



# Scottish Government Consultation: Vision for Kinship Care

Includem Response

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## Includem Response

### About includem:

Includem is a Scottish charity that supports children, young people and families to help them transform their lives. We support children, young people and families to make positive life choices and progress towards the type of future they want to live.

To do this, we work with social services, schools and criminal justice services and health to identify which children, young people and families could benefit from our support. We then engage the child or young person and their family/carer, taking a whole family approach to co-develop a package of support, tailored to their specific needs.

Our support is truly unique to each individual. There is no ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to helping children, young people and families to achieve positive outcomes.

We work with children and young people aged 0 – 26.

Our frontline staff have extensive experience of supporting children and young people in kinship care and our whole family approach means that we work closely with kinship carers to achieve positive outcomes. As an organisation we are committed to playing our part in helping Scotland Keep The Promise and recognise the importance that kinship carers have in achieving this.

Across Scotland, many of our services are delivered to families at the edges of care, and families in crisis. Our response reflects the experiences of supporting families that would have benefited from more targeted early intervention support.

This response has been informed through roundtable discussions with includem colleagues and captures the breadth of their experiences in supporting kinship carers and the children and young people who live with them.

### 1. Does the National Vision for Kinship Care reflect what matters most to you?

Includem welcomes the ambition of the Vision for Kinship Care and its grounding in Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and The Promise. We strongly support the recognition of kinship care as a vital part of Scotland’s care system and the emphasis on holistic, whole-family support.

The focus on voice, equitable access to support, trauma-informed practice and reducing stigma reflects what we see every day in our work with children, young people and families at the edges of care, and what they tell us about their lives.

However, our experience suggests that **the vision does not yet fully capture the realities faced by kinship families on the ground.**

### **What is working in principle**

- Recognition of kinship care as a positive option that maintains identity and belonging.
- Commitment to advocacy and life journey work.
- Intention to reduce postcode lottery through a national offer.
- Recognition of the need for trauma-informed support.

### **What needs strengthened or clarified**

- **Postcode lottery of support and lack of clarity about entitlements**

Across local authorities, there remains significant variation in:

- Financial payments
- Access to kinship social workers
- Support during transitions
- Eligibility linked to legal status

Families frequently report confusion about what they are entitled to, particularly in voluntary or informal arrangements. In some cases, carers have been told they are not eligible for support because the arrangement was “*voluntary*,” even when the need is acute.

### **The Vision must go further in ensuring:**

- Clear, enforceable national minimum standards
- Transparent entitlement frameworks
- Clear, accessible information and support to understand and claim entitlements
- Accountability where support is not delivered

There are currently useful resources that exist (see CPAG’s Information on Kinship Care and Benefits<sup>1</sup>) but accessing them requires digital access and literacy. Without tailored support to understand the legal frameworks and routes to their situation, kinship carers, and those working to support them, are lacking the necessary information to ensure they have their needs and rights met. Without this, families remain dependent on local interpretation rather than rights-based access.

- **Cliff-edges and transitions**

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<sup>1</sup> [Kinship care and benefits – the essentials | CPAG](#)

We have seen young people:

- Discharged from services at 18 despite significant ongoing vulnerability.
- Move between local authorities and experience different entitlements.
- Lose support when legal orders change.

The proposed universal definition of “care experience” is welcome, but clarity is required on how this translates into **automatic entitlement**, particularly for aftercare and continuing support. The young people in the situations described above are significantly vulnerable and in some cases are at acute risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system without appropriate aftercare. Due to these cliff-edges, young people have been forced to become homeless or return to unsafe situations.

- **Assessment and placement pressures**

In several cases, kinship arrangements were established rapidly during crisis without sufficient assessment of:

- Capacity
- Housing suitability
- Financial sustainability
- Emotional readiness

Some carers reported feeling pressured or guilty into accepting placements and includem workers described the trauma this cause them. They reported that in all of these cases it was clear from the beginning that placements would not be sustainable. Where placements subsequently broke down, this caused additional trauma for children and significant distress for carers. We heard of young single parents stepping in to try and support kinship placements, great-grandparents caring for children under five, and care-experienced young people becoming kinship carers for their younger siblings. Where additional support is provided, including appropriate housing and respite, these placements can work.

Unfortunately, these carers reported too much pressure on them and their existing caring responsibilities to manage the kinship placement in the long-term.

The Vision should explicitly commit to:

- Rigorous, trauma-informed, needs-led assessments
- Ongoing reassessment as circumstances change
- Clear review points with entitlement for carers and young people to request adjustments to these including increase frequency
- Ensuring placements are not resource-driven
- **Children’s voice in placement decisions**

We have supported children who were placed with relatives despite expressing that they did not want to live there. The Vision emphasises voice but must ensure that children's views meaningfully shape decisions, not simply inform them. We understand the pressures that exist on local authorities and public services but making decisions about who children live with must never be driven by resources but the best interest of the child. We heard several positive examples of community members, for example parents of the young person's friends, or neighbours had agreed to be kinship carers and this is working well for the young person and their family.

## **2. Does the Scottish Offer include the kinds of support that would make the biggest difference?**

The proposed Offer includes many important elements. However, our experience suggests that several areas require stronger emphasis and clearer guarantees.

### **- Respite**

Respite is consistently identified by kinship carers — particularly grandparents — as one of the most urgent unmet needs.

Many carers:

- Are older and managing health issues.
- Are caring for children with complex trauma.
- Have had no break for years.

The absence of respite contributes directly to placement strain and breakdown. Respite should be prioritised as a core entitlement, not an optional enhancement.

### **- Financial security**

We have supported families who:

- Almost entered debt due to additional costs.
- Received no payment for years.
- Experienced sporadic or delayed kinship payments.
- Faced confusion over benefits when parents continued claiming.
- Faced significant challenges using 'cash first' vouchers and this initial payment is less than their Kinship Payment, starting support on a deficit and with additional bureaucratic and practical burden.

The Offer should:

- Guarantee parity and consistency.

- Provide clarity about benefit interactions.
- End reliance on short-term vouchers.
- Ensure prompt payment following placement.

Financial instability undermines otherwise stable placements.

- **Emotional and therapeutic support for carers**

While the Vision centres children (appropriately), carers themselves require:

- Emotional support
- Trauma-informed parenting support, for example the Solihull training we provide to parents, carers and includem support staff
- Intergenerational trauma work
- Support when children reach adolescence

We frequently see significant generational gaps in understanding neurodiversity, trauma and adolescent development. In many instances, kinship carers are grandparents who have experienced trauma or whose children have experienced trauma and significant support is required to support families to manage their relationships. Without learning opportunities and support, carers can feel set up to fail.

Support must extend beyond crisis intervention and include preventative learning and development as well as long-term opt-in supports like peer networks and groups, support services, and advice lines.

- **Dedicated kinship expertise**

Families report difficulty accessing kinship-specific social workers. In some cases, allocation was refused because a child was not yet “settled” or because there was dispute over what team should take responsibility for a young person due to the challenges outlined with cliff edges above. In all of those cases, families expressed their desire to be supported by the kinship team as they felt this team was best able to understand their needs and provide the appropriate support. Families must be able to access the support that they feel they need without being faced by systems barriers linked to eligibility and siloed working.

Kinship expertise should not be contingent on stability or resource availability and should work closely with aftercare teams. Early support can prevent instability.

### 3. What feels most important, and is anything missing?

**Most important (no order assigned to the following, depending on individual circumstances):**

1. Clarity of rights and entitlements

2. Equitable financial and practical support
3. Respite and emotional support
4. Consistent review and reassessment

**Missing or underdeveloped:**

- **Ongoing review and re-assessment**

In our experience, kinship arrangements often begin as a crisis response or a short-term arrangement but become long-term homes for children and young people. Carers' circumstances change significantly during this time as they age, the cost-of-living and their outgoings increase, and children and young people grow older. Kinship carers have said there must be structured opportunities to request reassessment and regular review of support needs.

- **Support for informal kinship carers**

Many informal carers receive minimal or no support despite long-term care responsibilities. The national one-stop-shop must be accessible to all carers regardless of legal status and must include drop-in centres and local clinics to ensure they are accessible to a range of carers in different situations, with trained and informed staff who can answer questions, provide information and signpost to other services. Information about this should be shared via third sector partners and partners in education and health who often have great links to the local community.

- **Support for young people directly**

We appreciate that this offer focuses on kinship carers. Children and young people in kinship care should also have:

- Direct access to advice and advocacy
- Clear information about their rights
- Support navigating education, housing and benefits

- **Housing support**

We have supported carers who were promised help to secure larger accommodation when they agreed to take on kinship responsibilities that did not materialise. We heard about property being damaged by children and young people staying in kinship care and seriously overcrowded and unsafe living conditions. Inadequate housing contributes to placement breakdown and children returning home despite ongoing risk. For this reason, housing barriers require stronger integration within the offer for Kinship Care and must feature as a central element of support.

#### 4. Are there supports you struggle to access that should be prioritised nationally?

Based on our frontline experience:

- Respite
- Dedicated kinship social work support
- Consistent financial payments
- Practical assistance for property damage
- Parenting and trauma-informed learning
- Peer support networks (many have reduced due to funding pressures)
- Clear information about the Kinship Carer Fund

We also note that third sector organisations often undertake significant navigation and advocacy work to bridge system gaps. The Vision should recognise the capacity of third sector partners and ensure sustainable funding for preventative whole family support. Supports are being eroded by cuts across systems, and it is evidenced by the lived experience of too many kinship carers who are doing their best for vulnerable children and young people despite this.

#### 5. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Kinship care can and does work well when properly scaffolded.

We have seen:

- Grandparents stepping in and providing stability.
- Friends' families offering long-term belonging.
- Extended family placements that have transformed outcomes.

However, success is not automatic. It depends on:

- Early, realistic assessment
- Adequate financial and housing support
- Emotional and therapeutic input
- Respite
- Ongoing review
- Clear communication and shared decision-making

Where these are absent, we see:

- Placement breakdown
- Carer burnout
- Increased trauma
- Children returning to unsafe situations
- Escalation to residential care

Kinship care must not be viewed as a low-cost alternative to other forms of care. It requires investment, planning and sustained support.

If Scotland is to realise the ambition of Keeping the Promise, kinship care must be treated as a central, properly resourced component of the care system – with children’s rights and carers’ wellbeing equally upheld.



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