



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.

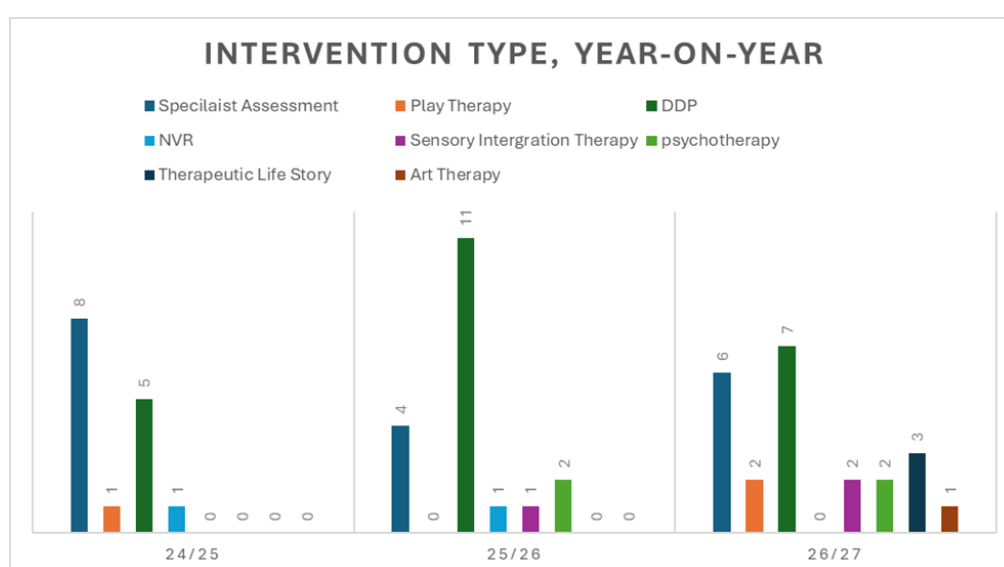
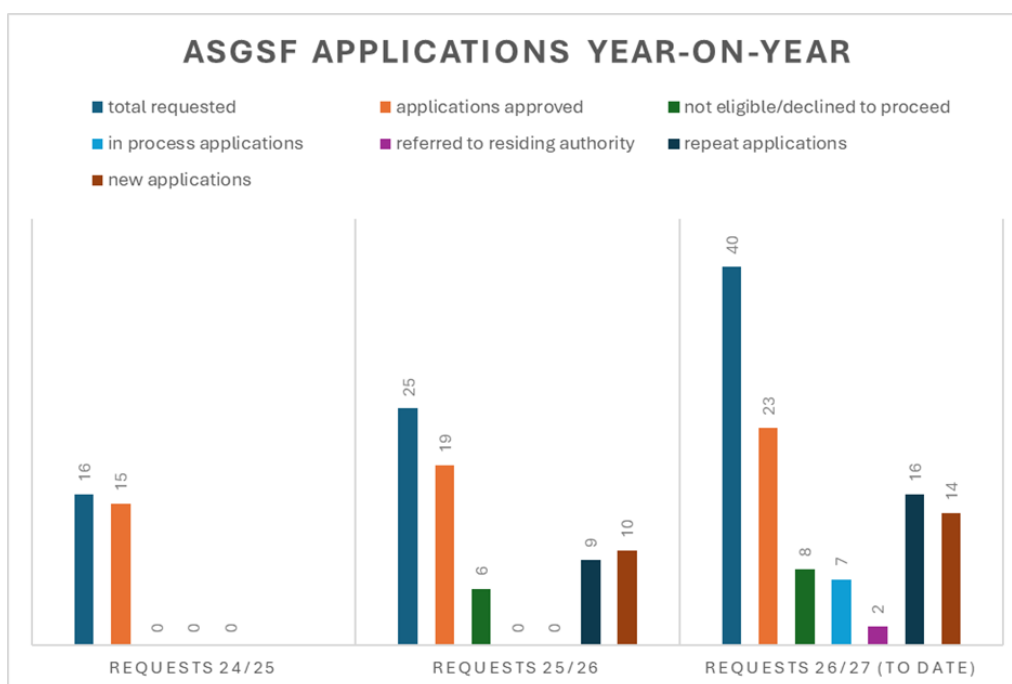
- 4.1 Following the ILACS inspection of Coventry's Children's Services in March 2026, Ofsted reported 'Family network meetings consider extended family members caring for children if they cannot remain living with their parents. Kinship carers receive a high level of training and support from their social 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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