottish Parliament. At Stage 2, the Scottish Government brought forward amendments intended to strengthen support for children and young people with care experience, including those in kinship care. These include provisions relating to improved access to advocacy, extension of eligibility for aftercare, greater transparency in relation to financial support, and clarification of support arrangements across different legal routes. If agreed by Parliament at Stage 3, these provisions will be supported by statutory guidance and phased implementation. This vision and offer is designed to complement and align with the final legislative framework once agreed by Parliament.

We recognise that legislative change alone does not deliver improved experience for families navigating the system. Clear statutory guidance, accessible information and consistent local implementation are equally important. Throughout this vision and offer, where we refer to legislative change, this includes a commitment to strengthening guidance and ensuring that families understand what the law means in practice.

This vision and offer complements our existing adoption vision¹ and work on the future of foster care. Although many of the principles – especially around intensive family support, trauma-informed practice and community-based help – are shared across all caregiver groups this document focuses on the specific context and needs of kinship families.

¹ [Supporting adoption: vision and priorities](#)

3. THE EVOLVING NATURE OF KINSHIP CARE

Kinship care refers to situations where a child is unable to live with their parent(s) and instead resides with someone they already have an established relationship with. These carers, known as kinship carers, take on the responsibility of meeting the child's day-to-day needs and supporting their wellbeing. Kinship care is often, but not always, the right option for the child and decisions should continue to be based on how best to meet the unique needs and wellbeing of the child and ensure they are safe, loved and able to thrive.

Kinship care in Scotland has developed significantly over time. What began as informal and sometimes unclear arrangements has evolved into a more structured and recognised form of care. Today, kinship care is increasingly understood as a vital way to help each and every child remain connected to their family, community and cultural identity. This evolution reflects a growing recognition of children's rights to stable, loving relationships and the importance of supporting families - whether related by blood or bond - so that children and young people experience a sense of belonging, safety and support.

The main legislative framework for kinship care in Scotland, whilst connected to the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, lies within Part 13 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Kinship Care Assistance (Scotland) Order 2016.

However, children living in kinship families have a diverse range of experiences and may be subject to a range of legal orders, or none. Some children live with relatives through private family agreements without statutory involvement, while others are supported through a child's plan developed in collaboration with their family. Some children are looked after by the local authority, who asks the kinship carer to care for the child on their behalf, while others live with carers under a Section 11 order (regulating Parental Responsibilities and Rights) or are supported by a guardian appointed under section 7 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Corporate parenting duties apply when a child is looked after; they do not apply to children living with kin under Section 11 or private arrangements, although support may still be offered.

While kinship care is often supported locally, many arrangements involve more than one local authority, cross-border or international elements. These can involve additional legal steps and coordination, and families can experience delays or uncertainty about who to contact and what support applies. International kinship² cases may also involve immigration, safeguarding standards, cultural integration and ongoing oversight.

² Scottish Central Authority and [Children and Families Across Borders](#) can provide advice on international arrangements

4. RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

Our vision and offer for kinship care has been informed by research and the lived experience of kinship carers, children and families. We also engaged with local authorities and local partners, including the third-sector, and drew on insights from earlier work by the Kinship Care Collaborative.

A working draft of the vision was published in December 2025 and further comment invited through a light touch consultation on Citizen Space, along with a further period of engagement with kinship carers and children and young people.

What the research tells us

Emerging CELCIS work and published Scottish statistics indicate that kinship care, when well supported, can sustain family, school and community connections, reduce placement disruption and help continuity of identity. Barriers commonly highlighted include variable access to advice and income maximisation, uneven local support offers, challenges navigating legal/assessment pathways, housing issues and maintaining family relationships in difficult circumstances. These findings shape our vision and offer which focus on early, proportionate support and clearer local delivery expectations.

Children and young people's perspectives

Listening to babies, children and young people is central. For pre-verbal children we commit to 'voice of the infant' practice, for older children, participation feedback emphasises the need for timely information, stability of relationships, and support for family time where safe. Across ages, young people want professionals to explain decisions clearly and to evidence how their views informed those decisions.

Following the publication of the draft vision, we heard from children and young people with experience of kinship care through face to face engagement and through organisations responding to the consultation through Citizen Space. They told us they wanted more regular communication and greater say around decisions that affect their lives. Some said that infrequent contact or changes in the professionals supporting them made it harder to build trusting relationships, leaving them unsure about what to expect.

They also said they wished adults understood more about living in a kinship family: that more awareness is needed; that genuinely listening to children's feelings makes a real difference; and that stigma, whether in schools, services, or wider communities, can significantly affect them. Children and young people found it distressing to be in the middle of difficult family interactions. They stressed that support should be designed not only for carers but also for the children and young people who grow up in kinship families, whose needs may differ from their peers.

Kinship carers

To inform the working draft of the vision we met carers across Scotland through peer support groups in urban and rural areas and drew on professional insights from local services and The Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland (KCASS) management information.

Carers consistently highlighted: (i) the need for clear information at the outset (ii) reliable income maximisation and practical help (iii) straightforward access to emotional/therapeutic support and (iv) better coordination between services (health, education, social work). Further detail is at Annex A.

We revisited carers after the publication of the draft vision statement in December. Carers welcomed the vision and said they thought it addressed the challenges they had shared with us. They were clear, however, that the key test is delivery: they want to see practical changes in how families access support, clearer information and advice early on, and more consistent support across Scotland - particularly at transition points where help can fall away. They hoped that it would progress to becoming reality. Further detail is at Annex B.

Stakeholder workshops and system insight

To inform the working draft, we also held workshops with local partners and national stakeholders, including members of the Kinship Care Collaborative. It was clear that overall there is a great deal of willingness to make things better for kinship families. A variety of views were expressed about how that could be done, and local partners raised points around ensuring the right support at the right time, the impact of different legal orders on support, the definition of kinship care, the role of GIRFEC, the role of the community.

Feedback from local authorities, professional bodies and practitioners – both through pre-publication engagement and written consultation responses, highlighted the relational nature of their work with kinship families and the importance of having the time and capacity to build and sustain trusted relationships. Respondents noted workforce pressures and increasing complexity of need and emphasised that successful delivery of the vision will depend on realistic expectations, clear roles and responsibilities, manageable workloads and proportionate guidance to support consistent practice.

Some enablers to existing barriers were also identified including: clearer local 'kinship offers', common templates/guidance, proportionate data for improvement and stronger local authority – health collaboration in the early years.

We have used all of the above research and engagement to inform this final vision and offer for families.

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL VISION FOR KINSHIP CARE

Our vision is of a Scotland where children and young people living in kinship families receive the right support, at the right time, so they can thrive and reach their potential. Kinship care continues to be routinely explored as a positive place for children to be cared for and, importantly, is recognised and valued as a vital part of society.

Kinship carers and the children living with them are supported through joined-up, whole family support within their local communities, guided by the 10 principles of family support⁴ set out in The Promise, which emphasise early help, respect, and working alongside families. Children in kinship care are listened to and involved in decisions about their lives, with their rights respected and upheld.

There is consistent access to support across Scotland, irrespective of where families live and the legal route of the arrangement. Support is appropriate, high-quality help based on the unique needs and experiences of kinship families, delivered by a confident, supported workforce working effectively together across services.

Our vision **applies to all kinship families** in Scotland. This includes those families where the child is 'looked after'; those with a legal status/orders such as a Section 11, and those in private arrangements.

It is important to recognise that kinship carers are not a homogeneous group. The vision and offer (set out in section 6) aims to improve recognition and support for all kinship families, while respecting these different legal routes and related responsibilities. It does not change legal entitlements or duties under Part 13 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Kinship Care Assistance (Scotland) Order 2016 or those who are looked after in kinship care.

However, we recognise that the interactions between different legal routes (including looked after status, Section 11 orders and private arrangements) can be complex and are not always well understood by families. Through this vision and associated guidance, we will improve clarity about legal routes, implications for support, and how families can access advice at key decision points.

This means that in addition to the vision and offer, local authorities have additional duties to some children and young people. For example, young people who are 'looked after away from home' – living with foster carers, kinship carers or in residential care – on or after their 16th birthday have legal rights and entitlements to stay in the same place with the same carers up until their 21st birthday. There are

⁴ [keepthepromise-family-support.pdf](#)

also different duties on local authorities and corporate parents if a child or young person is looked after.

The Foundations

Our new vision and offer to kinship families is underpinned by the universal principles of GIRFEC, UNCRC and built on the 5 foundations⁵ set out in The Promise. It acknowledges the support and good practice already in place for kinship families and seeks to strengthen this through continued partnership and shared effort. Collectively, leadership and delivery will help us Keep The Promise and reduce child poverty by 2030.

Voice: Being Heard and Empowered

The voice of kinship families: babies, infants, children, young people and the adults who are caring for them – must be at the heart of decision making nationally, locally and especially where it affects their everyday life, and future. Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) approaches are a key way to empower children and families and should be considered, where safe and appropriate, when kinship care is being explored or reviewed.

Access to information, advocacy and independent legal advice also helps ensure that children and families understand their rights and how they can access them. This includes clear signposting to legal aid where available and practical support to understand the implications of different legal routes. Kinship carers should be enabled and empowered to access the support they need to care for the child they are looking after, and the help they need to look after themselves.

Family: Benefits of Kinship Care

Kinship care - living with relatives or close family friends – is a vital way to maintain family life. For ethnic minority families in particular, it can provide essential continuity of culture, language, beliefs and community connections that are central to children's identity and wellbeing. It should be actively considered as an alternative place for children and young people to live if they cannot live with their birth parents, and it meets the needs of the child. International evidence⁶ generally demonstrates that kinship care can retain a sense of family, identity and heritage and may increase the chances of children maintaining critical connections such as staying in the same school and community.

Evidence⁷ also indicates (with variation by context) that when well supported, children in kinship care often feel settled and safe and experience strong continuity of relationships, schooling and community. Kinship care can also bring with it the increased possibility for reunification with the birth family where appropriate, and this

⁵ [Five Foundations – Independent Care Review](#)

⁶ [CELCIS briefing on kinship care in Scotland](#)

⁷ [Permanently Progressing? Building secure futures for children in Scotland](#)

requires careful, supported planning. The strong policy emphasis on kinship as the first consideration has existed explicitly in Scotland since 2007.

Kinship care often involves navigating complex and emotionally demanding family relationships. Carers may be balancing their role as a grandparent, aunt, sibling or family friend while managing contact arrangements and, in some cases, high levels of conflict or trauma. Support must recognise this relational complexity. This includes access to mediation, therapeutic support and clear professional boundaries to protect children and carers from harm, while ensuring, importantly, that birth parents can access support to enable safe and appropriate relationships wherever possible.

Care: Equity of support

As The Promise states, “support must be offered freely without the kinship carer having to fight for it.” Support should be based on the unique family needs of children and carers – not the legal status of the arrangement. Families must receive the right support at the right time, with a flexible “step up, step down” approach across the childhood journey.

Kinship families should be able to access holistic, place based, whole family support. This support should be practical, emotional and financial support and in line with the 10 principles of family support set out in The Promise. It should also take account of cultural, ethnic or other diversity needs.

Care should have the infant, child or young person’s wellbeing, views and interests at the centre with tailored support for the kinship carer(s) to help them better meet the physical, emotional and practical needs of the child. This should be captured in the Child’s Plan where applicable, or a separate record, as it helps kinship families flourish and stay together.

Sustaining kinship arrangements requires recognising carer wellbeing as fundamental. Access to proportionate respite and emotional support helps prevent crisis and protects stability for children.

People: High quality advice, support and information

To ensure that carers can provide the trauma-informed and nurturing care required by children in kinship care, and support educational, physical, emotional and mental health needs, they must have access to high-quality advice, support and help. This should be both practical and emotional. Support should be available at key points in a child’s journey into and through kinship care, especially at the outset and during transitions, and continue on a proportionate basis in line with the GIRFEC approach and the principle of minimum necessary state intervention.

Supporting kinship carers in this way enables strong, meaningful and sustained relationships, and helps maintain stable, loving homes for children. Delivering this

consistently will depend on a confident, skilled children's services workforce with the knowledge and capacity to respond to families' needs appropriately.

Scaffolding: Role of partners

Support for kinship families should come from a range of providers, and there is a role for many different organisations. While some legal duties rest with local authorities, this is not solely a social work responsibility. Partners across housing, education, health, justice, the third sector, community organisations, and volunteers all have a role to play in delivering the holistic, place-based, whole-family support that kinship families need and deserve. Corporate parents only have particular legal duties to those who are looked after by the local authority.

One of the most pressing challenges facing kinship families is housing, and we recognise that this issue affects many families across the country. However, some of the problems facing kinship families are systemic and complex and that is why there is a strong shared commitment across sectors to improve outcomes for kinship families where possible.

The Government expects a multi-agency approach to service design and delivery, with Children's Services Planning Partnerships and GIRFEC playing a central role. There is no one-size-fits-all model. Social work involvement in kinship families should be guided by the same principles that apply to any family. Kinship families, especially those without social work involvement, should be able to access universal services, third sector support, and community-based resources such as existing family centres. All support must be free from stigma and judgement, widely promoted, and easily accessible.

Kinship carers often tell us they have to repeatedly explain their caring role and retell difficult personal histories to access everyday services. We will explore a consistent way for kinship carers to evidence their role when interacting with services such as schools, health and housing – starting with a standard national confirmation approach – so families are not disadvantaged. Over time, we will consider how this can align with wider work to improve secure information sharing and digital access to public services, subject to feasibility and data protection requirements.

Kinship carers have also told us that, without adequate workplace support, they are often forced to leave their jobs or retire early to care for a child. This not only places significant financial strain on families but also results in the loss of valuable skills and experience from the workforce. Crucially, many carers have emphasised that they value and enjoy their work and would continue in their roles if they received the right support.

To address this, we are working with employers across Scotland to promote the adoption of Kinship-Friendly policies, including offering additional paid family leave for kinship carers

In the meantime, the Scottish Government is leading by example, providing extra paid leave to its own staff who become kinship carers, and we are encouraging organisations across Scotland to follow suit.

How this vision will make a difference

This vision is a crucial step in transforming how Scotland recognises and supports kinship families.

Workforce and resourcing

We are aware that the vision and offer will have resource and workforce implications, especially for local authorities and third sector partners. We will work with national and local partners to consider how the needs of the workforce can be met to support kinship families effectively. This will include engagement with the National Social Work Agency in relation to the distinct learning and development needs of the social work workforce, alongside consideration of the wider children's services workforce. Any profession-specific development will align with existing regulatory and workforce frameworks. This will include engagement with relevant national bodies to understand the current workforce baseline, role clarity and development needs, where this is necessary to inform implementation.

This would take into account the different contexts in which services operate. We are mindful that the needs and challenges vary significantly across Scotland, including in rural and island areas where services may be more limited, travel times longer, and access to specialist support more difficult. Ensuring the vision is deliverable will require tailored approaches that reflect these local realities.

No additional statutory duties will be commenced without consideration of workforce capacity, sequencing and resource implications, and engagement with local authorities and other partners.

Delivery of the vision and offer

We know everything cannot be delivered straight away.

We recognise wider concerns about realism and resourcing. We intend to co-design, with partners and those with lived experience, a phased and costed delivery plan that is realistic, with clear timelines and milestones, sequenced according to resources and impact and wider reforms underway in the sector.

The delivery plan will distinguish actions that can be progressed immediately through clearer guidance, shared templates and improved coordination, from those that require legislative change, workforce expansion or additional investment. This

will help ensure expectations on local authorities and partners are clear, resourced and delivery is sequenced in a way that is aligned with workforce capacity.

The delivery plan will align with The Promise routemaps. There will be a key role for a redesigned Kinship Care Collaborative.

The co-design work will be undertaken during May to September 2026, with a delivery plan published in autumn and implementation on a sequenced basis thereafter. We will draw on different tools to support this, including the theory of change, and consider mapping what services are currently available to understand what new/adapted services might be needed to help local authorities and third sector partners to implement the vision and offer. Absolutely key is the sequencing of delivery based on the capacity of local partners. We will also consider consistency of support across the different caregiver groups where it meets the needs of the children and family.

Roles and responsibilities

The delivery plan will also set out clear roles and responsibilities recognising that successful implementation of the vision and offer will require the commitment and support from many partners including local authorities, health, education, housing, justice, social security, the third sector and communities. We recognise that different partners have distinct legal duties and workforce planning cycles, including for different kinship care cohorts. Relevant national bodies will be engaged early in the development of the delivery plan to ensure alignment with existing workplans and capacity.

Monitoring and governance

We will also consider how best to track progress and measure impact. Data collection and strong evaluation will be key with read across to the existing Promise Progress Framework and Promise route maps.

In line with this, we are committed to gaining a comprehensive understanding of all kinship care arrangements in Scotland, including kinship placements where the child is no longer considered "looked after". By collaborating with local authorities to gather data on kinship care families in their areas, we aim to create a more complete and accurate picture of kinship care across Scotland. These insights will help shape policy decisions that better support the wellbeing, stability, and positive outcomes of all children and families in kinship care.'

We want to ensure accountability and governance, including feedback loops for kinship families. We will consider how best to do this in a way which utilises existing forums and stakeholder groups both within the Scottish Government and externally, so we avoid duplication, link to wider work on child poverty, early child development and whole family support, making best use of peoples' energies and efforts.

5. SCOTTISH OFFER TO KINSHIP FAMILIES

Kinship carers play a vital role in providing safe, loving homes for children and young people, where they cannot live with their parents. We recognise that where children are not being looked after by the local authority, not all kinship carers, want, or require intensive support, but many kinship carers in these situations tell us they feel unrecognised, under-supported and sometimes stigmatised.

Our Scottish offer is informed by research and the voices of children, young people and carers, as well as the practitioners and partners who support them. It sets out the basic level of support that every kinship family should be able to expect, wherever they live in Scotland, and regardless of the legal status of their arrangement. If a child or young person is looked after by the local authority in a kinship care arrangement they may already be accessing this support, as well as there being other duties placed on the local authorities. For those kinship families where there is no local authority involvement, this offer is not about increasing unnecessary statutory interference in private family life – instead it aims to increase support to kinship families who need and choose it.

In this section, some commitments reflect existing duties and services that we want to strengthen, others will require changes to legislation or guidance. All legislative proposals **are subject to approval by the Scottish Parliament** and may change depending on the outcome of Stage three of the parliamentary process for the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill 2025.⁸

Some elements of the Scottish Offer to Kinship Families, for example support for family relationships, strengthening kinship expertise or kinship co-ordination or mentoring pilots will require detailed work, with local partners and kinship carers, to plan out how they will be implemented in practice, including what additional resource or funding would be required to deliver the service. As indicated earlier, the Scottish Government will co-design a sequenced, costed delivery plan with local authorities, the third sector and people with lived experience.

SCOTTISH OFFER TO KINSHIP FAMILIES

1. Voice – Listening to and amplifying lived experience

Babies, infants, children, young people and kinship carers must have a meaningful say in the decisions that affect their lives and in how services are designed and delivered.

Our commitments:

- **Independent advocacy:** Children and young people in kinship care, and

⁸ [Part 2: Stages of Bills – the general rules | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

those who have experience of kinship care, will have improved access to independent advocacy support, through legislation and statutory guidance, to help them understand their rights and participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives.

- **Universal definition of “care experience”:** Will be developed (through statutory guidance). This will include those with experience of kinship care and will help to raise awareness, reduce stigma and improve consistency in support and understanding of care experience across public services.
- **Positive recognition:** We will promote positive recognition of kinship care through awareness raising and improving understanding, knowledge and skills among professionals – including health and education – and the public, so that kinship families experience informed, respectful and appropriate support.
- **Life journey work:** Will be promoted as good practice, where appropriate to a child’s circumstances and wishes, to help children understand their story and strengthen identity and belonging. It will be delivered in a trauma informed and child-led way, with skilled professional support where required.

2. Family – Support that keeps families together

Often kinship care is about sustaining family relationships and navigating complex family dynamics. Families must be able to access timely, proportionate help that reflects their individual and unique circumstances.

Our commitments:

- **Right to request support assessment:** Through legislation, kinship families will have the right to request, or be proactively offered, a proportionate assessment of their support needs, aligned to the existing GIRFEC approach and National Practice Model. It will be proportionate to the family’s circumstances and will not duplicate existing child protection processes or statutory adult carer assessments. This assessment will consider the circumstances of the child and wider family where relevant, but will not create a separate or additional statutory child protection or child’s plan process. This could be carried out by the local authority, for example by family workers, and we are exploring the feasibility of delivery models involving third sector partners, while retaining local authority accountability for statutory duties. Detail will be set out in statutory guidance.
- **Alignment with GIRFEC planning:** The assessment of support needs and any agreed actions would, where relevant, align with existing GIRFEC processes – including the Child’s Plan or other multi-agency planning arrangements for the child. However, the kinship carer’s support needs are distinct and may require separate consideration. Where there is no formal Child’s Plan, or where carer needs are not reflected within it, there should be a proportionate written record of the assessment and agreed, to ensure clarity, coordination and shared understanding across services.

- **Extended Kinship Care Assistance:** We will extend and clarify, in law, and statutory guidance the range of supports available as Kinship Care Assistance (KCA), to be delivered by local authorities in line with their statutory duties, to include:
 - Income maximisation and financial support (including clear interaction with benefits)
 - Information, advice and guidance
 - Emotional and therapeutic support (e.g. counselling, mediation, trauma-informed services)
 - Peer and community support networks
 - Learning and development opportunities
 - Practical and material assistance (e.g. household adjustments, transport, planned and emergency respite, including short breaks that reflect the age and needs of the child and the circumstances of the carer)
 - Transitional and continuing support as children move between arrangements with implementation phased and supported through guidance and delivery planning.
- **Support for family relationships:** Kinship families will be supported to maintain and strengthen relationships with parents, siblings and wider family where it is safe and, in the child's, best interests, recognising that managing complex family dynamics can be emotionally demanding and, at times, involve conflict. Support may include mediation, therapeutic input and clear professional boundaries to protect children and carers from harm, including clear, accessible information on family time arrangements and where to get help when challenges arise. Birth parents should also be able to access appropriate support so that relationships can be repaired and sustained safely wherever possible.
- **Family Group Decision Making (FGDM):** Where decisions are being made about a child's care or support arrangements, FGDM can be used to help families and professionals plan together, where appropriate and aligned with legislation and local arrangements.

3. Care – Stability, fairness and equity

Every kinship family should experience equitable support, taking account of rural dimensions, regardless of where they live or the legal status of their arrangement.

Our commitments:

- **Publication of allowance rates:** Through legislation, Ministers will require local authorities to publish the rates of payments paid to both foster and kinship carers, supporting efforts to ensure national parity of allowances, in line with the Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA) and provide clear information to carers on what the allowance is intended to cover for the child.
- **Aftercare access:** Children and young people from kinship families who

were previously 'looked after' before age 16, and who need and want support, will have the right to access Aftercare from age 16.

- **Local kinship offer:** Local partners will be supported through Children's Services Planning processes to develop and publish a local kinship care offer, setting out how the national offer is delivered locally, taking account of local needs and priorities and building on existing services and subject to available resources, with national support to reduce burden.
- **Transitional support:** Kinship families will benefit from access to proportionate and transitional support as children move from looked after to Section 11 kinship care arrangements, avoiding abrupt loss of help. While statutory kinship care assistance applies only to those with a Section 11 order, local partners should seek to avoid cliff-edges in support for other kinship families wherever possible.

4. People – Skilled, connected and supported communities

Kinship carers and practitioners have distinct roles and responsibilities, but both require access to clear information, learning, peer networks and professional advice to sustain high-quality care.

Our commitments:

- **Kinship Starter Pack:** Every new kinship carer should receive clear, accessible information early in their journey. We will develop a nationally consistent Kinship Starter Pack (digital and paper), co-designed with carers and young people, including:
 - plain English explanation of kinship care and legal routes
 - financial entitlements and benefit interactions
 - step-by-step practical checklists (school, GP, housing, benefits)
 - where to access advice, advocacy and peer support
 - guidance on family time and managing complex relationships
 - information on respite and emotional support
- Local authorities will be encouraged to strengthen dedicated kinship care expertise within their existing structures, (for example through specialist kinship teams or lead practitioners or identified points of contact, in line with local need and capacity).
- Kinship carers will be informed about the offer of support from the Named Person or Lead Professional where there is a Child's Plan, so that assessment and support for the child and family are co-ordinated.
- **Kinship co-ordination pilots:** We will explore and pilot, in partnership with local authorities, models of kinship co-ordination, to provide a clear point of contact for kinship carers navigating services such as education, health and housing, as well as linking into local community groups. These roles would not replace statutory social work functions or existing lead professionals, but would complement them by improving coordination and clarity for families. This may involve adapting existing initiatives/services or roles rather than

creating new standalone posts. Governance arrangements, scope of responsibility and cost, will be co-designed out with local partners in advance of piloting to avoid duplication and ensure clear lines of accountability, with clear escalation routes into statutory services where required.

- **Evidence of caring role:** We will explore options to provide kinship carers with a consistent and proportionate way to evidence their caring role across services, to reduce barriers and repeatedly explain their circumstances.
- **Trauma training:** Access to bespoke trauma training for kinship carers, developed as part of the National Trauma Transformation Programme, to help carers provide trauma-informed care.
- Guided by partners and kinship carers we will develop further information or learning resources that would help them better support the children and young people they are looking after.
- **Mentoring pilots:** We will explore pilot opportunities for experienced kinship carers, or foster carers who no longer foster full-time to mentor new kinship carers, sharing learning and peer support. Where short, child-centred breaks are considered as part of a pilot, these would operate within existing safeguarding checks, approval and oversight arrangements, and would not create informal or unregulated care arrangements.
- **Practitioner learning:** Practitioners working with kinship families will have access to shared learning resources, communities of practice and training, supported at a national level and delivered in partnership with local authorities and sector bodies. This will include cross-sector learning on kinship care principles and practice, alongside profession-specific development to reflect the distinct statutory responsibilities and specialist skills required within social work and other services so that support is consistent and grounded in evidence and lived experience.

5. Scaffolding – A coordinated and sustainable system

To make this offer real, delivery must be underpinned by robust structures, resources and partnerships.

Our commitments:

- **Children’s Services Planning alignment: Local delivery is intended to** be aligned with Children’s Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs), ensuring alignment across agencies and integration with whole family support and child poverty planning.
- **Costed delivery plan:** Implementation will be sequenced through a costed national delivery plan, developed collaboratively with local partners and those with lived experience.
- **Housing collaboration:** We will actively facilitate sharing of good practice and innovative ideas between housing and social work and wider partners professionals to tackle some of the challenges such as overcrowding, access to priority points, and adaptations where children move into kinship care at

short notice or have additional needs.

- **Data and guidance improvements:** We will continue to develop guidance, templates and data improvements to promote consistency and reduce administrative burden.
- Progress will be tracked, using existing reporting mechanisms where possible, with regular reporting on milestones and outcomes for children and families.
- We will explore what more needs done to ensure a clear and understandable kinship policy and legislative landscape, and the cost/benefits of any changes.
- We will redesign the Kinship Care Collaborative to help us deliver the vision and offer.
- **Kinship-Friendly Employers:** We will work with employers across Scotland to encourage the voluntary adoption of Kinship-Friendly policies within their organisations, including consideration of additional paid family leave to support kinship carers.

6. Kinship Advice Service for Scotland (KCASS) — a national “first stop” for kinship families

KCASS will be further embedded as a universal, nationally promoted route to clear, consistent advice and referrals, aligned with The Promise and local Children’s Services Planning.

Our commitments:

- **National advice hub:** KCASS acts as a national advice hub, providing timely, rights-based guidance, initial legal information and signposting to independent legal advice and coordinated referrals into local services (LA kinship teams, income maximisation, education, health, housing, third sector).
- **Legal clarity:** Provide accessible explanations of common legal routes (including Section 11 and looked after status) and their implications for Support.
- **Outreach:** A co-ordinated awareness approach to increase understanding of KCASS among kinship carers (including those in informal arrangements) and key professionals (social work, schools, health, advice agencies) using universal services and community channels to maximise reach.
- **No wrong door:** Clear referral and sign-posting pathways so local partners and KCASS can hand families off seamlessly, supported by agreed protocols and information-sharing arrangements to reduce unnecessary variation while allowing tailored, individualised advice.
- **Inclusive access:** Phone, web, and community outreach; accessible formats and languages; offline, jargon-free materials; and proactive engagement through schools and community settings to avoid digital exclusion or disadvantage; targeted campaigns for under-served groups (e.g. informal carers with no current LA involvement).
- **Insight to improvement:** KCASS provides anonymised data/insight on

recurring issues (e.g. allowances, housing barriers, school supports) to inform national policy and local offers.

- **Contribute to national learning:** by sharing insights, trends and good practice emerging from its advice and support work, informing local practice and national policy development.

6. ANNEX A

METHODS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH KINSHIP CARERS (August – November 2025)

Activities: Facilitated peer groups discussions (urban/rural mix, LA-led and third-sector-led) before and after publication of draft vision, practitioner roundtables and KCASS Management Information review.

Participants: Kinship carers with varied legal routes (looked after, Section 11, private arrangements)

Approach: Open-ended questions; thematic analysis; consent and anonymisation applied; no social workers present during carer sessions to reduce perceived power dynamics.

Equity considerations: Accessible timings; expenses/childcare support where possible; plain-English materials.

What we heard

- The various legal orders were not understood well and carers often didn't know what their rights were.
- Carers often experience financial hardship when they become kinship carers and financial systems are complex to navigate.
- Carers often felt abandoned and 'left to get on with it' and found it difficult to know how to access the right help, often having to fight for it.
- Education and mental health supports for children and young people are hard to access.
- Mental health support for carers was difficult to access, although carers said they needed it to deal with the complex needs of the children they cared for and the traumatic and strained family relationships they experienced.
- Housing barriers disrupt stability.
- Stigma and lack of recognition.
- Carers spoke highly of their local authority kinship team in areas where they had them.
- Carers described peer support groups as a lifeline.
- Carers spoke warmly of their love for the children they cared for and their pride in children's achievements in the face of adversity.

7. ANNEX B

Consultation period update (December 2025–February 2026)

Alongside earlier engagement, we received further responses via Citizen Space and undertook targeted discussions with kinship carers, young people and sector stakeholders.

Overall, responses welcomed the vision and Scottish offer as a positive step in recognising kinship care and aligning with The Promise and GIRFEC. The strongest message, however, was that families want to see clear delivery, resourcing and consistent implementation across Scotland.

Key themes raised in this consultation period included:

- **Delivery confidence and resourcing:** Many carers and stakeholders supported the principles but expressed low confidence that change will be delivered without long-term funding, workforce capacity and clear accountability.
- **Financial insecurity and child poverty:** Financial support and inequality (including perceived disparity with foster care support) was a dominant theme. Respondents highlighted hardship during transitions into kinship care, delays in accessing assistance and complexity of benefit interactions.
- **Information at the outset:** Carers repeatedly emphasised the need for a clear, universal “starter pack” explaining kinship care, legal routes, entitlements and how to access support and peer networks.
- **Legal clarity and access to advice:** Many responses highlighted confusion around different legal routes (including Section 11 and looked after status), the implications for support over time, and barriers to accessing affordable legal advice or legal aid.
- **Respite and carer wellbeing:** Respite was consistently raised as a key gap. Carers described exhaustion and isolation, particularly older carers and those with multiple caring roles, and emphasised that support should not be crisis-only. They emphasised access to planned short breaks, rather than crisis-only intervention, would help sustain placements and protect wellbeing.
- **Navigating complex family relationships:** Carers highlighted the emotional labour of kinship care, including managing family time, conflict, and fear of being judged as “unsuitable” if they ask for help. Respondents called for trauma-informed, family-centred practice and clearer professional boundaries.
- **Education and health access:** Respondents noted inconsistent support in schools and long waits for CAMHS/therapeutic services. Young people highlighted stigma, the burden of repeated retelling, and the importance of professionals understanding kinship care.
- **Housing pressures:** Overcrowding and limited access to appropriate housing were raised as major stressors affecting stability and wellbeing.

- **Digital exclusion and accessible communication:** Stakeholders emphasised the need for non-digital routes, jargon-free materials and proactive outreach through schools and community settings, so families are not disadvantaged.

We used these insights to refine the vision and offer and will also use it to inform co-design of the phased delivery plan, including priorities for guidance, communication, and support to local implementation.



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

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