



Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Time and Date

10.00 am on Thursday, 17th September 2026

Place

Diamond Rooms 1 and 2 - Council House, Coventry

Public Business

1. **Apologies and Substitutions**

2. **Declarations of Interests**

3. **Minutes** (Pages 5 - 8)

a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2026

b) Matters arising

4. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

To consider whether to exclude the press and public for the item of private business for the reasons shown in the Briefing Note.

5. **Cabinet Member Priorities 2026/27** (Pages 9 - 14)

Briefing Note of the Director of Law, Governance and Safer Communities

Note: The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Equalities will attend the meeting for this item of business.

6. **Work Programme 2026/27** (Pages 15 - 20)

Briefing Note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator

7. **Kinship Local Offer** (Pages 21 - 52)

Briefing Note of the Director of Children's and Education Services

Note: The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People has been invited to the meeting for this item of business.

8. **The Complexities Involved in Finding Homes for Children in Care and Associated Costs** (Pages 53 - 64)

Briefing Note of the Director of Children's and Education Services

Note: The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People has been invited to the meeting for this item of business.

9. **Any Other Business**

Any other item(s) of public business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

Private Business

10. **The Complexities Involved in Finding Homes for Children in Care and Associated Costs** (Pages 65 - 78)

Report of the Director of Children's and Education Services

(Listing Officer: A Whitrick – Email: angela.whitrick@coventry.gov.uk)

Note: The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People has been invited to the meeting for this item of business.

11. **Any Other Business**

Any other item(s) of private business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

Julie Newman, Director of Law, Governance and Safer Communities, Council House, Coventry

Wednesday, 9 September 2026

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Michelle Salmon, Governance Services, Email: michelle.salmon@coventry.gov.uk

Membership:

Councillors A Bullock, A Cole, J Fearn, S Hanson (Co-opted Member), G Hayre, J Innes, D Jackson (Co-opted Member), S Jobbar (Chair) and G Vohra (Co-opted Member)

By invitation:

Councillor M Mutton - Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Councillor A S Khan - Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Equalities

Public Access

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Michelle Salmon**Governance Services****Email: michelle.salmon@coventry.gov.uk**

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Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 16 July 2026

Present:

Members: Councillor S Jobbar (Chair)
Councillor A Bullock
Councillor A Cole
Councillor J Fearn
Councillor G Hayre
Councillor A Hopkins (substitute for Councillor J Innes)

Co-opted Members: Sybil Hanson
Ghulam Vohra

Other Members: Councillor M Mutton – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Employees (by Directorate):

Children's and Education Services S Sen (Director)

Law, Governance and Safer Communities M Rose, A West

Apologies: Councillor J Innes
David Jackson (Co-opted Member)

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interests

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th March 2026 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

3. OFSTED Inspection of Coventry Local Authority Children's Services

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a report of the Director of Children's and Education Services that provided information on the recent inspection of Coventry Local Authority Children's Services including services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers.

All Local Authority Children's Services are inspected by Ofsted, every three/four years. The focus of inspections includes:

- The effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children, and enable families to stay together and get the help they need
- The experience and progress of children in care wherever they live, including children who return home
- The effectiveness of the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, in stable, loving homes, including adoption
- The experience and progress of care leavers

Inspectors also evaluate:

- The effectiveness of leaders and managers
- The impact leaders and managers have on the lives of children and young people
- The quality of professional practice delivered by multi-disciplinary local authority teams that are equipped and effective

Children's Services were last inspected in June 2022. A change to the inspection framework in January 2023, introduced a separate judgement and evaluation criteria added for 'the experience and progress of care leavers. The outcome of Coventry's inspection in 2026, therefore included a separate judgement for care leavers for the first time. Local Authority Children's Services Inspections were based on a strength-based approach focusing on social workers and social work practice.

Children's Services were inspected between 9-13 March 2026. The Ofsted report was published on 18th May 2026, judging Coventry Children's Services as 'Outstanding' in four of the five judgement areas. Ofsted judgements for all Local Authorities in England, highlighted that Coventry were 28th of 153 local authorities representing the top 18% nationally. Coventry were one of four local authorities in the West Midlands region rated 'Outstanding' overall. This achievement was significant and one to be proud of. The inspection report identified two recommendations to strengthen and improve further:

- The consistency of the quality and impact of planning for children in need of help and protection.
- The consistency of the quality and impact of supervision.

The national children's social care reforms provided an important opportunity to strengthen and accelerate local ambitions for children and families. The direction of travel, including a stronger focus on Family Help, multi-agency working, kinship and family networks, and evidence-informed practice, align closely with the commitment to strengthen practice further and ensure children receive the right help at the right time, aligned to the One Coventry ambition. The aim was to shift the balance of support towards earlier help, prevention and whole-family approaches, so that families would be supported before needs escalate and children would be helped to remain safely within their families and communities wherever possible.

The test and learn pilot of the end-to end pathway from Family Help to multi-agency child protection commenced at the beginning of June 2026 in the East locality team and would be an opportunity to evaluate at the end of the six months and provide a basis for the phased roll out implementation planned for March 2027. While recognising the progress already made, Coventry would continue to learn, internally challenge and work with partners to deliver consistently outstanding practice, improve outcomes and strive for the very best for all children, young people and families.

A Children's Services Action Plan had been developed to focus on strengthening and developing what was already very strong and would include quality and impact of plans and supervision in line with the Quality Assurance Framework. Progress against the areas for development would be monitored by the senior leadership team and presented to a future Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2).

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People attended the meeting and outlined her commitment to providing the best service and indicated that any recommendations from the Scrutiny Board would be welcomed. The Cabinet Member and the Scrutiny Board offered congratulations to all those involved for what they had achieved.

The Briefing Note and presentation at the meeting highlighted:

- The journey over time
- The inspection areas of focus
- Strengths
- Areas to develop
- The impact of lifelong relationship links
- The right help at the right time
- Partnership working

In considering the Briefing Note and the presentation, the Scrutiny Board asked questions and received responses from officers and the Cabinet Member on matters including:

- Continuing to improve
- Working on the areas for development
- Recruitment and retention and promoting the challenging but rewarding profession
- Training programmes

The Cabinet Member and the Director of Children's and Education Services were positive that the self-evaluation identified areas to develop further, including the following:

- Consistency and auditing quality impacts
- Evidencing detail including discussions and curiosity, actions and decisions
- Work planning
- Supervision
- Recruitment and retention, training and development

The Scrutiny Board thanked officers for their presentation and their continued commitment.

RESOLVED that the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board (2):

- 1) Notes and welcomes the recommendations highlighted in the Inspection report.**
- 2) Requests that 'Recruitment, Retention and Workforce Planning in Children's Services' be added to their Work Programme 2026/27.**

4. Work Programme 2026/27

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) received a Briefing Note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator that detailed issues that were proposed for the Board's Work Programme for meetings of the Board in 2026/27.

Further to Resolution 2) in Minute 3/26 above, it was noted that an item headed 'Recruitment and Retention and Workforce Planning in Children's Services' would be added to the Work Programme.

The Scrutiny Board also requested an item about Behaviour, Attendance, Exclusions and Alternative Provision in Schools.

RESOLVED that the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2026/27 be updated to include:

- Recruitment and Retention and Workforce Planning in Children's Services**
- Behaviour, Attendance, Exclusions and Alternative Provision in schools**

5. Any Other Business

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 10.46 am)



Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 17 September 2026

Cabinet Portfolio: Cabinet Member Children and Young People, Cabinet Member Education, Skills and Equalities

Subject: Cabinet Member Priorities 2026-27

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the Cabinet Member priorities which sit with the remit of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) in order to identify potential Work Programme items.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) is recommended to:
 - 1) Consider the information provided at Appendix 1, as well as at the meeting
 - 2) Identify any items for the Work Programme 2026-27

3 Information and Background

- 3.1 One of Scrutiny's role is to hold the Executive to account by reviewing decisions made by the Cabinet before they are implemented (pre-scrutiny) or after they are enacted.
- 3.2 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) has the responsibility of scrutinising the portfolios of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Equalities.
- 3.3 Each Scrutiny Committee/Board has a Work Programme which is determined by that Committee/Board, where items for Scrutiny are identified for the municipal year.

Appendix1: Cabinet Member Priorities

Gennie Holmes
Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Law, Governance and Safer Communities
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Children's and Education Cabinet Member Priorities 2026-27



Cabinet Member Children and Young People

Children and young people in Coventry deserve to have the best start in life with access to the right support at the right time to prevent escalation into statutory children's services. Where they need to be safeguarded and cannot remain within the family network as corporate parents we need to provide the best care in good quality homes.

Families First & Best Start in Life

Whole-scale reform delivery focused on early intervention and prevention, family-led decision making, and implementation of Family Help and Multi Agency Child Protection Teams — shifting the dial from late statutory intervention to early support so children can stay within families.

Sufficiency of Homes

Increasing the sufficiency of good quality homes for our children in care and care leavers in Coventry. This will be achieved through fostering, residential homes and supported accommodation.

Reunification & Family-Led Solutions

Supporting and enabling greater reunification and family led solutions for children to exit care, e.g. kinship care and adoption.

Foster Friendly Employers

Encourage and promote more organisations to become foster friendly employers as part of Child Friendly Cov.

Corporate Parenting Duties

Partnership responsibilities delivered in line with new corporate parenting duties identified in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.

Cabinet Member Education, Skills & Equalities : Education Priorities

Children and young people deserve an education that enables them to flourish, now and into the future. The Coventry Education Partnership is committed to ensuring all children and young people feel they belong, can reach their full potential and maximise their life chances as they move into adulthood

SEND & Alternative Provision

- Deliver national reform and improve inclusion
- Improve experiences and outcomes for children and families
- Strengthen AP and education engagement
- Deliver financially sustainable SEND services
- Strengthen local area accountability through data and co-production
- Maximise Support Service offer

Enabling a self-improving education system through effective partnership, support and challenge

- Raise achievement
- Improve attendance and education engagement
- Reduce pupil suspensions and exclusions
- Strengthen inclusion, 'Belonging' and wellbeing
- Support young people's progression into sustained education, employment, apprenticeships and training
- Provision of high-quality traded services

Other local and national reform

- Maximise Education's Contribution to the Family First Partnership Programme
- Deliver the Best Start in Life for Children and Families
- Expand Access to Enrichment and Positive Activities
- Ensure sufficient, high-quality early years and education provision is available across Coventry to meet current and future demand
- Strengthen delivery of the Extended Duties of the Virtual School

Potential considerations for SB2 work plan for 2026-27

- Family First Partnership Programme
 - SEND & AP Reform
 - Kinship Strategy and Kinship Local Offer
 - Sufficiency of Children's Homes
 - Development of the Children's Social Care Academy
 - Recruitment, Retention and workforce planning
 - Child Friendly Gov/Family Valued Impact Reports
 - Inclusion and Belonging, Alternative Provision & Behaviour
 - Education Performance - across the key stages
 - Annual Reports (Fostering Annual Report, Adoption Service Annual Report, Safeguarding Annual Report)
 - Best Start in life, Early Help & Early years
 - Holiday Activities & Food Programme
- 

Agenda Item 6

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2026-27

Last updated 8 September 2026

Please see page 2 onwards for background to items

16th July 2026
Children's Services Ofsted Report
10th September 2026 – move to 17th September
Cabinet Member Priorities Kinship Strategy and Local Kinship Offer (25/26) Placement Sufficiency
15th October 2026
Young People and Social Media
19 November 2026
Child Exploitation
17 December 2026
Families First Partnership Programme
21 January 2027
Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Local Transformation Plan April 2025 – March 2027
25 February 2027
School Performance - tbc School Attendance Elective Home Education
15 April 2027
Best Start in Life
2026-27
Regional Placements School Places Sufficiency SEND reforms progress Children's Front Door MASH – Effective Support for Children and Families in Coventry Youth Provision in Coventry Health and Wellbeing in Schools Family Health and Lifestyles Service – SB5 joint Family Valued and Reunification Project Recruitment, retention and workforce planning Uptake of FSM and impact on school budgets Child-friendly Cov Behaviour, Attendance, Exclusions and Alternative Provision in Schools

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2026-27

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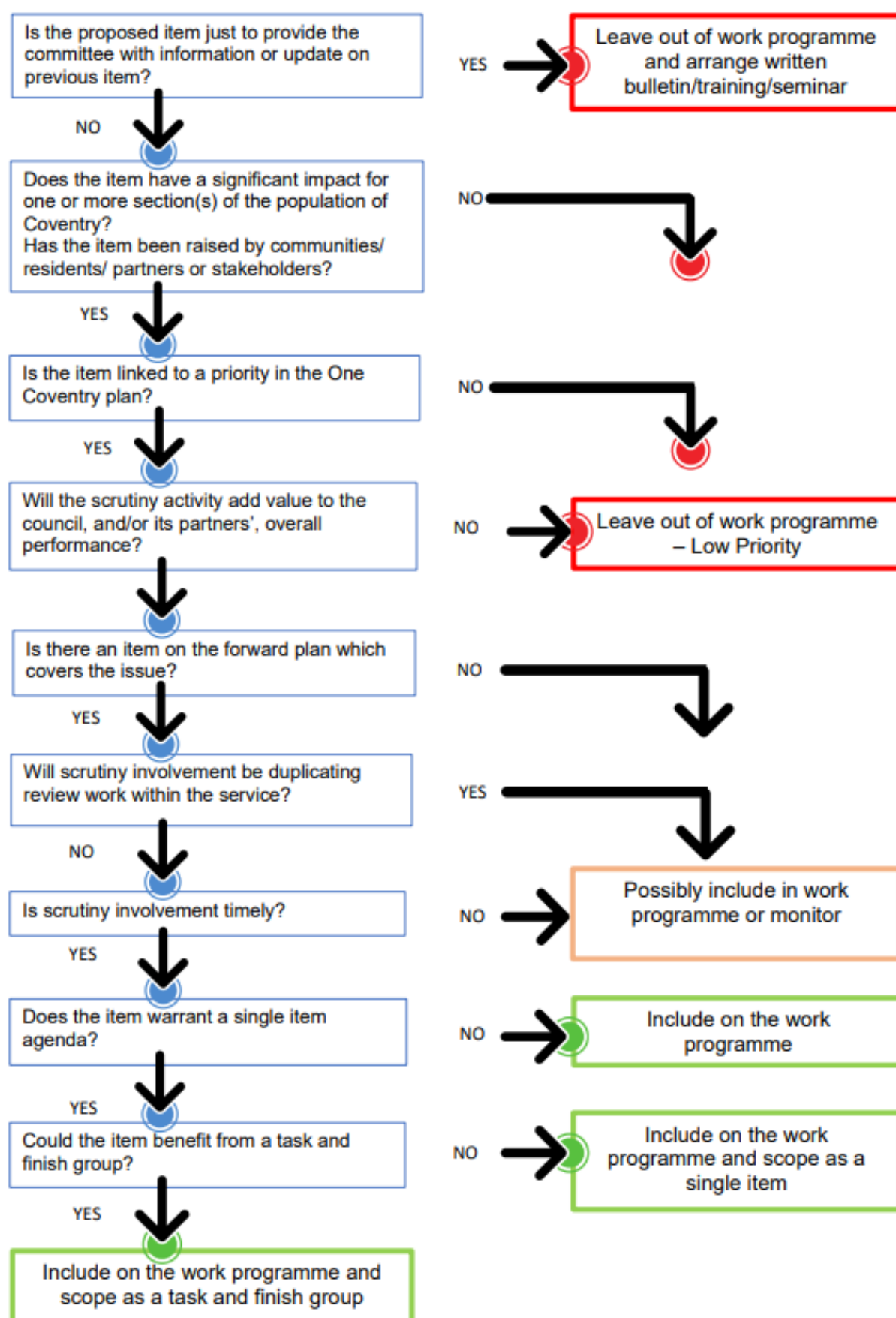
Date	Title	Detail	Cabinet Member	Lead Officer
16th July 2026	Children's Services Ofsted Report	To consider the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of Children's Services	Children & Young People	S Sen
10th September 2026 – move to 17th September	Cabinet Member Priorities	Written Briefing Note of priorities to be circulated to the Board ahead of the meeting	Children & Young People Education, Skills & Equalities	
	Kinship Strategy and Local Kinship Offer (25/26)		Children & Young People	S Sen
	Placement Sufficiency	Refreshed Placement Sufficiency Strategy	Children & Young People	A Whitrick
15th October 2026	Young People and Social Media	Looking at the impact on behaviour, mental health and attention span	Education, Skills & Equalities	R Sugars
19 November 2026	Child Exploitation	To cover criminal and sexual exploitation. The work of the Horizon Team – links with the police and health.	Children & Young People	C Heeley
17 December 2026	Families First Partnership Programme		Children & Young People	S Sen
21 January 2027	Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Local Transformation Plan April 2025 – March 2027	Potentially joint meeting with SB5	Children & Young People	
25 February 2027	School Performance - tbc		Education, Skills & Equalities	

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Work Programme 2026-27

Date	Title	Detail	Cabinet Member	Lead Officer
	School Attendance	Progress on recommendations agreed by Scrucro on 9/4/26 including progress on data.	Education, Skills & Equalities	R Sugars
	Elective Home Education	Progress on T&F recommendations agreed by Scrucro 9/4/26, including 14-16 and post16 provision	Education, Skills & Equalities	R Sugars
15 April 2027	Best Start in Life		Children & Young People	S Sen
2026-27	Regional Placements	Also to include progress on West Midlands Safer Centre	Children & Young People	S Sen
	School Places Sufficiency	Primary, Secondary and Special – to look in more detail at the delivery on the One Strategic Plan – refer to Scrucro for Cabinet Report.	Education, Skills & Equalities	R Sugars
	SEND reforms progress			R Sugars
	Children's Front Door	An aspect of the LGA Peer Review.	Children & Young People	S Sen
	MASH – Effective Support for Children and Families in Coventry	Looking at the impact of the new partnership threshold document in reducing inappropriate referrals into MASH, as well as diversion to Family Hubs.	Children & Young People	S Sen
	Youth Provision in Coventry	How and where we work with outside partners (and specifically the third sector) to deliver it	Children & Young People	S Sen
	Health and Wellbeing in Schools	To look at what is being done to promote health and well-being in schools and universities – including the school nursing service	Education, Skills & Equalities	A Duggal

Date	Title	Detail	Cabinet Member	Lead Officer
	Family Health and Lifestyles Service – SB5 joint	To looking in more detail at how the service is tackling health inequalities and targeting services at those in need on a localised basis. School nurse provision. Also how the service is supporting Early Help BN CM CYP & PHSW - Early Help.docx		Bill McCann – Allison Duggal
	Family Valued and Reunification Project	Pick up outstanding items from 24-25, cost of care proceedings, ethnicity, cost of different levels of intervention	Children & Young People	Sukriti Sen
	Recruitment, retention and workforce planning	Suggested at the meeting on 16 July 2026	Children & Young People	Sukriti Sen
	Uptake of FSM and impact on school budgets	Following a query at Scrucro on 20 November 25, an item on the impact of universal FSM in KS1 and having to claim beyond that age.	Education, Skills & Equalities	Rachael Sugars
	Child-friendly Cov	A follow up from meeting held 27 November 25 to consider widening the inclusion of schools across the city in Child-friendly Cov activities	Children & Young People	Angela Whitrick Rachael Sugars
	Behaviour, Attendance, Exclusions and Alternative Provision in Schools	Tying together several linked items together	Education, Skills & Equalities	Rachael Sugars

Work Programme Decision Flow Chart



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Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 17th September 2026.

Cabinet Portfolio: Children and Young People

Subject: Kinship Local Offer

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of recent developments in Kinship Care, including the implementation of the Government's first National Kinship Care Strategy, the introduction of local Kinship Offers, and the current Law Commission review proposing significant reforms to the legal framework supporting kinship families. [1] [7]

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) is recommended to:
- 1) To note progress and the development of Coventry's Children's & Education Services Kinship Strategy and local offer.
 - 2) Note the developments arising from the National Kinship Care Strategy and the Law Commission consultation, with potential future legislative reforms.

3 Information and Background

- 3.1 Many children will live in informal kinship arrangements, where families have created family led solutions to support parents and children, where there has been no court of local authority involvement.
- 3.2 Our goal is always to enable families to remain together, wherever this is safe to do so, providing multi-agency support through approaches such as Best Start in Life, Families First Partnerships (Early Help) and community-based support.
- 3.3 In line with our Family Valued and Families First approach, if Children's Services do become involved, we will always seek to support families to identify family led solutions. In addition to working alongside parents to support them to care for their child, this may also be through supporting a Family Network Meeting or Family Group Conference (FGC).
- 3.4 When children cannot safely remain living with their parents despite support, safety plans or child protection plans, parents will be asked to identify any potential kinship carers that could care for their child/ren.

- 3.5 If the circumstances are urgent, consideration can be given to temporary approval of kinship foster carers, following an initial assessment (regulation 24 assessment), pending a full assessment then being undertaken.
- 3.6 This can enable children to be cared for by extended family or friends' networks, who are already known to them and their parents at short notice, whilst work continues with the family to enable children to return to their parents care wherever possible.
- 3.7 Evidence demonstrates that children in kinship care often experience greater stability, stronger family connections and improved emotional wellbeing when compared with other care arrangements.

4 Developments.

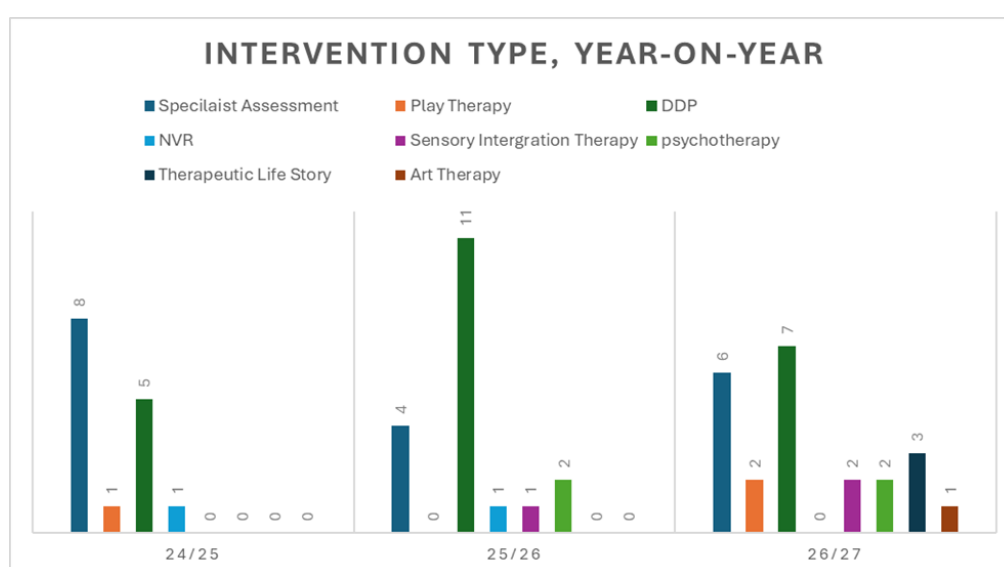
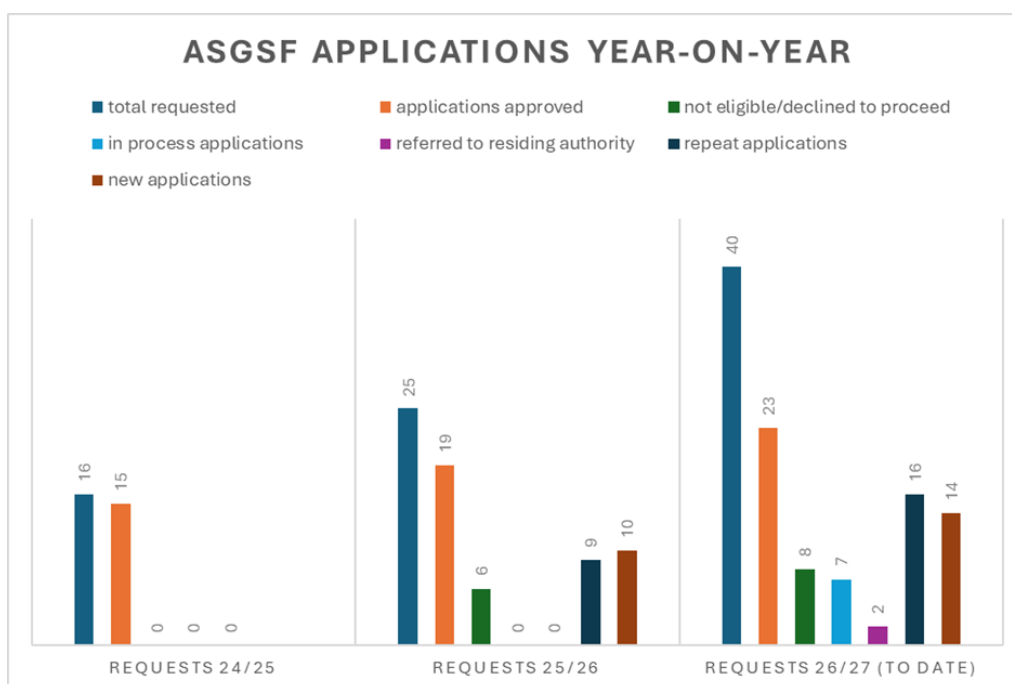
- 4.1 Following the ILACS inspection of Coventry's Children's Services in March 2026, Ofsted reported 'Family network meetings consider extended family members caring for children if they cannot remain living with their parents. Kinship carers receive a high level of training and support from their social workers. This means that when possible and appropriate, children can remain living with their wider family, cared for by people who know their histories and who love them.'
- 4.2 As evidenced, and in line with Family Valued, social workers have been working with families to identify family led solutions for several years and subsequently we have seen a growth in the number of children living in Kinship Fostering arrangements.
- 4.3 Up until 2 years ago there was on average 100 children living in a Kinship fostering arrangement, however the average now is approximately 145.
- 4.4 Between 1 January and end of June 2025 and the corresponding period in 2026, data demonstrates a clear increase in both the volume and complexity of work undertaken by the Kinship Service.

Activity	Data 1 st Jan- June 2025	Data 1 st Jan – June 2026
Referrals	102	121
Total number of children represented within referrals	140	190
Initial assessment activity	77	101
Full assessment activity	50	62
Referrals relating to more than 1 child	25	40
UK- out of area assessments	24	35
Regulation 24 approvals (temporary up to 16 weeks)	10	22
Full assessments completed	47	61
Private SGO referrals	6	10

- 4.5 In light of the increased demand for assessments and ongoing support to carers, an additional Team Manager post has been created within the Kinship Team and an additional kinship assessor.
- 4.6 Despite this, commissioned full assessments, by independent social workers has remained necessary, increasing from 21 in the first 6 months of 2025 to 23 in the

same period in 2026. This indicates that commissioned provision supplemented internal capacity while the service continued to absorb higher demand.

- 4.7 There has been a significant increase in the number of Kinship assessments to support increased family led solutions. Form K assessments (previously form C) are used for both Kinship Fostering and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) applications.
- 4.8 It is important to note that the local authority has a duty to support both private and 'public' Special Guardianship Order (SGO) applications. An SGO can provide a child with stability, their carers the authority to make most day-to-day decisions about their lives and enable a child who may have been in care, to exit care.
- 4.9 **SGO** - private law, is where an agreement is made privately between individuals- public law is where the local authority applies to the court to secure the welfare of a child.
- 4.10 Where the local authority has been involved and existing Kinship Foster carers wish to seek an SGO, they are supported to apply via the local authority and an agreed support plan is drawn up, with an assessment of need, as part of the application. [3]
- 4.11 The Two-Year Rule: The local authority has the legal discretion to pay an element of remuneration (fostering fee/skill payment) alongside the standard child maintenance allowance for up to two years after the SGO is made to support the transition. Coventry's existing policy is to continue to pay both elements of the allowances for the first 2 years. [4]
- 4.12 Exceptional Circumstances: In some cases, or under specific circumstances, this non-means-tested financial parity can be extended beyond two years to ensure the stability for the child. All requests for 'bespoke' support are considered by the 'Exceptional Allowances' panel in Coventry.
- 4.13 Each support plan is determined and agreed on an individual basis, beyond the 2 years for children who were formerly fostered.
- 4.14 There is conflicting guidance/case law linked to SGO support and therefore Coventry Children's services, sought specific legal advice from a Kings Counsel, which has informed the section shared within the Kinship Strategy & Local Offer.
- 4.15 Coventry Children's Services currently means test financial support in accordance with the statutory guidance. [2]
- 4.16 We have strengthened our support, offering monthly check in calls for all carers post SGO and have provided direct work with families on accessing therapeutic support, accessing education and meeting SEN and supported the facilitation of family network meetings for carers to increase their network of support.
- 4.17 A dedicated phone line exists for SGO carers to access support and advice on an ongoing basis. This includes signposting to services, in line with family support and/ or access to the Adoption and Special Guardians Support Fund (ASGSF). Coventry offers support to approximately 300 families where a child lives under an SGO.
- 4.18 Based upon previous feedback from SGO applicants and SGO carers, dedicated support has been provided to enable carers to access these funds since 2023, which provide 'therapeutic' support to children and their carers.
- 4.19 The outcome measurement tools (that are completed at the start and end point of therapy by the therapists), consistently show progress following intervention, even if this is small progress.



4.20 Based upon feedback from carers and issues raised via Corporate Parenting Board, the HA | Wisdom Wellbeing App was made available to all Coventry City Council foster and kinship carers from September 2025, supporting their wellbeing through confidential resources such as mood tracking, health checks, breathing exercises, personalised health plans, articles, podcasts and videos. Carers can also access 24/7 counselling, legal and financial advice, wellbeing coaching, Wisdom AI support, digital therapeutic programmes including SilverCloud CBT and Rightsteps menopause CBT, plus discounts and perks to support financial resilience.

4.21 With effect from April 2026, the skills fee 'level 1' for newly approved Kinship/ foster carers was increased, to address the initial financial challenges that some kinship carers may have and reduce the potential of financial barriers preventing family led kinship solutions, demonstrating that Coventry recognises families as its greatest

resource, values those who step forward to care and stands alongside carers to sustain relationships.

- 4.22 We have reviewed and updated our Pathway Policy and budget, to support more families to access grants to fund home extensions/redesigns to create additional bedrooms, supporting kinship arrangements and enabling siblings to remain living together.

5 Kinship Statutory Guidance and reforms.

- 5.1 There are significant ongoing social care reforms. [5]
- 5.2 In December 2023, the Department for Education published "Championing Kinship Care", the first National Kinship Care Strategy for England. [1]
- 5.3 The strategy aims to: Improve outcomes for children living in kinship care, increase support available to kinship carers, raise awareness and understanding of kinship care, strengthen educational and financial support and improve local authority practice and consistency.
- 5.4 Key commitments included: announcement of £20 million investment to support implementation, to improve financial, educational and practical support for kinship families and improved training and advice for kinship carers. It also emphasised that there needed to be increased recognition of kinship care within children's social care reform programmes.
- 5.5 As evidenced, Coventry Children's Services have already been focusing on family led solutions, including Kinship care, prior to the implementation of New Kinship Care Statutory Guidance published in October 2024.
- 5.6 This guidance provided the first clear definition for Kinship Care, alongside a for local authorities to publish a Kinship local Offer.
- 5.7 The guidance defines "kinship care" as any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term. [2]
- 5.8 Children who live with Kinship Foster carers, (previously referred to as connected carers) or with carers where a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order has been granted by the courts, children living within a Private Fostering arrangement, or Adoption under a Placement Order, are deemed to be living in a Kinship Care.
- 5.9 The statutory guidance requires local authorities to develop and publish a Kinship Local Offer. The local offer must provide information about support available to kinship families to include:
- Financial support.
 - Education support.
 - Mental health and wellbeing services.
 - Training and peer support opportunities.
 - Advice regarding legal arrangements and benefits.
 - Access pathways to children's social care and early help services.

- 5.10 In October 2024, Foundations also published the first national Kinship Care Practice Guide, providing evidence-based recommendations to improve outcomes for children and kinship families.
- 5.11 Foundations, known as the 'What Works Centre for Children and Families,' focuses on translating research into practical guidance for children's services. In the context of kinship care, Foundations published the first national Practice Guide on Kinship Care, commissioned by the Department for Education, to support local authorities in children's services and improve outcomes for children living with relatives or close family friends
- 5.12 The guide proposes how local authorities could meet the needs of Kinship carers with recommendations linked to support, which have been applied to the development of Coventry's Kinship Strategy & Local offer.
- 5.13 On the 29th June 2026, the Kinship Ambassador issued a notification to local authorities clarifying that the work on the local offer should have commenced to develop, consult on and publish a local offer to kinship families.
- 5.14 Coventry Children's Services commenced work on the local offer and Kinship Strategy in January 2025.
- 5.15 The Kinship local offer will be available as a 'live electronic' version and we have already consulted with partners, the virtual school, prospective kinship carers and carers caring for children under an SGO on several occasions, through different routes. We will also develop a 'landing page', summary document and are developing a 'child friendly' version. The offer is separated into 2 documents, an overarching offer and separate financial support offer, based upon legal advice. Please refer to Annex A & B for the latest versions.
- 5.16 Further consultations sessions are planned in September, through the SGO peer support group and the current version has been shared with kinship carers for feedback. Directions for further consultation were formally stated within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.
- 5.17 Current legislative changes linked to foster carers and kinship carers are being undertaken by the DfE in relation to the assessment and approval of carers, fostering standards, alongside changes in the support being offered to carers following allegations. [9]
- 5.18 The Law Commission are also consulting on changes to potential 'kinship legal orders' with proposal of a new 'Kinship Care Order', which would replace the use of Child Arrangements Orders and Special Guardianship Orders for future kinship care arrangements. The proposed changes to the orders are suggested to provide a more flexible legal framework tailored to the child's circumstances and family needs"
- 5.19 These changes also propose a 'Kinship Parental Responsibility agreement' with consultations closing on the 16th October 2026. Any recommendations for law reform will be published in the autumn of 2027. [7] [8]
- 5.20 The government also launched a pilot for 7 'Kinship Zones' in April 2026. The initial scope of the pilot was to introduce weekly financial support for Kinship/ SGO carers on an ongoing basis to address perceived financial blockers to SGO applications. The guidance of the pilot has now been updated and expanded to include how reforms need to interlink with support through Family Network Support Packages under the Families First Partnership reforms. [6]

- 5.21 Kinship care is becoming an increasingly important element of children's social care reform. The introduction of the National Kinship Care Strategy, the requirement for a Local Kinship Offer and the Law Commission's proposals for legal reform collectively represent the most significant developments in kinship care for many years. Together, these changes aim to create a more consistent, accessible and supportive system for children and families, helping more children remain safely connected to their family networks while receiving the support needed to thrive.

6 Health Inequalities Impact

- 6.1 Potential Kinship carers are subject to a medical assessment at the point of full assessment and there are regular reviews for kinship foster carers. Recommendations may be made in terms of lifestyle changes and medical advisors will consider if there '*are any absolute medical contraindications*' that would prevent a carer being a kinship carer.
- 6.2 Where a child may have additional health needs, carers are supported to access additional support, adaptations and if needed have been supported to access short breaks. The responsibility lies with the multi-agency partnership, alongside the carers to meet the needs of children with complex needs.
- 6.3 If the child is in care, they are prioritised in terms of accessing CAMHS support and as evidenced children and their carers with an SGO can access support through ASGSF.
- 6.4 Kinship carers now have access to support through the commissioned services via the Wisdom contract.

National timeline

Date	Development
December 2023	Publication of the National Kinship Care Strategy.
2024	• Expansion of Virtual School Head support for children in kinship care. • Development of employer guidance to support kinship carers in the workplace. • Commencement of pilot arrangements for financial allowances for eligible Special Guardians. [1] [10] [11]
October 2024	• Publication of new Kinship Care Statutory Guidance. • Requirement for local authorities to develop and publish a Local Kinship Offer setting out available support and services for kinship families.
2025–2026	• Embedding of local kinship support arrangements. • Ongoing evaluation of financial allowance pilots. • Further development of local authority practice and family network approaches across children's social care services.
July 2026	• Letter from the National Kinship Care Ambassador in relation “to the new duty on local authorities to publish a kinship local offer and consult on that offer”. That support should be based upon need and not solely on legal arrangements.

Annex A: Kinship Booklet

Annex B: Special Guardian Financial Support

References

- [1] Department for Education, *Championing kinship care: the national kinship care strategy* (2023). [Source](#).
- [2] Department for Education, *Kinship care: statutory guidance for local authorities* (October 2024). [Source](#).
- [3] Coram Family and Childcare, *Special guardianship orders*. [Source](#).
- [4] Department for Education, *Special guardianship guidance*. [Source](#).
- [5] Department for Education, *Delivering the children's social care reset*. [Source](#).
- [6] Department for Education, *Kinship Zones: programme specification*. [Source](#).
- [7] Law Commission, *Kinship care*. [Source](#).
- [8] Community Care, *Reforming kinship care law: the Law Commission's provisional proposals*. [Source](#).
- [9] Kinship, *Building a new kinship care system*. [Source](#).
- [10] Kinship, *Westminster Hall debate on the Kinship Care Strategy* (6 March 2024). [Source](#).
- [11] Department for Education, *England's first ever kinship care strategy launches*. [Source](#).

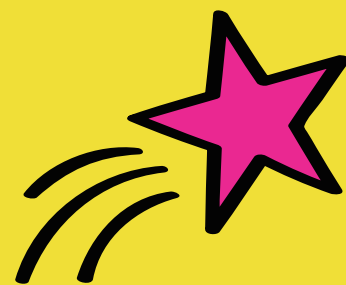
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Kinship Care Strategy and Local Offer



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Kinship Care Strategy and Local Offer

Supporting the needs of children and young people living in Kinship Care arrangements December 2025

RELATED GUIDANCE:

- **Kinship care: framework for local authorities - GOV.UK:** Kinship Care: Framework for Local Authorities: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities about family and friends providing care for children who cannot live with their parents.
- **Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care Strategy**
- **Family Rights Group, Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment :** Outlines what an Initial assessment for Kinship carers should look like, what should be considered and how to undertake international assessments.
- **Looking After Someone Else's Child :** Government advice on the support and financial help you can get if someone else's child is living with you full time.
- **Promoting the Education of Children with a Social Worker and Children in Kinship Care Arrangements: Virtual School Head Role Extension:** Non statutory guidance for local authorities about the development of Virtual School Head's strategic leadership role in promoting the educational outcomes of children in kinship care arrangements.
- **Practice Guide: Kinship Care - Guidance to Support Local Authorities in Achieving the Outcomes of the Children's Social Care National Framework.**



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Coventry Family Valued is the practice approach in Children's and Education Services and across the partnership, underpinned by the belief that outcomes are better for most children, if they are living at home, with their family and within their community, wherever safe to do so. When children are not able to live with parents, it is vital that every attempt is made, for them to remain within their wider family and community, with people who are connected with them, who love them, and already want the best for them.

Children may be looked after by members of their extended family, friends or other people who are connected with them for a variety of reasons and in a variety of different ways. This strategy sets out Coventry's approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of children living with wider family and friends full time and covers the assessments which will be undertaken to determine whether services are needed to support these arrangements, and how they may be provided.

This strategy highlights the support needs for Kinship Carers that are covered in the Local Authority Local Offer for Kinship Carers. Please visit coventry.gov.uk/fostering for further information.

Children who live with extended family and friends can be cared for in a variety of different ways outlined below:

- Informal arrangements with close relatives of the child (relative is defined by section 105 of the Children Act 1989 as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership or stepparent))
- Informal arrangements with friends or other family members (not under the legal definition of relatives as above) which last for a period of less than 28 days (if the intention is for the arrangement to last more than 28 days, then this may be private fostering arrangement)

A Private Fostering arrangement:

- As a child in care being cared for by a Kinship Foster Care (previously known as a 'Connected Care placement')
- Subject to a Child Arrangement Order
- Under Special Guardianship Order

For further information regarding these arrangements, who may make decisions for children and young people, and the support applicable, please see Appendix 11.1 'Caring for somebody else's child – Options

Coventry City Council has developed this offer in collaboration with its local partners to ensure that information is readily available regarding the duties and responsibilities for children in differing arrangements, the support and type of services that are available, and how these may be accessed.

Outcomes for children living in Kinship Care, are typically more positive than those living in 'unrelated Foster Care'; with young people more likely to be securely attached to their carers, feel a greater sense of belonging, and to be more confident that they will be staying with their carer as they grow up.

Numerous studies have shown that Kinship Foster Care enhances emotional and behavioural development in children. Young people in Kinship Care typically report feeling more secure, happier, and more integrated within their families compared to those living with Unrelated Foster Carers. Furthermore, research highlights the increased stability of Kinship Care, which offers children greater continuity and the opportunity to maintain meaningful relationships with those who matter most in their lives.

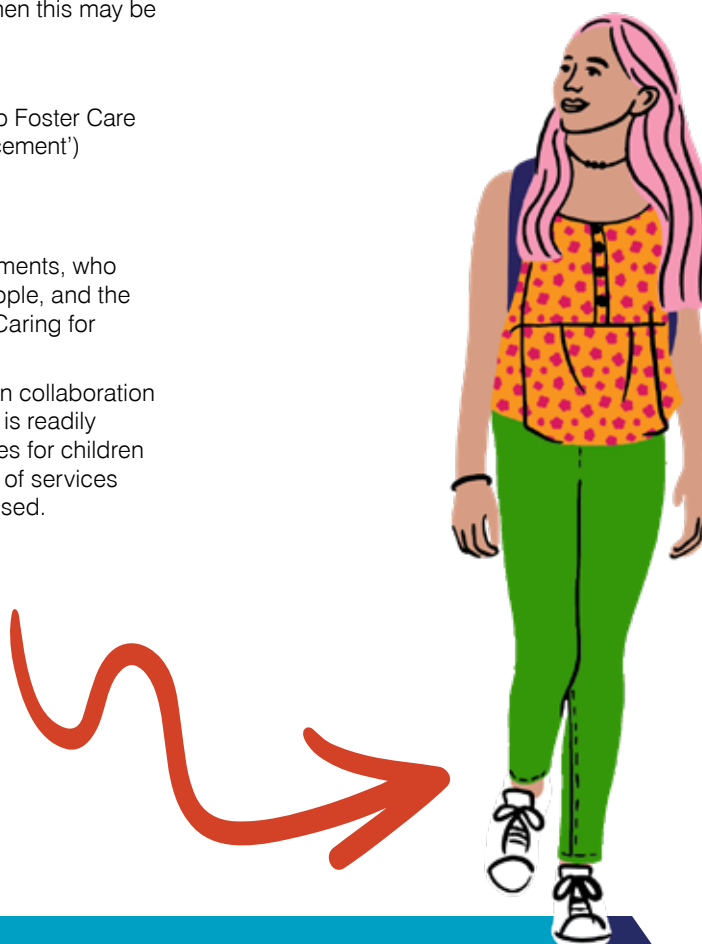
Coventry City Council has developed the local offer in collaboration with partners to ensure information is readily available regarding:

- the duties and responsibilities for children living with extended family and friends in different ways
- the support and type of services that are available
- how support and services may be accessed.

In implementing the local offer, Coventry City Council aims to narrow the gap in outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who live in Kinship Care and to provide their carers with effective and coordinated interagency support.

Management Accountability

The Senior Manager in the Council with responsibility for this Kinship Strategy and Local Offer is Angela Whitrick, Strategic Lead - Corporate Parenting and Sufficiency.



2. Values and Principles

Coventry Family Valued provides our scaffold for practice, keeping children at the heart of everything we do; focussing on the importance of investing in relationships, and empowering families to build their networks of support, to find their own solutions and lead on the decisions which affect their lives and the lives of their children. Child Friendly Cov is our ambition as a whole city, to make Coventry the best city in the UK for children and their families to live and grow up in; a city where all children are loved, safe, healthy, valued and have opportunities.

It is an underlying principle that children should live within their own family and community, wherever it is safe for them to do so. This principle applies to all children, including those who are in the care of the local authority. Therefore, it is imperative for children who cannot live with their parent(s), that we are tenacious in our efforts for them to remain within their wider family, identifying potential carers connected with them, and offering support and services to enable this to happen.

We will provide support for Kinship arrangements based on the assessed needs of the child, not simply on their legal status, and will seek to ensure that Kinship carers are provided with support to prevent children becoming looked after by the local authority, or do not have to remain in the care of the local authority for longer than is needed.

We aim to provide support and training in ways that are appropriate and encouraging for Kinship carers, recognising the life changing commitment that they are making both for the child, and for themselves.

When the local authority does become involved in the arrangements for a child living with or going to live with family or friends, this should be based on a thorough assessment of the child and the family or friend. Children's Services will work in partnership with children and their families in planning and decision making about their future care, empowering family to lead on these decisions wherever possible.

It is essential that the legal basis under which the child is living is clearly stated, confirmed in writing and understood by everyone.

This Offer reflects the 'No Order' principle of the Children Act 1989, 'the aim ... of the Children Act 1989 ... is to ensure that an Order is granted only where it will positively improve the child's welfare', (Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Vol. 1).

Where it is assessed that a child cannot remain with, or return to their birth parents, then care by Kinship Carers will be the care arrangement of first choice to meet these needs, provided this is consistent and in accordance with the child's needs and welfare, which is the paramount consideration.

3. Purpose and Scope of the Offer

The purpose of the Offer is to provide guidance and information on how Coventry City Council, alongside its partners and local services, will support children and young people living with extended family, friends or other people. These arrangements can be made informally by parents, or through the Council in the case of children who are in care.

Coventry City Council will only become involved with such arrangements if there are welfare or protection issues, with which the family needs help or intervention, or if the arrangements fall within the legal definition of private fostering, or if the child becomes cared for by the Council.

This offer is in two parts:

1. Informal or private Kinship arrangements for children where their parents, or the person with parental responsibility for them, has made arrangements for their child or young person to live with relatives and friends when these are for children assessed as 'in need' (as prescribed by section 17 Children Act 1989, detailed in section 4).
2. 'Public' Kinship arrangements for children who are in the care of the local authority; that is the care arrangement of children who are looked after by the Council, but who live with their family or friends.



4. Legal Framework

Coventry City Council has a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of Children in Need* living within its area and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families. The way in which we fulfil this duty is by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's assessed needs (Section 17, Children Act 1989). This can include financial, practical or other support.

It is important to note that the local authority does not have a general duty to assess all arrangements where children are living with their wider family or friends' network rather than their parents, but it does have a duty where it appears that services may be necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a Child in Need:

***A Child in Need is defined in Section 17(10) of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is disabled or who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by the local authority.**

To clarify the children who may come within the definition of Children in Need, the local authority has drawn up a 'Threshold Guidance – Effective Support for Children and Families' document, which is available here in the **Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures Manual**.

Children in Need may live with members of their family or friends in a variety of different legal arrangements, some formal and some informal. Different court orders are available to formalise these arrangements.

Children who are in care will always come within the definition of Children in Need, whether they are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (with parental consent) or in care subject to a Court Order whereby the Local Authority shares parental responsibility for the child. The local authority has a responsibility wherever possible to make arrangements for a child in care to live with a member of the family (Section 22 of the Children Act 1989).

For a detailed summary of the meaning and implications of different legal situations, the rights of carers and parents, and the nature of decisions which Kinship carers will be able to make in relation to the child, please see:

Annex A: Caring for Somebody Else's Child - Options. Section 4, Different Situations whereby Children may be Living with Family and Friend Carers, which sets out the local authority's powers and duties in relation to the various options.



5. Differing Care Arrangements

5.1 Informal Family Arrangements with a close relative

Where a child cannot be cared for within their immediate family, the family may make their own arrangements for a close relative (a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership or stepparent) to care for the child. Parents retain their responsibility for maintenance of their children if they live with informal family arrangements.

The local authority does not have a duty to assess any such informal close family arrangement, unless it appears to the authority that services may be necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a Child in Need. In such cases, the local authority has a responsibility under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to assess the child's needs and provide services to meet any assessed needs of the child. Following an assessment, a Child in Need Plan will be drawn up and a package of support will be identified. This can comprise of a variety of different types of services and support, including financial support.

Parental responsibility remains with the child's birth parents, but the carer may do what is reasonable to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. The parent also remains financially responsible for the care given to their child by the private fostering carer. Private foster carers should also access benefits advice to ensure that they claim all the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled.

5.2 Private Fostering Arrangements

A privately fostered child is a child under 16 (or 18 if disabled), who is cared for by an adult who is not a parent or close relative, where the child is to be cared for in that home for 28 days or more. Close relative is defined as 'a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or stepparent.' It does not include a child who is in the care of the Local Authority. In a private fostering arrangement, the parent still holds parental responsibility and agrees the decision-making arrangements with the private foster carer. The parent also remains financially responsible for the care given to their child by the private fostering carer.

The local authority has a duty to assess and monitor the welfare of all privately fostered children and the way in which they carry out these duties is set out in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. However, the local authority may also become involved with a child in a private fostering arrangement where the child comes within the definition of a Child in Need. In such cases, the local authority has a responsibility to provide services to meet the assessed needs of the child under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Following assessment, a Child in Need Plan will be drawn up and a package of support will be identified. As in 4.1 above, this can comprise a variety of different types of services and support, including financial support. See also Appendix 11.1 **Private Fostering**.

5.3 Kinship foster carers

Where a child is cared for by the local authority (under s20 or 31 Children Act 1989), we have a responsibility wherever possible to make arrangements for the child to live with a member of the family who is approved as a foster carer

(Section 22 of the Children Act 1989). The child can live with the family members prior to such approval, subject to an assessment of this care arrangement, for up to 16 weeks under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. Regulation 24(1) outlines that where the local authority is satisfied that the child going to live with a Connected Person immediately is the most appropriate care arrangement for the child, the carers can have temporary approval for a period of up to 16 weeks provided that an assessment of their suitability under Regulation 24(2) has taken place. Regulation 25 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations gives a possibility of an extension of 8 weeks to the original 16 weeks.

In this context the carer is referred to as a Kinship Foster Carer and the process of obtaining approval for the care arrangement is set out in the **Placement with Connected Persons Procedure**. Where temporary approval is given to such a care arrangement under the procedure, the carers will receive financial support on a regular basis. This is intended to cover the costs of looking after the child including where arrangements are made at short notice.

In addition, the child will have a care arrangement, which sets out the specific arrangements surrounding the child and the carers, including the expectations of the Kinship foster carers and the support they can expect to receive to enable to fulfil their responsibilities for the child.

The assessment and approval process for family and friends who apply to be Kinship foster carers for a child in care will be similar to any other foster carer and include checks and references. However, the assessment is focussed on meeting the needs of the specific child / children rather than being a generic fostering assessment. Accordingly, the assessment form is different from that used to assess prospective mainstream foster carers. The timescales for the assessment are different where a child is already living with the person connected with them as indicated above. An information pack will be available to potential Kinship foster carers about the process and they will be given the name and contact details of the social worker from the fostering service allocated to carry out the assessment.

Once approved as Kinship foster carers (including where this approval is temporary), they will be allocated a supervising social worker from the fostering service to provide them with support and supervision, and they will receive fostering fees and allowances for as long as they care for the child as a Kinship foster carer and the child remains in care.

While the child remains in care, as a Kinship foster carer, they will be expected to cooperate with all the processes that are in place to ensure that the child receives appropriate care and support. For example, contributing to reviews of the child's Care Plan, working with the child's social worker and promoting the child's education and health needs.

Authority for day-to-day decision making about the child should be delegated to Kinship carer(s), utilising the delegated responsibility process, unless there is a valid reason not to do so.

5.4 Child Arrangements Order

A Child Arrangements Order is a Court Order which sets out the arrangements as to when and with whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact.

These orders replace the previous Contact Orders and Residence Orders.

A Child Arrangements Order may give parental responsibility to the person in whose favour it is made. Parental responsibility is shared with the parents.

Authority for day-to-day decision making about the child should be delegated to the carer(s), unless there is a valid reason not to do so.

Child Arrangements Orders may be made in private family proceedings in which the local authority is not a party nor involved in any way in the arrangements. However, a Child Arrangements Order in favour of a relative or foster carer (who was a Kinship carer) with whom a child may live with, may be an appropriate outcome as part of a permanence plan for a Child in Need or a Child in Care.

The local authority may pay Child Arrangements Order Allowances to relatives or friends, unless they are a spouse or civil partner of a parent, with whom a child is living under a Child Arrangements Order. This is set out in paragraph 15 of Schedule 1 of the Children Act 1989; however, this is discretionary.

Please see the local authority's Child Arrangements Order Allowances Policy, for details of what financial assistance may be available to holders of Child Arrangements Orders, the applicable criteria and who within the local authority will make decisions under the policy. Contact **childrens social care** for details.

5.5 Special Guardianship Order

Special Guardianship offers a further option for children needing permanent care outside their birth family. It can offer greater security without absolute severance from the birth family, as in adoption. The following individuals can apply to be a child's special guardian if they are not their parent and are over 18:

- They are already the child's legal guardian;
- The child lives with the carer because of a child arrangement order;
- The child has lived with the carer for three of the past five years;
- The carer is the child's relative or a foster parent, and the child has been living with them for at least one year;
- The carer has the agreement of anyone named in a child arrangements order as someone who the child will live with;
- The carer has agreement of all the people with parental responsibility for the child;
- The carer has the agreement of the local council, if the child is in care;
- If the carer does not fit one of these descriptions, they will need to ask the court's permission to apply.

A joint application can also be made. For further information and for forms please see: **Becoming a Special Guardian**

See also the **Applications for Special Guardianship Orders**, for details of what financial assistance may be available to holders of Special Guardianship Orders, the applicable criteria and who within the local authority will make decisions under the policy.

Special Guardianship Financial Support

Coventry City Council provides financial support to special guardians under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and in accordance with the Special Guardianship Statutory Guidance 2017.

For further information, please see Appendix 11.3.



6. Provision of Support

Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities sets out a requirement on local authorities to provide a Kinship Local Offer. Kinship Local Offers should be underpinned by the principle that support should be based on the needs of the child rather than merely their legal status. The Kinship Local Offer should provide Kinship families with support to ensure that children enter care, or remain in care, longer than is needed.

See also Table 1: Entitlement to support by Kinship carers and the child/ren in their care, under Children Act 1989 section 17 and for children looked after at pages 33-34 of the statutory guidance.

The following sections summarise the support available to Kinship carers.

6.1 Support Groups and Training

Research has identified that Kinship carers, irrespective of the legal basis of the care arrangement often require a range of support to assist them caring for the child. This increases the likelihood that care arrangement will remain stable.

The Fostering Service will provide information to Kinship carers regarding peer support groups and relevant training; this information will be provided in the Kinship Team newsletter which is distributed on a bi-monthly basis. The Fostering Service will collaborate with partner agencies and the voluntary sector to establish and improve access to this type of support.

Kinship foster carers will receive a copy of Coventry City Council's Fostering Handbook and will be asked to sign the Council's Foster Care Agreement, this details the expectation that carers practice in line with the fostering regulations and the Fostering National Minimum Standards. Carers will also be expected to regularly engage with the training programme provided, and to complete their Training, Skills and Development workbook within 18 months of approval, to evidence their learning and that the required standards have been met. Please see Appendix 11.2 (page 16) for details of the training programme available.

Kinship foster carers can access support, advice and training from the dedicated Kinship Team and from their allocated supervising social worker.

Training can boost the confidence of Kinship foster carers and equip them with skills and knowledge to provide high-quality care. For example, the training can include:

- Information about different types of Kinship care;
- Knowledge about child development and how to manage challenging behaviours; or
- Practical information on how to navigate the children's social care system, register for a new school or how to access a GP.



How to access support

You can contact the Fostering Service via email or telephone. A duty worker will take some information from you, answer any questions that you may have, and support you to access relevant training if appropriate. Our workers are available 9am - 5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am - 4.30pm on Friday.

- Call: **024 7697 5489**
- Email: **PSSFostering@coventry.gov.uk**
- Website: **coventry.gov.uk/fostercarerstraining**

6.2 Provision of Financial Support

There are three categories of payment, which may be considered. One or more of these may be applicable:

1. Subsistence crisis (one-off) payments

These should be used to overcome a crisis, following the best assessment of what support can be provided in the circumstances.

2. Setting Up payments

These are for such items as clothing, furniture, or bedding. The assessing or supervising social worker must be satisfied that the carers' financial position justifies the payment. Assistance may be given subject to conditions, including repayment in certain situations. However, in most situations, it will be inappropriate for the service to recover money provided under these circumstances.

3. Weekly contribution to living expenses

It is possible for the local authority to make regular payments where family members or friends care for a child whether or not the child is in care. Where regular payments are made, Kinship carers should be assisted to maximise their Income and access appropriate universal benefits.

In all cases where regular financial support is agreed, a written agreement will be drawn up detailing the level and duration of the financial support that is to be provided, and the mechanism for review.

The following criteria will be applied to all such payments:

- The purpose of the payments must be to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.
- As part of the assessment, a view should be taken as to whether carers need financial support, based on their reasonable requirements in taking on the care of the child.
- There are no other legitimate sources of finance.
- Payments will be paid to the carer and should not be passed on to the parents.
- The payment would not place any person in a fraudulent position.

4. Exceptional Allowances Panel

- The Exceptional Allowances Panel is held monthly and is responsible for considering ad hoc payments and any other additional financial support needed by Kinship foster carers or prospective Special Guardians.
- The Exceptional Allowances Panel is the forum in which applications to the Pathways to Care Budget are considered. This budget is used to facilitate permanence for children in care, and to fund adaptations to accommodation, where needed to increase capacity. Please see **Pathways to Care Capital Funding Approval Policy**

- Applications to the panel are made by the Social Worker on behalf of the Kinship Foster Carer or prospective Special Guardian(s), and submitted with supporting documentation, where applicable.
- The outcome of the Exceptional Allowances Panel is communicated in writing.
- If the Panel does not approve the application for additional financial support, then the Foster Care or Special Guardian applicant may submit an appeal within 14 days following receipt of the Panel's decision.
- Appeals must be submitted in writing to the applicant's social worker, outlining the reasons for the appeal. This should include a rationale for why the decision should be reconsidered, any additional information or context which support the appeal, and detail of the impact on the child or the care arrangement if the requested support is not provided.
- Appeals are considered by the Strategic Lead and Operational Lead for Fostering Services, within 10 working days following receipt of the appeal.
- The outcome of the appeal will be communicated in writing, outlining the basis on which the decision has been made.

6.3 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

Local authorities and regional adoption agencies (RAAs) can apply for therapeutic funding for eligible adoptive, special guardianship order and child arrangement order families. Local authorities and RAAs must apply to the ASGSF within three months of assessing a family's support needs. The Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) is available to most children being raised under a Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Order.

This also includes children up to and including the age of 21, or 25 with an education, health and care (EHC) plan who:

Were in care before an SGO was made.

- Left care under a special guardianship order that was subsequently changed to an adoption order, or vice versa.
- Are under a residency order or child arrangement order (CAO) and were previously looked after.
- Were previously looked after but where the adoption, special guardianship, residency or CAO care arrangement has broken down, irrespective of any reconciliation plans.

There is a dedicated Children and Families Support Worker within the Fostering Service who coordinates applications to the ASGSF; this will include obtaining a minimum of three quotes for support services that are needed for the family.

These quotes will be shared with the family to consider the most appropriate service to provide the support needed. This Children and Families Support Worker will arrange and chair the planning meeting for this support; they will also review how the services are working for the family and complete the closure meeting once all sessions have taken place. If it is felt that the family requires further therapeutic support or services an application can be made within the following financial year if all funds have been exhausted for the current year.

For more information and how to apply see: **Adoption and special guardianship support fund (ASGSF) Guidance**

6.4 Foster Carers Out of Hours support

The Fostering Service offers a 24-hour telephone out of hours support service, in line with the Fostering National Minimum Standards (Standard 21.3), which is staffed by members of the Fostering Service. The contact number for out of hours fostering is:

Tel: **07958 337681**

This service is used by foster carers (including Kinship foster carers) that require urgent support, for example, they may need some advice and support on how to manage some difficult behaviours.

If a foster carer requires advice and support regarding a child, for example, a child goes missing or requires emergency medical treatment, they must contact the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) on Tel: **024 7683 2222**

During office hours, the Fostering Service is available to all Kinship Carers via PSS Fostering **Monday to Thursday 8.30am – 5pm**, and **Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm** (excluding bank holidays). Tel: **024 7697 548**

Each Kinship foster carer will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker who can be contacted via telephone or email during office hours. The Supervising Social Worker will provide their direct contact details.

6.5 Employment Support

Kinship Carers in the Workplace: Guidance for Employers sets out best practice for supporting Kinship carers at work, including the right to be entitled to leave benefits similar to that of parents and adopters.

6.6 Accommodation

Kinship carers may need support with accommodation, as their home may not have sufficient space to take on the care of a child or possibly a sibling group of children.

Living in cramped conditions may add to the pressures of caring for a child. Housing authorities and registered social landlords should be engaged to ensure that their policies recognise the importance of the role performed by Kinship carers, and that whenever possible Kinship carers living in social housing are given appropriate priority to move to more suitable accommodation, particularly if this will prevent the need for a child to enter care.

Local authorities have a general duty under section 17 of the 1989 Act, to consider providing financial support towards accommodation costs where they assess this as the most appropriate way to safeguard and promote a child's welfare. Such assessment will be based on the child's individual needs.

Coventry Homefinder Policy supports Kinship carers with additional priority, and Band 1 status (the highest band) where there is a need to move to a larger property to accommodate the child(ren) being supported.

Coventry City Council housing support page brings together information that could help if you are worried about rising household costs like rent and mortgage payments, energy costs and more. Below you'll find **advice on benefits, ways to reduce energy bills and organisations you can contact** for support

Coventry Homefinder Policy – Coventry City Council

Pathways to Care Capital Funding Approval Policy at **Pathways to Care Capital Funding Approval Policy.**

6.7 Education

All children who live in Kinship care are now supported by the Virtual School. The Virtual School Head role has been extended to champion the attendance, attainment and progress of all children who live in Kinship care. Kinship families who have a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order will also receive advice and support on request.

Education support for children in Kinship care

Children living in Kinship care can face unique educational challenges. The Virtual School plays an important role in promoting understanding of these needs across the education system and supporting positive educational outcomes.

The nature of the Virtual School's involvement depends on a child's legal status and circumstances.

The role of the Virtual School

The Virtual School Head (VSH) provides strategic leadership to improve educational experiences and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people across the city, including those living in Kinship care.

Our work focuses on:

- championing high expectations for learning, attendance and inclusion
- promoting trauma-informed and attachment-aware practice
- strengthening collaboration between education, families and services
- supporting schools to meet their statutory responsibilities effectively

Children who are previously looked after

For children who were previously looked after and left care through adoption, a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or a Child Arrangements Order (CAO), the Virtual School Head has a statutory duty to promote their educational attainment through the provision of information and advice.

This advice may be provided to:

- parents and guardians
- schools and education providers
- social workers or other professionals

All maintained schools and academies must appoint a Designated Teacher, who has a leadership responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of previously looked after children on the school's roll and for working closely with families.

Previously looked-after children may attract Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding. This funding is:

- allocated to schools through the October school census
- managed by the school
- used to improve educational outcomes, informed by the child's needs and in partnership with parents or guardians

Children living in Kinship care who are not previously looked after

For children living in Kinship care who have not previously been looked after, the Virtual School contributes through city-wide strategic activity designed to strengthen educational practice and understanding.

This includes:

- promoting inclusive practice across all education settings
- supporting schools to recognise and respond to the impact of adversity on learning and behaviour
- improving consistency of expectations and support for vulnerable learners

Trauma-informed and attachment-aware education across the city

The Virtual School leads a city-wide trauma-informed, attachment-aware programme, supporting all schools to better meet the needs of children who have experienced adversity, including those living in Kinship arrangements.

Through this programme:

- schools have access to free CPD delivered or commissioned by the Virtual School
- schools can access bespoke whole-school development to strengthen inclusive practice
- education staff are supported to understand how trauma and attachment impact learning, attendance, behaviour and relationships

This work supports improved educational experiences for children in Kinship care by embedding consistent, informed practice across mainstream education.

Supporting Designated Teachers in schools

The Virtual School works with schools to ensure that all maintained schools and academies appoint a Designated Teacher, in line with statutory guidance.

Designated Teachers have a leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of children who are looked after and previously looked after, and in supporting inclusive practice for other vulnerable learners, including those living in Kinship care.

The Virtual School supports the development of the Designated Teacher role through:

- regular training and professional development, aligned to national guidance and local priorities
- Designated Teacher network events, providing opportunities to share good practice and strengthen partnership working
- guidance and resources to support schools in embedding trauma-informed and attachment-aware approaches
- system leadership that promotes high expectations, consistency and inclusion across the city



School admissions and transitions

Securing and sustaining the right school place is an important part of supporting children living in Kinship care. The Virtual School provides strategic leadership and advice to support positive admissions practice across the city. This includes:

- working with schools and local authority colleagues to promote timely, inclusive admissions
- upporting good planning for school moves and key transition points
- advising schools and professionals on the educational needs of vulnerable children, including those living in Kinship arrangements

For children who are previously looked after, admissions authorities give high priority in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

For other children living in Kinship care, school admissions are managed through the local authority's standard admissions processes. The Virtual School promotes early, collaborative problem-solving to minimise disruption to education during transitions.

Coventry operates a Fair Access Protocol to support children who are without a school place outside the normal admissions round. The protocol is designed to reduce the amount of time vulnerable children spend out of education, while ensuring that responsibility for admissions is shared fairly across schools. Consideration through the Fair Access Protocol is based on individual circumstances and follows attempts to secure a place through the usual in-year admissions process. Where appropriate, this mechanism can support timely placement and smoother transitions for vulnerable learners, including some children living in Kinship care.

Future development of the Virtual School role

At present, the Virtual School's role in relation to children in Kinship care who are not previously looked after is nonstatutory and focused on strategic leadership and system-wide improvement, including the provision of information, advice and signposting where appropriate, rather than individual casework.

The Department for Education has indicated that this aspect of the Virtual School role is expected to become statutory from September 2026, subject to national guidance and local implementation.

Further information will be published as national guidance is confirmed.

How to contact the Virtual School

Kinship carers, schools and professionals can contact the Virtual School for education-related information and advice, or to discuss how the Virtual School's strategic work can support inclusive practice.

Email: virtualschool@coventry.gov.uk
Phone: 024 7697 5535

The **School Admissions Code** provides that children being raised by Kinship carers under a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order, who struggle to get a school place during the year, will be supported in finding one.

In addition, Pupil Premium for children in long-term family care arrangements (also known as Pupil Premium Plus) was introduced in 2014. Pupil Premium Plus is awarded in recognition that many children who have joined permanent families through adoption, Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), or Child Arrangement Orders (CAOs) may need extra support in school due to the

circumstances that led to them becoming looked after and later settling into their permanent family environment. See **Pupil Premium Overview**.

Promoting the Education of Children with a Social Worker and Children in Kinship Care Arrangements: Virtual School Head Role Extension confirms that children in Kinship settings having access to the virtual school head program to continue to support their academic achievement.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Early Years Team

The SEND Early Years team are committed to the principles of early identification and intervention for children with Special Educational Needs. The SEND Early Years Team recognises the diversity of children's experiences and varying rates of progress, however there will be children whose rate of progress determines that early intervention is necessary to support their learning.

The SEND Early Years team aims to:

- take a leading role in securing the educational entitlement of preschool children with individual or special educational needs/disabilities
- work in partnership with parents/carers, professional and voluntary agencies to meet the needs of and improve outcomes for children from birth to four years with a range of SEND and to support inclusion into mainstream Early Years provision.

Services offered:

- Portage home visiting
- Portage supervision and coordination in partnership with family hubs
- support in all schools and settings within early years
- advice to parents on the statutory assessment process
- support and advice on the process of transition to maintained education provision
- training.

The SEND team can be contacted on Tel: **024 7678 8400**

Email: SENDsupportservice@coventrygov.uk

Website: coventry.gov.uk/sendeyt

The following organisations may provide additional support for specific children



Company	Website/link/contact	What they do
Community Autism support service (CASS)	casspartnership.org.uk	• Support groups for parent / carers • Training • Peer mentoring • Community outreach sessions for children and young people
Grapevine/ TeenVine	grapevinecovandwarks.org coventry.gov.uk/teenvineplus	• Young people with autism or learning disabilities 13-18yrs • Support children in developing friendships, confidence and skills. • Also offers TeenVibe plus, that works with children with SEND who are not accessing education (10-18 years)

6.8 Supporting Family Time

The local authority has a duty to promote family time for all Children in Need where they are living apart from their family, although this differs depending on whether or not the child is in care.

Where the child is not in care, the local authority will take such steps as are reasonably practicable to promote family time between the child and their family 'where it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard and promote their welfare'. As part of the support arrangements, it may be identified that specific assistance is required to ensure that any such family time can be managed safely. If necessary, information will be made available to Kinship carers about local family time, contact

centres and family mediation services, and how to make use of their services.

Where a child is in care, the local authority shall allow reasonable family time between the child and their parents (or other legal standing) 'unless it is not practicable or consistent with the child's welfare'. The overall objective of the family time arrangements will be included in the child's Care Plan, and the specific arrangements will be set out in the child's Care Arrangement Plan - see **Contact and Overnight Stays Procedures**.

If the child is subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), the arrangements will be set out in the SGO Support Plan.

Information in relation to family time, contact may be available from the following organisations:

Organisation	Contact details	Other contact
Grandparents Plus	0300 123 7015	grandparentsplus.org.uk
Family Rights Group	0808 801 0366	frg.org.uk
Coventry Family Hubs	0800 887 0545	Or by visiting one of the Local Family Hubs in person

6.9 Health

The local authority, through its Corporate Parenting responsibilities, has a duty to promote the welfare of Children in Care, including those who are eligible and those children living in pre-adoptive care arrangements. This includes promoting the child's physical, emotional and mental health.

Every Child in Care should have an up-to-date health

assessment so that a health care plan can be developed to reflect the child's health needs and be included as part of the child's overall Care Plan.

Health assessments are statutorily required to be carried out a minimum of:

- 6-monthly for babies and children under 5 years of age; and
- Annually for those aged 5 years and over.

Information in relation to health is available from the following organisations:

Organisation	Contact details	Other contact
Children in Care Team	024 7696 1442	LACMedicals@coventry.gov.uk
RISE	0300 200 2021	coventry.gov.uk/childrens-mental-health wbc@cwmind.org.uk
Coventry and Warwickshire Mental Wellbeing Line	0800 616 171	cwmind.org.uk/coventry-wellbeing-hub re- covery.academy@covwarkpt.nhs.uk
Coventry and Warwickshire Mind		wbhub@cwmind.org.uk

6.10 Mentoring Scheme for Kinship Foster Carers

What is a mentor?

- A mentor provides another Foster Carer with informal support.
- A mentor can provide general advice and guidance to others, who are getting to know the fostering role,
- Or if a mentee has identified a specific issue a mentor could provide them with a targeted piece of support.
- A mentor actively listens without judgement and offers reassurance, advice, and guidance.
- A mentor will empower the mentee to problem solve and help the mentee to explore their own needs.
- A mentor provides face-to-face, telephone, and email support.

Mentoring is semi-structured guidance where the mentor shares their knowledge, skills and experience to help the mentee to change something and develop their potential. Mentors need to be readily accessible and prepared to offer help as the need arises - within agreed bounds.

The aims of providing a peer mentor are therefore to:

- provide new foster carers with the support of an experienced foster carer – to offer a listening ear and empathy.
- increase the confidence of new foster carers and help them settle into their role.
- such as fostering children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation or Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- enable and encourage foster carers to develop their skills and confidence – which will help to sustain care arrangements, thereby improving outcomes for children.
- improve the retention of foster carers.

How to access support

You can contact our service via email or telephone. A duty worker will take some information from you and answer any questions that you may have and support you to access the Mentoring Scheme.

Our workers are available **9am - 5pm Monday to Thursday** and **9am - 4.30pm Friday**.

Tel: **024 7697 5489**

or email: **PSSFostering@coventry.gov.uk**

6.11 Newsletter

The Kinship Team distributes a Newsletter to Kinship Foster Carers and Special Guardians every two months. The Newsletter provides up to date news on the service, useful information about local services, latest events information, any staffing updates and service structure updates.

This is sent via email – to be added to the mailing list and to receive a copy, please email:

PSSFostering@coventry.gov.uk and provide your email address.

6.12 Special Guardian Peer Support Groups

Different forms of Special Guardian peer support are available via the Fostering Service. Key objectives of this support are:

1. Emotional support:

To offer a safe space for Special Guardians to share their experiences, feelings, and concerns.

2. Information sharing:

To provide access to relevant information, resources, and guidance on caring for a child as a Special Guardian.

3. Community building:

To foster a sense of community among Special Guardians, helping them feel less isolated and more connected.

4. Empowerment:

To empower Special Guardians to navigate the complexities of their role and make informed decisions about the child's care.

At present the following support is provided:

- Coffee mornings, on the first Friday of every month
- Park walks at War Memorial Park take place monthly
- Virtual sessions with guest speakers are bi-monthly (e.g., Seniass Compass etc)

In addition, there is also a peer support WhatsApp group which can be joined on request.

For further information about peer support and the sessions available, please email: **sgps.coventry@gmail.com**.

6.13 Special Guardianship Information sessions

This aim of this bespoke information session is to help participants understand what being a Special Guardian means and their role in the child's life. It aims to provide clarity about the legal responsibilities involved as a special guardian, as well as examining the impact of trauma and loss on children in relation to their previous experiences.

Additionally, the course seeks to support participants in building and maintaining positive relationships and attachments with the children in their care, while considering the impact on themselves and their families. It also aims to help participants understand the support their child will gain from their education provider and what an SGO support plan may entail.

By the end of the session, participants will have access to information, advice, and signposting to services and support that will enable them to make informed decisions about becoming a Special Guardian and to thrive as a family.

This half-day session is tailored for both Prospective Special Guardians and existing Special Guardians. If you would like to attend, please book a place through JRNI or contact the Kinship Team to book a place. Tel: **024 7697 5489**



6.14 Skills to Care

Skills to Care training is a one-day training session to inform and advise prospective Kinship carers about the assessment and supervision process. The training also explores some key issues carers may experience.

Skills to Care is for applicants undertaking Fostering or Special Guardianship Assessment. The training is delivered by two members of staff from the Kinship Team.

- To gain an overview of the assessment process within fostering and special guardianship.
- To gain a clear understanding of the role of a Foster Carer and what the fostering role entails.
- To understand the Foster Panel process and the Court process.
- To ask any questions to help you understand the assessment process.

This is an interactive course, so you attendees are invited to participate within a group work setting and consider case studies. This is also an opportunity to create links and networks with other applicants undertaking the assessment process.

Skills to Care is offered every two months, from **9.30am - 2.30pm**, at **Coventry Council House**. A place can be booked via your Assessing Social Worker, or alternatively via the Kinship Team. Tel: **024 7697 5489**

6.15 Designated Children and Families Workers

The Kinship Team has two Children and Families Workers who provide bespoke tailored support to Kinship Foster Carers and Special Guardians. Often families within a Special Guardianship arrangement may be eligible for support and services funded by the ASGSF, and the Children and Families Worker will offer support in the interim whilst these services are commissioned.

Children and Families workers will assess and plan the intervention and support that they deliver to families in need. This can include support around routines, emotional and behavioural management strategies, online safety, training around the impact of domestic abuse, alcohol or drugs on children and young people. Other support offered could be around life story work, and experiences of loss and trauma.

Children and Families Workers will routinely work with families for up to six weeks however this can change depending upon the needs of the family. A planning meeting will be arranged with the Social Worker(s) involved to identify what the outcomes

should be. The support offered will be reviewed mid-way, and at conclusion a closure meeting will also be held review the work undertaken and next steps. If it appropriate for referrals to made to other support services, these will be made prior to the Children and Families Worker's involvement ending.

6.16 Events

The Fostering Service host events throughout the year for Kinship Foster carers, Special Guardians and their families. These include the Summer fun day, carers conference, children who foster (groups for birth children whose parents foster), 'Thank You' events, and the Winter events. Event invites are sent to those on the mailing list, which is updated regularly by Social Workers. Social Workers will also share details of forthcoming event during supervision visits with Kinship Foster Carers.

6.17 Edge of Care

Edge of Care Criteria and Threshold

Edge of Care offer a 12-week intervention aimed to prevent children and young people coming into Local authority Care. The service has expanded to include Reunification, Foster care arrangement Stability and Positive Directions. Therapeutic Practitioners and a Fostering Stability Worker who are trauma informed provide bespoke packages of support. Support is also available to special guardianship arrangements which are becoming unstable.

Children and Young people must be aged between 8-17 for the duration of Edge of Care intervention. We prioritise adolescent referrals for young people aged between 11-16. Children and Young People must be considered at imminent risk of coming into care by the Social Worker and overseeing Manager.

How we work with families

We work jointly with social workers, young persons and family to identify the required support. Together, we develop measurable goals and help the whole family acquire the skills necessary to achieve them. We deliver direct work in both parent and family sessions to defuse crisis within the home.

We work alongside the family to identify need, deliver structured and evidence-based intervention tools to support families in crisis. The foundation of our intervention includes signs of safety and the Family Valued approach.

We work to promote independence and create sustainable change for the family, which will we aim to embed in their behaviours after Edge of Care closes. We work directly with the family, providing hands-on and intensive support work for the 12-week period to achieve rapid change.

Workers vary between early (till 5pm) and late shifts (up to 8pm), allowing flexibility to work with families in different circumstances.

Our on-call service provides support outside working hours. On call offers support to families to practice new strategies agreed within their intervention. Edge of Care do not offer an 'emergency response' to incidents that may require relevant emergency services.

Referrals are completed by the allocated Social Worker, following a consultation with their Team Manager. Referrals to be sent to: **edgeofcare-referral@coventry.gov.uk**

All referrals are screened by the Management Team to discuss the suitability of the referral and agree work to be completed with the family.



6.18 Wellbeing Support for Kinship Foster Carers and Special Guardians

A comprehensive Wellbeing Support offer is available to Kinship Foster Carers and Special Guardians via the Local Authority's partnership with Health Assured.

The wellbeing offer provided by Health Assured and commissioned by Coventry City Council, is designed to support all carers, including Special Guardians, by addressing their mental, emotional, and financial wellbeing. This comprehensive support package includes access to a confidential helpline, structured counselling sessions, and life coaching. Kinship carers and Special Guardians can benefit from up to 12 sessions of structured counselling per person, per issue, per year, ensuring they receive the right care through a triage process conducted by qualified counsellors. Additionally, the offer extends to immediate family members, providing support for partners and dependent children aged 16 to 24 who are in full-time education and living in the same household.

In addition, the wellbeing offer includes financial coaching, legal advice, and medical support. Kinship carers and special guardians can access personalised financial guidance to help with household budgeting, debt management, and pension advice, with up to three sessions per person, per issue, per year. The legal team is available 24/7 to provide consultations on various issues, including family and matrimonial law, civil litigation, and immigration. For medical support, qualified nurses can offer advice on musculoskeletal conditions, viruses, and other health concerns, although they cannot diagnose or prescribe treatment. This holistic approach ensures that special guardians have the resources they need to manage their wellbeing effectively.

In addition, online CBT is available for over 30 different areas and specific CBT linked to the Menopause.

7. Family Networks and Family Group Decision Making

The Children's Social Care National Framework: Statutory Guidance on the Purpose, Principles for Practice and Expected Outcomes of Children's Social Care provides that this is the umbrella term for family-led decision-making fora, where a family network has all the resources, adequate preparation, relevant information, a safe and appropriate environment, and private family time to make a plan to response to concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing. At pre-proceedings stage, successful family group decision making also includes having an independent coordinator. Family group decision making can take different forms; a 'family group conference' is one model, alongside Family network meetings or discussions which include family members and the 'Team around the child'.

A family network is described as a group of people close to a child, made up of relatives and also non-related connected people (where connected people has the same definition used in The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, in addition to close family friends who have a connection with the child). A family network could include stepparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, or close family friends.

These meetings can be especially helpful to Kinship carers in identifying areas of caring for a child for which additional support from the wider family network may be helpful.

See also **Family Networks and Family Group Decision Making Procedure.**

Contact Family Group Conferencing in Coventry at:
FGC@Coventry.gov.uk



8. Legal Support

In public family proceedings, legal aid is available to prospective Kinship carers, or Kinship carers in public family law children's cases under the Children Act 1989 and in related proceedings, where they have been joined as a party to proceedings by the court. This includes where prospective Kinship Carers wish to make more permanent arrangements, for example, through a Special Guardianship Order. This is subject to means and merits eligibility assessments.

In private family proceedings, legal aid is available for prospective Kinship Carers and Kinship carers for Special Guardianship Orders. This is also subject to means and merits eligibility assessments.

If a Kinship carer wishes to discuss their matter with a legal aid provider and explore their eligibility further, they can use the 'Find a legal aid adviser or family mediator' tool which will assist them to find a provider in the area.

It is important to know that birth families can legally apply to the court for permission to discharge a Special Guardianship Order. The court will look at any new evidence and make a decision based on the child's best interest.

The Family Rights Group, 'Helping families Helping children' has more information on this.

It can be useful to seek legal advice in relation to family time if there are challenges surrounding this that are not being resolved.

The organisation 'Kinship' offers advice and support on obtaining legal advice, including information about legal aid and signposting to other helpful organizations: <https://Kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/advice-and-information/legal-helpfor-Kinship-carers/>

The Law Society has a find a solicitor service: Find a Solicitor - The Law Society. **Find a Solicitor - The Law Society**

The Kinship Team can advise and signpost you to the organisations that can offer support with legal enquiries. The team can also advise on requests for financial support in relation to legal costs.



9. Complaints Procedure

Where a Kinship carer or Special Guardian is not satisfied with the level of support provided to enable them to care for the child, they have access to the local authority's complaints process. Our aim would be to resolve any such dissatisfaction without the need for a formal investigation, but where an informal resolution is not possible, then a formal investigation will be arranged.

The timescales and process are set out in the **Complaints Procedure**

10. Glossary of terms

Kinship/ connected person is a relative, friend, or other person connected with a child, who has a pre-existing relationship with the child.

Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. This is a private arrangement made between a parent and a carer, for 28 days or more. Close relatives are defined as stepparents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, or aunts (whether of full blood, half blood or marriage/affinity).

Children in need are defined in law as children who are aged under 18 and: -

- need Local Authority services to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development
- need Local Authority services to prevent significant or further harm to health or development
- are disabled

The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families provides a systematic basis for collecting and analysing information to support professional judgements about how to help children and families in the best interests of the child

Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (s17) defines the duties of a Local Authority in safeguarding and promoting the general welfare of a child in need and her/his family within their area. Assistance given to families under S17 includes financial assistance

A Child Arrangement order decides where the child is to live and with whom. The granting of a child arrangements order to someone automatically gives him or her parental responsibility for the child if they do not already have it.

11. Appendix

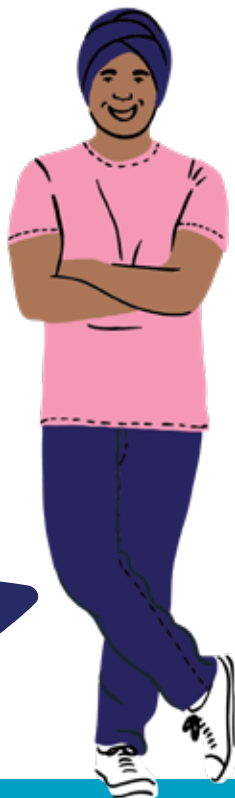
11.1 Caring for Somebody Else's Child – Options

For further information please visit **looking after someone else's child**

11.2 Fostering Service training offer

For full details, visit **Foster carers training**

- **All About Me (Life Story Approach)**
- **Attachment Theory**
- **Behaviour That Challenges You**
- **Core Mandatory Refresher for Foster Carers**
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**
- **Equality and Diversity E-Learning**
- **First Aid for Foster Carers**
- **Foundations for Attachment**
- **Induction for Foster Carers**
- **Introduction to Court Processes for Foster Carers**
- **Intro to Safer Caring and Health and Safety**
- **Reporting and Recording for Foster Carers**
- **Safeguarding Awareness for Foster Care**
- **Special Guardian Training**
- **Supporting Children and Young People with Autism - neurodivergence awareness**
- **Supporting Education of Children in Care (Outcomes)**
- **Supporting Education of Children in Care WMVS**
- **Therapeutic Parenting and Behaviour Management**
- **Understanding the mental health and emotional well-being**



11.3 Special Guardianship Financial Support

1. Purpose and Legal Basis

Coventry City Council (CCC) provides financial support to Special Guardians (SGs) under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and in accordance with the Special Guardianship Statutory Guidance 2017. Financial support is payable only where the Council considers it necessary to enable the Special Guardian(s)/prospective Special Guardian(s) to care for the child (Regulation 6(1) & (2)). The amount of support is determined by considering other available resources, the Special Guardian's financial situation, and the child's needs (Regulation 13(2) & (3)).

2. Principles of Support

Financial support is intended to remove financial barriers to suitable Special Guardianship arrangements.

Financial support may be provided to facilitate arrangements for a person to become a Special Guardian or to support the continuation of the arrangement. Payments may be made where necessary to ensure the Special Guardian can look after the child, where the child needs special care (because of longterm illness, disability, emotional or behavioral difficulties or the consequences of past abuse or neglect) and for legal costs, or for necessary expenditure to accommodate and maintain the child.

CCC is committed to evidencing specific decision making and the provision of reasons for financial decisions. Financial support is assessed on its own facts and tailored to individual circumstances, resources, needs and the child's individual needs.

3. Assessment Process

All applications for Special Guardianship financial allowance are subject to a means test, except for in the following circumstances:

- i The first two years following a Special Guardianship Order for former Kinship/ foster carers.
- ii Where bespoke financial support packages have been agreed through the exceptional allowances panel.

In determining the amount of financial support, CCC must consider:

- Any other grant, benefit, allowance or resource available to the Special Guardian (Reg 13(2)).
- The Special Guardian's financial resources, including tax credits or benefits (Reg 13(3)(a)).
- The Special Guardian's reasonable outgoings and commitments (excluding child-related costs) (Reg 13(3)(b)).
- The financial needs and resources of the child (Reg 13(3)(c)).

CCC's model is based on its full fostering allowance, which exceeds the national minimum.

Financial support cannot duplicate other payments and must be based on individual need. The fostering allowance that would have been payable had the child been fostered is used as the maximum benchmark for calculating support. CCC will advise Special Guardians to access any benefits to which they are entitled; this will usually include child benefit and tax credits.

CCC will provide special guardians and applicants with clear reasons of how SGA is calculated.

Further details on the assessment process and request for review of SGA calculations can be found here; Applications for Special Guardianship Orders

4. Treatment of Child Benefit

CCC deducts child benefit from the final SGA assessment, including where Special Guardian's are in receipt of benefits. This deduction is justified because Special Guardian's are separately entitled to child benefit and CCC's fostering allowance exceeds the national minimum. This means that even after deducting child benefit, the SGA remains higher than the national minimum amount an SG would receive. However, child benefit will not be deducted as a blanket policy, as there will be exemptions and each case will be considered individually with written reasons provided.

5. Exceptional Allowances Panel

The Exceptional Allowances Panel considers bespoke financial support packages for Special Guardians where standard SGA arrangements may not meet the needs of the child or Special Guardian's circumstances. The panel may approve support for high-cost needs, transition arrangements, financial hardship, one-off payments, and legal costs. Referrals must include a clear rationale and evidence. Decisions are recorded with reasons and ongoing payments reviewed annually.

Special Guardians have the right of appeal to decisions made by the Exceptional Allowance's Panel, via an Appeal Panel if requested within 10 working days of their written receipt of the outcome from the Exceptional Allowance Panel.

6. Financial Assessment Process

Applicants complete financial assessment forms with supporting evidence. The allowance is calculated using income, standard outgoings, and benefits, measured against the fostering allowance. If disposable income falls below the fostering rate, the difference forms the basis of the SGA. If calculated at zero, the applicant is informed and documents returned. Proposed allowances are set out in the SGO support plan and reassessed annually.

7. Post-Order Support for Former Foster Carers

CCC supports transitions from fostering to Special Guardianship arrangements. Where a foster carer agrees to provide permanent care, and the child has been looked after by CCC for at least one month, CCC will provide an allowance equivalent to existing fees and allowances (minus child benefit and universal credit if applicable) for two years post-order. Thereafter, support is means-tested. Legal fee support up to £500 is available where CCC leads the application to discharge the care order. Private applicants are assessed under standard criteria.

8. Review and Changes in Circumstances

Financial support is reviewed annually through a 'desk top' review or sooner if there is a significant change in the Special Guardian's or child's circumstances, where a bespoke package of support has been agreed. SGO carers can request a review/reassessment of their financial support, if their circumstances change, which will be presented to the Exceptional Allowances panel for consideration.

If the Special Guardian moves out of Coventry, CCC remains responsible for financial support unless agreed otherwise. Other support services will be the responsibility of the new authority unless the child was previously looked after prior to the Special

Guardianship Order being made in which case support services will remain the responsibility of CCC for at least three years post order.

Support may continue until the child ceases to have a home with the Special Guardians, end of education, training and commences employment or where the child qualifies for benefits in their own right (other than child benefit) as part of a transition plan

Support normally ceases when the child turns 18, unless;

- a The child is in full-time education or training.
- b The child has special needs or disabilities.

Any request for continued support post 18 will be considered by the Exceptional Allowance panel and should be made no less than 3 months prior to the child's 18th birthday. The financial element of this support, will generally be in line with the current Staying Put Allowance, taking into account that the child post 18, may be able to apply for alternative state benefits, have access to income or support from adult services. The Exceptional Allowance panel will consider each individual's case, to determine ongoing support specific to that child's circumstances and needs, as they transition into adulthood.

9. Contact Information

To request a financial assessment or learn more about postorder support, contact PSS Fostering at PSSFostering@coventry.gov.uk or call **024 7697 6759**



12. Notes

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Special Guardianship Financial Support



Special Guardianship Financial Support

1. Purpose and Legal Basis

Coventry City Council (CCC) provides financial support to Special Guardians (SGs) under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and in accordance with the Special Guardianship Statutory Guidance 2017. Financial support is payable only where the Council considers it necessary to enable the Special Guardian(s)/prospective Special Guardian(s) to care for the child (Regulation 6(1) & (2)). The amount of support is determined by considering other available resources, the Special Guardian's financial situation, and the child's needs (Regulation 13(2) & (3)).

2. Principles of Support

Financial support is intended to remove financial barriers to suitable Special Guardianship arrangements. Financial support may be provided to facilitate arrangements for a person to become a Special Guardian or to support the continuation of the arrangement. Payments may be made where necessary to ensure the Special Guardian can look after the child, where the child needs special care (because of long-term illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the consequences of past abuse or neglect) and for legal costs, or for necessary expenditure to accommodate and maintain the child. CCC is committed to evidencing specific decision making and the provision of reasons for financial decisions. Financial support is assessed on its own facts and tailored to individual circumstances, resources, needs and the child's individual needs.

3. Assessment Process

All applications for Special Guardianship financial allowance are subject to a means test, except for the following circumstances:

- i. The first two years following a Special Guardianship Order for former Kinship/foster carers.
- ii. Where bespoke financial support packages have been agreed through the exceptional allowances panel.

In determining the amount of financial support, CCC must consider:

- Any other grant, benefit, allowance or resource available to the Special Guardian (Reg 13(2)).
- The Special Guardian's financial resources, including tax credits or benefits (Reg 13(3)(a)).
- The Special Guardian's reasonable outgoings and commitments (excluding child-related costs)(Reg 13(3)(b)).
- The financial needs and resources of the child (Reg 13(3)(c)).

CCC's model is based on its full fostering allowance, which exceeds the national minimum.

Financial support cannot duplicate other payments and must be based on individual need. The fostering allowance that would have been payable had the child been fostered is used as the maximum benchmark for calculating support. CCC will advise Special Guardians to access any benefits to which they are entitled; this will usually include child benefit and tax credits.

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Further details on the assessment process and request for review of SGA calculations can be found at **Applications for Special Guardianship Orders**



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18th birthday. The financial element of this support, will generally be in line with the current Staying Put Allowance, taking into account that the child post-18, may be able to apply for alternative state benefits, have access to income or support from adult services. The Exceptional Allowance panel will consider each individual's case, to determine ongoing support specific to that child's circumstances and needs, as they transition into adulthood.

Contact Information

To request a financial assessment or learn more about post-order support, contact PSS Fostering at

PSSFostering@coventry.gov.uk

or call **024 7697 6759**

For further details visit
coventry.gov.uk/fostering





Coventry City Council

Briefing note

To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 17th September 2026

Cabinet Portfolio: Children and Young People

Subject: The Complexities Involved in Finding Homes for Children in Care and Associated Costs

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 This paper provides an update following the items considered by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) on 28th November 2024, and 11th September 2025 outlining ongoing challenges in the children's social care market, recent national developments, and local authority responses.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended:
- 1) To note progress in relation to sufficiency, in line with significant national social care reforms.
 - 2) To formally acknowledge Coventry City Council's continued support to the 14 local authorities in the West Midlands by managing the West Midlands Commissioning Hub (WMCH) & leading on the Regional Frameworks for both Fostering and Residential homes. In addition, Coventry is leading on the Regional Residential workforce strategy.
 - 3) Note progress linked to Regional Fostering Hubs and the establishment of the West Midlands Regional Care Cooperative.

3 National & Regional Context

- 3.1 As previously reported, there has been a marked increase in the number of children and young people in care that local authorities have struggled to find appropriate homes for.
- 3.2 The Children's Commissioner reported that as of 1st September 2025, 669 children were reported to be living in an unregistered children's home in England. This continues to be a widely reported national issue and is a consequence of several interlinked factors, which were highlighted in Competition and Market's Authority report of March 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social care of May

2022, Stable Homes, Built on Love (February 2023) and the Parliamentary Committee for Public Accounts in January (2026).¹

- 3.3 Subsequently there are significant reforms in social care and in summary the key areas include:
- 3.4 **Family Help & Safeguarding:** Local authorities are rolling out unified Family Help services alongside multi-agency child protection teams uniting police, health, and education to intervene earlier.
- 3.5 **Placement & Cooperatives:** Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) are expanding to jointly plan and improve the sufficiency of children's homes and foster care placements.
- 3.6 **Kinship & Sibling Support:** Councils must publish a local kinship offer backed by national standards, and legal duties now mandate promoting sibling contact in care.
- 3.7 **Ofsted and Regulation Changes:** Ofsted gains powers to issue direct financial penalties for running unregistered homes, while inspections move away from single-word overall effectiveness judgments.
- 3.8 **Workforce & Care Leavers:** New early career and post-qualification standards for social workers are taking effect, supported by expanded long-term 'Staying Close' frameworks for care leavers.
- 3.9 In summary, the Government is reported to be investing £2.4 billion for the Families First Partnership Programme, £245 million to deliver legislative commitments and improve the care market, and £56 million in capital funding to expand and refurbish children's homes.
- 3.9 There is national recognition that the children's 'placement' market is broken, there has been a significant decline in the number of available foster carers since 2021. At the same time, the children's homes sector continues to expand, with Ofsted reporting a 20% increase in the number of children's homes during 2025/26 and an overall 70% increase in new children's homes since March 2022. However, this growth has not translated into a proportional increase in placement capacity, as newly registered homes are typically smaller, with an average capacity of three children per home, compared to four children in existing homes. These market pressures continue to present challenges for local authorities in securing sufficient local homes for children in care
- 3.10 Research has identified that these problems break down into two main areas and the government has begun to take steps to address these within the Social Care & Education reforms. As reported previously, the two main areas were identified as:
1. *A lack of placements of the right kind in the right place, thereby increasing risk of unregulated placements with providers making materially higher profits and charging significantly higher prices than if the market were functioning effectively.*
 2. *A concern of the high level of debt some providers have and the impact if they exited the market as this would further exacerbate sufficiency and the ability of local authorities to meet the needs of these children.*

¹ [Financial sustainability of children's care homes](#)

- 3.11 In *Keeping Children Safe*, the government referenced the need to “bring a swift end to excessive and exploitative profit making in a sector which supports our most vulnerable children”.
- 3.12 There continues to be a drive to create regional solutions through the establishment of Regional Care Co-operatives (RCC). supporting local authorities in challenging profiteering providers “as well as enabling greater central government oversight of the placements market” ²
- 3.13 Around 11,560 children and young people are currently in care across the West Midlands. In July 2026, the Department for Education (DfE) awarded up to £680,000 in 2026/27 and £1.026million in 2027/28 to create a new West Midlands Regional Care Cooperative (RCC). Sandwell are the lead authority, working with the DfE on the development and mobilisation of the West Midlands RCC, on behalf of the 14 LA’s/Trusts.
- 3.14 The new partnership will bring together the 14 councils across the wider West Midlands region, as well as health services, police and youth justice partners, who will work together to make sure children and young people get the support they need, when they need it.
- 3.15 The RCC aims to improve placement sufficiency, increase placement stability, strengthen regional commissioning and improve outcomes for children and young people. An interim Director for the RCC has been appointed and work is continuing across the region to develop a regional sufficiency strategy and action plan.
- 3.16 [The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act \(2026\)](#) references a financial oversight regime for providers who meet conditions to be set out in regulations; linked to the size of the provider and whether it would be difficult to replace were it to fail. The aim is to ensure that these providers submit a “recovery and resolution plan”, setting out risks to their financial sustainability and actions they propose to take in response.
- 3.17 In addition, the National Audit Office (NAO) published a review of the Department for Education’s oversight of the children’s homes sector, including supported accommodation, highlighting a 96% rise in local authority residential care expenditure between 2019/20 and 2023/24, with costs increasing to £3.1 billion over the period. In the West Midlands, approximately £1billion is spent collectively on children’s social care annually, with just under half of this spend linked to residential children’s care.
- 3.18 The Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting & Sufficiency, alongside colleagues from finance have contributed to the Children’s social care market interventions working group with the DfE.
- 3.19 The Government have also identified an additional £52m to support the capital funding (50%) to increase the number of local authority run Childrens homes (July

² <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-local/childrens-social-care-market/recommendations>

2025).³ which is specifically aimed at creating up to 200 new placements in council-run children's homes for children with complex needs.⁴

- 3.20 The Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting & Sufficiency is part of the DfE working group on reforms linked to Childrens Residential Care. Recent research has been published linked to findings from a workforce census and discussions have taken place this summer, with an expert led panel on the development of a national workforce strategy. The initial report with proposed outcomes will be published in the Autumn.
- 3.21 Coventry, with the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and Sufficiency as chair, leads and contributes to regional workforce initiatives across the West Midlands to address ongoing recruitment and retention challenges within residential childcare.
- 3.22 Regional analysis has identified shortages of experienced residential workers and Registered Managers, increasing competition from the private sector, and delays in Ofsted registration processes as key risks to sufficiency. In response, local authorities are working together and sharing ideas to develop recruitment campaigns, training pathways, university partnerships, leadership development opportunities and peer support networks for Registered Managers.
- 3.23 As part of this, Coventry also led the delivery of the West Midlands 'Big Thinking' Residential Workforce Event in June 2026, bringing together local authorities, Registered Managers, universities and Health partners to explore workforce challenges, career pathways, therapeutic practice and innovation within residential childcare. This collaborative approach aims to improve workforce resilience, supporting the growing number of LA children's homes across the region, and ensure children continue to receive high-quality care from a skilled and experienced workforce.
- 3.24 Ofsted are considering changes to regulations including 'location impact risk assessments' to ensure that new children's homes are being opened in the right places to meet need and only following collaborative work and agreement with the local authority in which they plan to situate the home. In addition, consideration is being given to sufficiency becoming a Children's Services judgement in full inspections, under the ILACS framework.
- 3.25 Coventry City Council have established a process whereby Childrens services are now consulted on all planning applications for a 'change in use' form C3 to C2, where a provider wishes to open a new home in an existing property. Each application is considered based upon additional evidence the provider is now required to submit, linked to opening a children's home. Consideration is given to Coventry's sufficiency needs for new homes and expectation that any new homes will be for Coventry's children. Discussions are being held across the region to address the challenges all local authorities are facing in relation to the opening of new private homes, sufficiency and the impact of out of area 'children' coming into the region.
- 3.26 In addition to residential children's homes, Regional Fostering Recruitment hubs are being established to enable local authorities to work together to recruit new foster carers and improve retention, supported by £25m in DfE funding. There has been an expansion of the expectations of the Fostering hubs, now requiring a

[Government announces £53 million for council-run children's homes | Social Work Today](#)

⁴ <https://www.ccinform.co.uk/practice-guidance/childrens-social-care-reforms/>

minimum of 4 LA's/ Trusts to come together to not only recruit but also assess and train new foster carers.

3.27 In summary the new proposals for 'End to End Fostering Hubs' (Published March 2026) aims to: ⁵

- launch a national communications campaign to attract potential foster carers and provide clear guidance on the system and applications process
- speed up the foster carer recruitment process and work with local areas to improve monitoring of that process
- pilot an enhanced training and support offer for foster carers and from 2027 provide up to £25m (in cash terms) in capital funding over two years to help local authority foster carers create additional space in their homes.

3.28 The WM authorities have successfully submitted a Room Makers bid via the Black County Fostering Hub, to access addition funding to support foster carers to have their properties developed to create additional bedrooms. In addition, a DfE Expression of interest has been submitted, in partnership with health for Home Again funding- to support children to exit Tier 4 hospital provisions and prevention of admissions.

3.29 As part of this wider regional approach, West Midlands local authorities are also working together to establish a Regional Safe Centre in Birmingham, supported by the Department for Education. The Safe Centre will provide secure welfare provision for children with the most complex needs where foster care, kinship care or residential provision cannot safely meet their needs.

3.30 Cabinet approval on 4 November 2025 confirmed Coventry City Council's commitment and support for this regional development, which aims to increase specialist provision, reduce reliance on limited national secure welfare provision, and enable children from the West Midlands to be cared for closer to home wherever possible

4 Sufficiency in Coventry

4.1 Following the March 2026 inspection of Coventry's Childrens Services judged as Outstanding, Ofsted stated '*As committed corporate parents, leaders have ensured sufficient provision for children in care. This means that more children can live locally and remain in the communities and schools they know, cared for by skilled and dedicated carers.*' ⁶

4.2 Ofsted also stated: *Leaders recognise the importance of children living close to home and in communities they identify with. As a result of targeted work to increase sufficiency, there is now a wider range of placements available when children cannot remain living at home. This is also leading to greater placement stability for children in care. No children in care currently live in unregistered care provision*

⁵

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69c407bdb66ff902f45441d9/Fostering_Recruitment_and_Retention_Programme_end-to-end_programme_booklet.pdf

⁶ <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50301676>

- 4.3 The Coventry practice model 'Family Valued', works on the premise of keeping children and families together when it is safe to do so. This approach seeks to enable families to find the solutions to challenges they face. Families are supported through Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences (FGC) and additional support to identify family led solutions. This approach aligns with the government 'keeping children safe, helping families thrive' principles.⁷
- 4.4 In February 2026, the number of children in care reached its lowest point during the last year at 683. Since then, the service has experienced a steady increase, with 731 children in care as of August 2026.
- 4.5 Whilst fluctuations are expected throughout the year, the increase observed since February is greater than in previous years and reflects the growing demand and complexity being experienced across children's social care. Initial analysis suggests that a contributing factor has been an increase in the number of large sibling groups entering care and Assistant Directors continue to review and approve all new entrants to care.
- 4.6 Further analysis is being undertaken to understand the key drivers behind this increase and to identify opportunities to safely reduce demand, reunify children wherever possible and improve outcomes for children and families.
- 4.7 Family-led solutions, including kinship arrangements with connected carers, are considered when a child cannot safely remain with their parents. Kinship care has seen notable growth in Coventry, with 146 children in September 2026 now placed in kinship foster care representing 19.8% of children in care.
- 4.8 If no suitable family or kinship carers can be identified and the child requires safeguarding and care by the local authority, the process of finding an appropriate alternative home will begin. In most cases, a foster placement is sought initially, allowing the child to receive care and support within a family setting either through Coventry Fostering Service or an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), who are ideally on the fostering framework.
- 4.9 As of 5th September 2026, just under 73% of Coventry's children in care were living with foster families, including kinship foster carers. Nationally, fostering remains the most common placement type, with an average of 67% of children in care living in foster care in 2025.
- 4.10 1.9% of our children in care are placed for adoption, 4.3% placed with parents and 9.7% are living in supported accommodation.
- 4.11 However, for some children, the complexity of their needs means that a residential children's home is the most appropriate care plan. Wherever possible, children will live within Coventry's own internal children's homes or through contracted providers on the residential framework, as close to their communities as possible. Only where these arrangements are unable to meet a child's needs will the service access the wider residential care market to secure an appropriate home.
- 4.12 11% of Coventry's children in care live within a children's home and this figure has remained reasonably stable over the last 12 months, whilst the number of children in care has increased over the last 12 months.

7

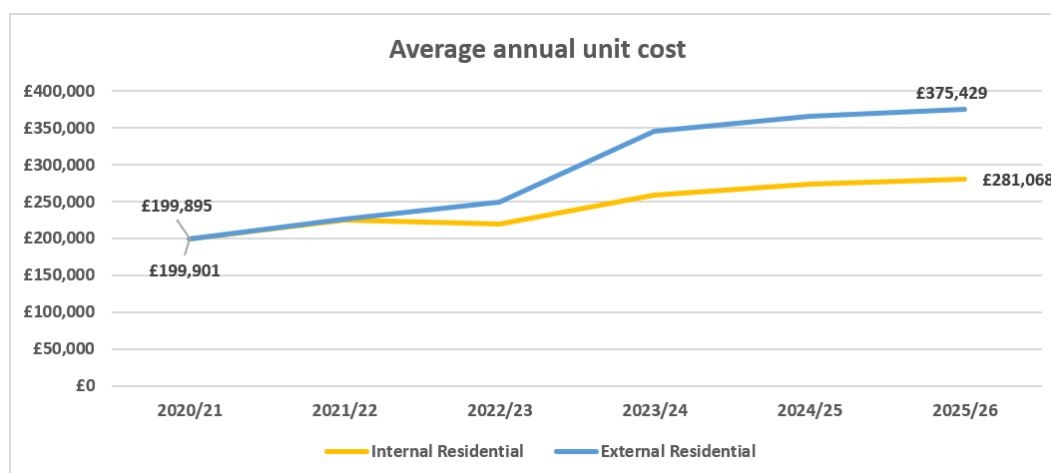
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69c407bdb66ff902f45441d9/Fostering_Recruitment_and_Retention_Programme_end-to-end_programme_booklet.pdf

- 4.13 The challenge of securing the right home in the right location is often intensified by the urgency with which homes must be found. Some children enter care under a Police Protection Order, are remanded to local authority care, or require immediate relocation due to incidents involving physical or perceived aggressive behaviour or due to significant safeguarding concerns. In some cases, carers both foster and residential, may give very limited notice, sometimes on the same day. Within an already pressured market and considering the factors previously outlined, finding a suitable new home immediately is not always possible. Children's Services consistently work to resist immediate or short-notice endings, dedicating significant daily resources to engaging with providers to stabilise homes.
- 4.14 Weekly stability meetings are held to explore additional support options that may help maintain stability for children at risk of needing to move. This often involves securing extra funding, which some providers may need, to continue to care for the child, stating that without it, the child will need to be relocated.
- 4.15 When a child must move from a children's home and another residential provider offers a home, the associated costs can be high. Providers may seek to mitigate perceived risks by increasing fees, often basing their offer on the need for additional staffing or by charging for 2 spaces in the home (double funding).
- 4.16 For children who experience sudden moves, the impact on their emotional wellbeing can be significant, affecting their self-esteem, sense of self-worth, and their ability or willingness to form attachments with new carers. These children may assume that new carers will also give up on them at the first sign of difficulty, which can perpetuate a cycle of instability. This, in turn, can reinforce providers' justification for maintaining high levels of support and costs, as children respond to psychological trauma through 'fight, flight, or freeze' behaviours.
- 4.17 Both the increase in the number of 'out of hours' foster carers and the opening of our 'short stay, same day' children's home, which has supported 15 children (including sibling groups), has evidenced impact on our ability to address some of these challenges. There have been no children placed in an unregulated children's home or with an unregulated provider by Coventry for over a year.
- 4.18 As of March 2026, just under 74% of children who have been in care for over 2 years, under the age of 16, were experiencing 'home' stability, against a national average of 69%.
- 4.19 In addition, a 2025 report published by the charity 'Become' highlighted that delivering sufficiency remains a national challenge, with the number of children in care living more than 20 miles from home increasing by two-thirds since 2013. The report identified that local authorities achieving the strongest sufficiency outcomes were those investing in early help, kinship care, foster carer recruitment and retention, local residential provision, and stronger relationships with providers. The report highlighted and recognised Coventry's Family Valued approach as a positive exemplar of practice that has helped reduce the number of children entering care and our increased use of kinship arrangements, supporting more children to remain connected to their families and communities, living closer to Coventry.⁸

⁸ https://becomecharity.org.uk/content/uploads/2025/11/Good-practice-report-by-Become-2025.pdf?utm_source=Button&utm_medium=Website&utm_campaign=Full+report&utm_content=Read+the+report

5 Financial context

- 5.1 The challenge for Coventry is that the average unit cost of a home for a child in care has been sharply increasing from year to year, high costs provision feature across the region, confirming demand outstripped availability of the right home in the right place to meet children's needs.



- 5.2 Although there are residential homes within the local market and Coventry is considering further homes, it still remains extremely difficult to find homes for our most complex children who exhibit significant trauma linked behaviours and often have additional needs such as autism.
- 5.3 External Residential costs have almost doubled over the last 5 years with the current 10 highest cost packages of care accounting for 42% of the total external residential budget.
- 5.4 As reported by the County Councils' Network & IMPOWER in November 2024: *Councils are faced with unenviable choices when needing to place a child taken into care at short notice – they cannot just be left homeless until a suitable price can be negotiated for their care'*

6 Mitigating activity

- 6.1 **The Sufficiency Steering Group**, alongside the Children's Commissioning Team carry out needs analysis into the issues to inform potential commissioning solutions. Several existing projects, alongside new initiatives seek to address the challenges of the 'placement mix'.
- 6.2 **The placement mix** is tracked throughout the year and reported monthly on a finance scorecard. To project future movements in the mix, input is gathered from across children's services covering:
- Expected changes in the overall number of children in care
 - Growth of internal provision
 - Impact of other projects, including House Project, Reunification,
- 6.3 Once compiled, the placement mix is modelled across the next financial year along with the anticipated unit costs to create expected budgets.
- 6.4 Actuals versus projections are reviewed regularly including at the monthly Sufficiency Steering Group Meeting. In addition, expected delivery against budgets

is scrutinised as part of Coventry's quarterly budgetary control process, Children's Services Leadership Team monthly business meeting and regular meetings between colleagues from finance and children's services.

- 6.5 The use of the 'Valuing Care' tool also supports Coventry's ambition to increase the use of local homes and foster placements, reduce reliance on high-cost external provision, and ensure that placement decisions are informed by a clear understanding of need rather than service availability alone. Ongoing review of children's changing needs, enables professionals to consider planned moves for children to foster homes or ways in which to support them further towards independence, as appropriate. This aligns with wider sufficiency and value-for-money objectives.
- 6.6 **The Fostering Excellence programme** aims to build on the growth in the number of carers supporting Coventry's children—whether through kinship care, mainstream fostering, or Next Steps arrangements. It enhances the support available to carers to promote stability and permanence wherever possible. Notably, the service has successfully increased the number of emergency foster carers, who now operate on a rota system to provide immediate care for children entering care in crisis.
- 6.7 Targeted recruitment activity continues, aligned to the specific types of homes needed—such as parent and child arrangements—and includes postcode-based recruitment in areas with larger properties that may be suitable for sibling groups.
- 6.8 Coventry has strengthened its Kinship Strategy and Local Offer. This now includes access to therapeutic support and a wider range of resources for all carers, aimed at encouraging and supporting potential kinship carers through both fostering and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) pathways.
- 6.9 Discussions are ongoing with neighbouring local authorities regarding the development of a regional fostering hub. Although initial work began in 2025, the Department for Education's funding criteria, and the scope of the hub's role was changed in March 2026 and therefore work has recommenced against new criteria and ambition.
- 6.10 **Next Step foster carers.** The Next Steps fostering scheme offers a supportive, safe, and nurturing family environment for children with more complex needs who step across from a children's home or are on the cusp of entering residential care. This continues to show success in significantly improving outcomes for the children placed with Next Steps carers alongside delivering tangible cost saving / avoidance, however we continue to target recruitment for experienced carers to increase the number of children who could move to a fostering family.
- 6.11 **Coventry's Residential Strategy (2023–2026).** Coventry's Residential Strategy continues to respond to increasing demand and the growing complexity of children's needs. The Council currently operates seven internal children's homes, with two further homes refurbished and awaiting Ofsted registration.
- 6.12 Once open, these smaller homes will increase local sufficiency and reduce reliance on high-cost external placements for children with complex needs.
- 6.13 Workforce recruitment remains a key challenge, particularly in relation to experienced residential childcare workers and Registered Managers, which can affect the pace at which new homes become operational. However, Coventry continues to maintain an active recruitment campaign and contribute to regional

workforce development across the West Midlands. Early impact from local investment is evident through 'short stay, same day' children's home, which has supported 15 young people in crisis, helped keep sibling groups together where appropriate, reduced reliance on unregistered provision, and contributed to an estimated £1 million in annual cost avoidance, in the first weeks 16 weeks of operation. The Council will continue to review its residential strategy to ensure the right number and type of homes, supported by a skilled workforce, are aligned to children's changing needs.

- 6.14 **House Project & Staying Close**, plans are in place to increase the number of cohorts accessing this. The new cohort has just begun and 97 young people now having been successfully supported by the House Project and 35 through Staying Close which also includes Lifelong Links.
- 6.15 The House Project is registered by Coventry as a Supported Accommodation provider and are awaiting their first Ofsted inspection.
- 6.16 Several children from children's homes have successfully moved onto their own home through the House Project and receive ongoing support through "Staying Close", from their former carers and through Lifelong links networks. The Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and Sufficiency alongside the Operational Lead for Residential Children's Homes are part of the Core Working Group for Staying Close Statutory Guidance development with the DfE.
- 6.17 **Reunification project:** Since the launch of the Reunification Project in June 2021, over 60 children have returned to the care of their parent(s) through this project, with further children, young people and their families working towards reunification.
- 6.18 **Supported Accommodation** is mainly provided to our children who are preparing to leave care though block contracts specifically commissioned though Coventry. Our block contracts have been effective in reducing spend, when comparing costs associated with the current regional supported accommodation framework. The assessment of need to determine if it is suitable for a child to move to supported accommodation, must be approved by an Assistant Director.
- 6.19 We are currently retendering our supported accommodation framework.
- 6.20 **Regional contracts:** Working in partnership with the West Midlands Commissioning Hub and local authorities across the region, Coventry supported the implementation of a Regional Fostering Framework in September 2024. The framework includes 58 Independent Fostering Agencies and is designed to improve quality, strengthen cost control and support more consistent access to foster homes across the region.
- 6.21 The framework aims to reduce the impact of shortages, particularly for sibling groups, older children, children with disabilities and children with more complex needs. It also supports regional collaboration in response to the wider recruitment and retention challenges affecting foster care, helping to improve sufficiency and enabling more children to live closer to their families, schools and communities wherever possible.
- 6.22 The Regional Residential Framework, which implemented in 2025/26 includes 107 providers, seeks to reduce reliance on spot purchasing by providing agreed fee structures, greater cost certainty and stronger regional quality assurance arrangements. This improves Coventry's ability to access suitable residential homes, achieve better value for money, and respond more effectively to national

demand, which continues to exceed supply for children with complex needs, disabilities, significant mental health needs and those subject to Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.

- 6.23 Coventry remains the lead authority for both regional frameworks on behalf of the West Midlands, working closely with the Commissioning Hub, local authorities, legal and procurement colleagues as part of a One Coventry approach. The Commissioning Team also works collaboratively with regional partners to undertake provider checks, quality assurance visits and ongoing liaison with social workers to ensure children receive safe, good quality care
- 6.24 **Regional Safe Centre.** Local Authorities from the West Midlands are working with the DfE to open a new West Midlands Safe Centre (secure welfare) children's home. There is a national shortage of secure welfare provision. The home will care for up to 20 children and is expected to open in the latter part of 2028. Birmingham Children's Trust are leading on the development, and the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting & Sufficiency is part of the 'Practice & Operating Model' working group.
- 6.25 **Assistant Director oversight** includes the weekly Gateway Panel, Resource & Stability Panels and bi-monthly Residential Review. All new entrants to care are approved by an Assistant Director.
- 6.26 A bimonthly review is undertaken of all children living in residential care, to consider a move on, in line with their care plan. Alongside this, children in residential care with additional packages of support are reviewed weekly. This meeting actively tracks each resource with additional support and works with social workers and providers to reduce the package in line with need.
- 6.27 **Unit cost inflation:** The outturn (end of year) position is analysed each year to determine the unit cost of different types of provision, including contract type e.g., framework, block or spot. Work is then undertaken to determine contractually expected uplifts or to estimate non-contractual increases. This involves looking at historical uplift trends and consideration of national inflationary rates, including CPIH and National Living Wage. This supports ongoing budget forecasting.
- 6.28 It is of note that the placement spend for 2025-2026 was within budget.

7 Joint working with Health.

- 7.1 Joint Health funding is provided for those children who are discharged from hospital, having been sectioned under S2 of the Mental Health Act, under s.117 and for some children with complex needs. However, there are ongoing discussions with health regarding differing views as to whether several children should receive additional funding support through Children's Continuing Health Care (CCHC) assessment outcomes. A complex needs panel meets monthly to consider funding 'splits' for children with the most complex needs- including the ICB, Children's and Education service.
- 7.2 With effect from September 2026, CAMHS provision will be co-located with children's services at Friargate. In addition, Coventry are one of 5 local authority pilots receiving a dedicated Toucan (CAMHS Regional Collaborative) Case Manager to work with and to support professionals and carers to respond earlier to emerging mental health and emotional well being concerns for our children in care.

7.3 The West Midlands have also submitted a bid to work with the DfE & health partners on Home Again.⁹

8 Summary & Conclusion:

- 8.1 As evidenced, the primary budgetary pressures stem from the instability within the residential children's homes market. Coventry Children's Services is leading the way regionally in supporting the development of local authority-run children's homes, with seven homes currently operational and two additional homes scheduled to open following Ofsted registration
- 8.2 A range of local workstreams in line with the reforms remain in place to ensure that children are supported in the most appropriate homes for their needs. This includes strengthening kinship care, fostering, Next Steps foster care, reunification, the House Project, Staying Close, Valuing Care and residential review processes.
- 8.3 It is noteworthy that many of the recommendations outlined in the May 2025 LGA publication, 'Costs and Complexity in Care: The Real Drivers of High-Cost Placements for Children in Care', are either already in place or have been identified as active workstreams through Coventry's Sufficiency Steering Group.
- 8.4 Collaborative efforts across the Council, Children's Services, and regional partners continue to focus on reducing the costs associated with children entering or remaining in care, and on supporting safe reunification with families wherever possible.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a4cb31de50f952c9b89e646/Home_Again_application_guidance_for_regional_care_cooperatives_and_partners.pdf

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