

	<p align="center">Corporate Parenting Committee 3 February 2025</p>
	<p align="center">Report from Director, Early Help and Social Care</p>
	<p align="center">Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools (Councillor Gwen Grahl)</p>
<p align="center">Brent's response to the National Kinship Care Strategy and updated guidance</p>	

Wards Affected:	ALL
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee with an overview of the national developments relating to the provision of services and support to kinship carers in England and Wales.
- 1.2 This report also sets out the service priorities for publishing Brent's first Kinship Local Offer and developing this area of work over 2025/2026.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To review and note the contents of this report.
- 2.2 To consider the work of the Kinship Care Team within the context of the wider Children and Young People service, future plans, and to provide elected member oversight ensuring that the Local Authority and their partners are effectively meeting the requirements of the new Kinship Care: Statutory guidance for local authorities (October 2024).

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 This activity contributes to the following Borough priorities, by ensuring that children, living in a range of kinship care arrangements, are receiving the appropriate support from the local authority to ensure that they are being cared for safely by people who they are “connected” to.

- **The Best Start in Life**

- Aligned to the borough plan priority for parents, children and young people to get the best start in life, the local offer aims to ensure that children and young people in kinship arrangements receive the support they need, when they need it.

- **Prosperity and Stability**

- The local offer aims to tackle inequality and disproportionality for care experienced young people in London by creating a fair, transparent and consistent response across local authority areas, and this new strategy aims to ensure that kinship carers are supported fairly, consistently and transparently.

- **A Healthier Brent**

- In order for care experienced young people to have good health outcomes social determinants of health such as inequalities in housing, employment and income must be addressed. The local offer aims to address these inequalities.

3.2 The National Kinship Care Strategy

- 3.2.1 In February 2023, the Department for Education published *Stable Homes, Built on Love* to respond to the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, the National Panel Review into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Competition and Markets Authority review into care placement sufficiency.

Stable Homes, Built on Love defined the then government’s vision for the children’s social care system and aimed to begin the work to meaningfully change the lives of children and families who interact with children’s social care. This reform was marked by an investment of £200 million to help tilt the system towards more supportive, preventative measures for families.

- 3.2.2 *Stable Homes, Built on Love* prioritised kinship care as a central pillar (Pillar 3) for improving support for kinship carers and wider family networks. The priorities for this pillar were:
- Testing how family networks could overcome financial and practical barriers in supporting children to live with their birth parents.
 - Extending legal aid entitlement to prospective guardians making applications for Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) in private family law proceedings.
 - Strengthening guidance on engaging Family Networks and the use of Family Group Conferences
 - Publishing a national kinship care strategy.
 - Launching a national kinship training, information and advice service.
 - Extending additional workplace entitlements for kinship carers with a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Care Arrangement Order (CAO), as well as exploring the case for introducing a financial allowance for SGO and CAO carers in every local authority.

- 3.2.3 The *Children's Social Care National Framework* published in December 2023 is statutory guidance from the DfE on the principles behind children's social care, its purpose, factors enabling good practice and what it should achieve. It is central to setting direction for practice in children's social care as part of the reforms set out in *Stable Homes, Built on Love*.

This framework sets out a number of outcomes which indicate what children's social care should achieve for the children, young people and families they support, and reflect the core purpose of children's social care. One of the key outcomes in the framework was that children and young people are supported by their family network.

- 3.2.4 *Championing Kinship Care, The National Kinship Care Strategy*, furthers the vision of *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, by setting out how kinship care will continue to be reformed, in order to keep more children safe and allow them to thrive. The new government has broadly kept to a similar policy direction of travel in relation to kinship care. This culminated in October 2024 with an update to Family and Friends Care statutory guidance, now called *Kinship Care: Statutory guidance for local authorities* (October 2024), based upon the National Kinship Care Strategy.

3.3 Definition of Kinship Care

The strategy establishes the government's new definition of kinship care and states that "*Kinship care is 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.*"

This definition includes:

- *Informal kinship arrangements and private family arrangements*
- *Private Fostering arrangements*
- *Special Guardianship Orders*
- *Child Arrangement Order (non-parent)*

- *Kinship foster carers (children are looked after by the local authority)*
- *Adoption by family/friends*

The full definition can be found in the Kinship Care Strategy at: [Championing kinship care: the national kinship care strategy](#)

4.0 Kinship Care in Brent

4.1 Brent has a long and positive history of valuing and prioritising kinship care. Since 2007 we have had a specialist kinship team which was developed in response to clear practice knowledge and an emerging national picture which was beginning to understand that kinship carers required a specialist response from the local authority and support that was catered to their specific needs.

Brent has, over the last 20 years, embedded a ***family first*** approach and are proud of the professional tenacity demonstrated in making sure that children can be cared for by their wider family and friend network if it is safe to do so.

4.2 The assessment of kinship carers, both kinship foster carers and prospective Special Guardians are undertaken by the Kinship Care Team. This team also supports and supervises kinship foster placements prior to the carer's fostering approval or granting of a court order.

4.3 Private Fostering assessments and monitoring of these arrangements are also held within the Kinship Care Team.

4.4 Brent's regional adoption agency, Adopt London West (ALW) provides support to Special Guardians and children subject to Special Guardianship Orders. The CPC receives 6-monthly reports on the work of ALW, including its work to support SGO arrangements.

4.5 At the end of December 2024:

- 49 looked after children were living in a kinship foster care placement.
- 5 children were living in Private Fostering arrangements.

5.0 Kinship Local Offer

5.1 The *Kinship Care: Statutory guidance for local authorities* (October 2024) set out a requirement for each local authority to publish a 'Kinship Local Offer' in which is set out what support is available in the specific local authority area.

5.2 What was previously known as Brent's 'Kinship Care and Support Policy' will now be known as Brent's ***Kinship Local Offer***. The Kinship Care team are updating our offer currently with a deadline for publishing the refreshed offer in April 2025.

5.3 The new statutory kinship guidance requires local authorities to address the following areas within their ***Kinship Local Offer*** in respect to each of the

following groups: private fostering arrangements, kinship foster carers, Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement Order and adoption:

- **Evidence base:** Children, kinship carers and parents should be consulted with as appropriate, in drawing up their kinship local offers. The offer should set out how the kinship local offers have been informed by these views.
- **Information about services and support:** Kinship local offers should support the promotion of good information about the full range of services for children and families in the area and highlight the availability of advice from independent organisations.
- **Management accountability:** The Director of Children's Services should identify a senior manager who holds overall responsibility for the kinship local offer. They will need to ensure that the kinship local offer meets the statutory requirements and is responsive to the identified needs of children and carers.
- **Legal framework:** The kinship local offer should explain the relevant legal framework, in a format which is accessible to kinship carers and for parents. This should include an explanation of the authority's powers and duties in relation to children in need and looked after children, and address the effect of a child arrangements order, special guardianship order or adoption order.
- **Complaints:** The kinship local offer should explain or signpost how children, kinship carers and other relevant people may make a complaint about the service.
- **Types of support to be included in the kinship local offer:**
 - ❖ Support groups and training
 - ❖ Financial support
 - ❖ Supporting kinship carers to stay in work
 - ❖ Accommodation
 - ❖ Education
 - ❖ Supporting family time (promoting contact)
 - ❖ Family Group Decision Making
 - ❖ Legal support
 - ❖ Therapeutic support.

5.4 Brent's current *Kinship Care and Support Policy* covers all of the above areas, however in line with the new guidance there are a number of areas that require further development to ensure compliance. This includes:

- Implications and practicalities of the extended role of the Brent Virtual School Headteacher and how this applies to children in different kinship arrangements
- Implications and practicalities for the local authority in relation to promoting contact for children in different kinship arrangements
- Proposed changes to the way the local authority promotes and manages family group decision making
- Further work to develop the communication of the refreshed kinship offer.

5.5 Consultation will take place in February 2025, which will provide direct feedback on the proposed kinship local offer with kinship carers and children in kinship arrangements. This will be completed via a survey and face to face consultation discussions.

The refreshed ***Kinship Local Offer*** will be published in April 2025.

6.0 How Brent is meeting the requirements of the Kinship Care Strategy

6.1 The organisation, *Foundations-What Works Centre for Children and Families*, have developed the first national Practice Guide on kinship care in response to the Kinship Care Strategy. The tools provided within this guide have enabled the Kinship Care Team to complete a self-assessment on where Brent sits currently in relation to the principles set out in the recent policy developments regarding to kinship care. This has enabled analysis on current practice and helped to identify areas for development in 2025/26.

The Guide, commissioned by the Department for Education and developed by Foundations, aims to close the gap between practice on the ground and evidence about what works to improve outcomes for children and kinship families.

6.2 Kinship carers across the UK, feeding into the Kinship Care Strategy, have said that the most common challenges that they face are:

- Loneliness and impact on holistic wellbeing
- Unclear guidance and support from local authorities and charities
- Financial strain and inconsistent financial support across legal status and local authority boundaries
- Inconsistent education entitlements for children in kinship care

6.3 The key principles of the Kinship Practice Guide summarise the needs, experiences, and preferences of kinship carers in the UK, and evidence on implementation and design of services and interventions. These ensure accessible, acceptable, and effective interventions can be delivered. The Kinship Care Team have reflected on how we currently address these principles and the evidence that supports this position, and what we could do to improve services and support to kinship carers moving forward:

Key Principle 1:
Support for kinship carers should take into account the specific needs and strengths of kinship carers.
What we currently do
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We approach kinship carers and prospective kinship carers at the earliest opportunity and provide them with information through verbal and written means to enhance their involvement with social workers and in the care planning process.• We involve carers in local interventions, through invitations to training, coffee mornings, and signposting to other services.

- We arrange for financial support to be provided to kinship carers to increase placement stability.
- We work in partnership with the child social work team to effectively match kinship carers' strengths to the child's needs.

Evidence

- We make contact with kinship carers in a timely way to introduce ourselves and establish our role in the process. We provide our contact information and make frequent welfare calls as well as calling and visiting at pre-arranged times.
- We offer the Kinship Preparation Training on a monthly basis to kinship carers in Brent and from three other London Local Authorities.
- We offer the Brent Fostering Training programme to Regulation 24 carers as well as approved foster carers.
- We make referrals to ALW, Brent's Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST) and Looked after children Resilience Service (LRS) depending on carers' individual needs.
- Kinship social workers attend placement planning meetings, PEP meetings, LAC reviews, and other meetings related to the child, to support and advocate for carers and children.
- Legal advice is offered during the assessment process as a one-off consultation for carers and prospective carers to understand the implications of the different kinship care arrangements, and further legal consultations are considered on an individual basis.
- Feedback is received from various forums including from carers, the fostering panel and court indicates that carers feel supported and enjoy a positive professional relationship with their assessing and supervising SWs. Carers have also expressed during fostering panel and after attending training sessions and attending court that they are pleased with the support provided.

What we can do to improve

- Prepare an information pack for all carers undergoing an assessment (to include the Kinship Local Offer and services specific to kinship carers such as ALW, LRS and WEST, and information about non-statutory services such as universal Brent services, Family Rights Group and Kinship). Include a written statement in the information pack recognising the existence of structural racism and Brent's commitment to anti-racist practice.
- Increase opportunities to obtain formal feedback from carers, i.e. utilising assessment questionnaires at different stages of the assessment process, surveys, feedback during support groups and coffee mornings, and then ensure there is a feedback loop leading to practice and service improvement.
- Redevelop the kinship care page on the Brent website for kinship carers which is relevant, up to date, and comprehensive.

Key Principle 2:

One-to-one relationships and high-quality casework should be at the heart of support for kinship families.

What we currently do

- We build trust and familiarity with kinship carers through a relationship-based approach.
- We show insight into carers' poor past experiences of statutory services based on family history and/or wider discrimination, such as experiences of structural racism (using models including anti-racist practice, trauma informed practice, systemic practice, and signs of safety).
- We demonstrate our commitment to support carers, both emotionally and practically through an empathetic and solution focused approach, ensuring their voices are amplified and we are acting as advocates for them.
- We employ effective partnership working across agencies.
- We have a high level of consistency of allocated assessing and supervising social workers.
- We celebrate kinship care week and offer events and activities like coffee mornings, that value and show appreciation for our kinship carers and the work they do.

Evidence

- We put this into practice through regular and consistent communication with carers through announced and non-announced calls and visits, responding in a timely manner, being flexible to carers' needs and adopting an inclusive, non-judgemental approach. We spend time getting to know our carers and understanding their needs and experiences, taking into consideration their individual circumstances.
- We utilise the assessment process as a means to forming stronger relationships with kinship carers and recognise that assessment is also an intervention in and of itself, for example by facilitating a kinship carer to emotionally process past trauma, and by providing information and education to kinship carers on various aspects of social work processes, their legal rights and entitlements, and aspects of therapeutic parenting and topics such as life-story work, safe contact with parents, and promoting a child's cultural identity.
- We include carers in Permanency Planning meetings, ensure they attend and have their voices heard in LAC reviews, PEP meetings, and other meetings specific to the child.
- We stay in close contact with the child social worker and other professionals involved, and we update the IRO on any pertinent developments.

What can we do to improve

- Develop the SGO support plan in closer consultation with the carer (and the child, and an ALW practitioner, where appropriate), and hold a meeting after the SGO is granted to ensure that the SGO carer is clear with the support available from ALW, Brent, and the local authority in which they reside.

- Kinship team to raise awareness of kinship care across different services and across the Brent community. To be achieved by developing links with Early Help and Family Wellbeing centres and continuing to provide training for social workers and other professionals, by celebrating Kinship Care Week, and by increasing the frequency of coffee morning support groups for kinship carers.
- The Learning and Development Team to be asked to consider providing more focussed training to enhance social work practice, for example the Secure Base Model, PACE approach, and DDP (Dyadic Developmental Practice), and learning from the practice of kinship teams in other local authorities.

Key Principle 3:

Kinship families need to be made aware of the support they are entitled to, and local authorities should actively work to address barriers to accessing support.

What we currently do

- We make carers aware of the support available from Brent, and we signpost to support available from non-statutory services.
- We are committed to working in ways that are culturally sensitive and culturally competent.
- We are committed to working in ways which address and support carers who are disabled, who have accessibility needs, and who face other barriers to accessing support.
- We offer support which is flexible and reflects the needs of different kinship families.
- We encourage carers to access therapeutic support and training via the fostering training programme, ALW, WEST and Early Help parenting programmes for parents and carers.

Evidence

- We provide new kinship carers and prospective carers with information during and around the time of the placement planning meeting about support available from Brent (including support from the child social worker, supervising social worker, Emergency Duty Team (EDT), WEST, LRS, ALW). Reminders from the fostering training co-ordinator are shared with carers and they are encouraged to attend trainings relevant for them.
- Trained practitioners adopt an anti-racist approach to all families we work with. We acknowledge and celebrate the different faiths and cultures in our families by learning about different traditions and customs depending on the family we are working with and asking culturally specific questions.
- Practitioners explore the specific needs of kinship carers with them in a sensitive and private manner, to establish if they have a disability, if they are neurodivergent, if they require an interpreter, or if they need support due to not being able to read or write in any language.

- Support is provided in a range of settings including face to face, virtual, office based, home based, and community settings, at different times of the day, including outside of working hours.
- We send out information about trainings to kinship carers via text message, email and letter, give verbal encouragement and reminders, and offer to register them for trainings on their behalf.

What can we do to improve

- Include kinship carers in the co-design of local interventions, through active involvement as well as feedback obtained via questionnaires, coffee mornings, and informal discussions. This will be discussed with ALW and possible joint working in this area will be explored.
- Raise the profile and reach of the current Foster Carer Programme, by including all relevant trainings in the monthly fostering newsletter, considering suggestions for additional specific and targeted trainings, and discussion with the Learning & Development Team about whether we can extend the fostering training offer to SGO carers.
- Create a kinship support group who will meet in person to improve kinship carers' wellbeing, beginning with 'coffee mornings', and to possibly include different events in the future, with the aim of empowering carers to sustain this independently in the longer term.

6.4 Consideration has been given to the strength of evidence for each of the six recommendations set out in the Kinship Practice Guide. These recommendations summarise the best-evidenced interventions for improving outcomes among kinship carers, and children and young people in kinship care. These are drawn from robust impact evaluations of interventions in high-income countries.

- Brent has a **good** strength of evidence to demonstrate that the local authority offers kinship carers specialist support to learn about, navigate an access the support that they are entitled to.
- Brent has a **good** strength of evidence to demonstrate that the local authority offers parenting support when a child or young person is demonstrating behaviours that challenge their kinship carer(s) on a frequent basis.
- Brent has **promising** strength of evidence to demonstrate that the local authority makes services available to facilitate peer support groups to improve kinship carers' well-being.
- Brent has a **good** strength of evidence to demonstrate that the local authority makes Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) available to kinship carers who have been assessed as in need of therapeutic support because, for example, the child or young person in their care is demonstrating behaviours that challenge the kinship carers.
- Brent has **promising** strength of evidence to demonstrate that the local authority offers kinship carers trainings in self-care to support their emotional health, well-being and quality of life.

- Brent has **strong** evidence to demonstrate that the local authority offers financial allowance to kinship carers to increase placement permanency, reduce the likelihood of placement disruption and improve the likelihood of permanent guardianship.

7.0 Action Plan

	Action	By when
1	Consultation activities with children and carers in kinship arrangements on the new kinship local offer	28 Feb 2025
2	New Kinship Local Offer published	1 April 2025
3	Prepare an information pack for all kinship carers undergoing an assessment	28 Feb 2025
4	Increase opportunities to obtain formal feedback from kinship carers, in partnership with Adopt London West, that can be fed back into service development and practice improvement activity. This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> kinship assessment questionnaires/survey feedback tools that can be used at support groups and coffee mornings 	30 June 2025
5	Update the kinship care page on the Brent website	30 March 2025
6	Develop SGO support plans in closer consultation with the kinship carer, child, ALW and relevant parties. To offer a post-order meeting to review the support plan and ensure the family understands the support available and where to access.	To begin immediately
7	Strengthen links with Early Help, Family Wellbeing Centres, and the Brent universal offer to children and carers in kinship arrangements.	28 Feb 2025
8	Continue awareness raising activity across CYP services and external, via multi agency training and quarterly information sessions provided by the Kinship Care team.	Ongoing
9	Extend our Brent fostering training offer to Special Guardians	31 Jan 2025
10	To build on the success of our 2024 Kinship Care Week coffee morning by facilitating a face-to-face kinship support group with the focus on empowering carers and improving wellbeing.	30 April 2025
11	Provision of focused training for specialist kinship social workers to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure Base Model PACE DDP 	30 March 2025

8.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 8.1 The development of this Local Offer has and will continue to involve services within Brent CYP and across the council, Adopt London West, and external partners like Health and Education.
- 8.2 Consultation activity with children and carers in kinship care arrangements will be carried out over February 2025 and this will feed into the finalised Kinship Local Offer.

9.0 Financial Considerations

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The total budget for Kinship Care, which includes the Kinship and Fostering teams, is £1.2m, with spending projected to remain within budget for the current financial year.
- 9.2 Currently where looked after children are placed with connected people/kinship carers, Brent provides fostering allowances in line with the council's Fostering Rates and Guidance.
- 9.3 Brent undertakes a financial means test for carers where children were looked after prior to a private law order, either through a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order. If a carer is eligible for an allowance, this is made available until the child turns 18 and annual reviews are undertaken. The baseline for the means tested allowance is the Brent fostering allowance.
- 9.4 Although the new guidance does not place any new statutory duties on local authorities, it has reiterated that support available to these children and carers should be based on the needs of the child rather than the legal status of the child. This change could lead to additional financial implications that would need to be considered as part of the refreshed *Kinship Local Offer*.

10.0 Legal Considerations

- 10.1 In October 2024 the new Kinship care: framework for local authorities was published. It is effective as from the date of publication. It replaces and updates the 2010 Family and Friends Care guidance. Whilst the 2024 Guidance does not place any new statutory guidance on local authorities, it sets out a framework for the provision of support for both the children living with a kinship carer and potential kinship carers. It requires each local authority to publish a 'kinship local offer' which sets out what support is available in the specific local authority area. The kinship local offer should be clearly expressed, regularly updated, made freely and widely available.
- 10.2 The expectation is that local authorities are to promote, support for families on the basis that 'children are best looked after within their families unless compulsory intervention in family life is necessary'. The Guidance states that the support available should be based on the needs of the child rather than the legal status of the child.

11.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

11.1 The Kinship Local Offer will contribute to the local authority's responsibilities to children in kinship care arrangements, ensuring that the children are not further disadvantaged because of their adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and have the best opportunity to succeed in all aspects of their lives. It will also ensure that there are clear parameters and a transparent framework for the delivery of resources and services to kinship carers.

12.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

12.1 At this stage there are no climate change or environmental considerations.

13.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

13.1 At this stage there are no human resource or property considerations.

14.0 Communication Considerations

14.1 A key element of the new statutory kinship guidance is the availability and accessibility of information for kinship carers in Brent. Our new Kinship Local Offer will be uploaded to the Brent website to ensure accessibility and will also be shared with colleagues across CYP and the wider council through email, discussions at team meetings and within quarterly workshops offered to staff and multi-agency partners.

Related documents:

Stable Homes Built on Love September 2023)- [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love consultation response](#)

Championing Kinship Care- The National Kinship Care Strategy (December 2023)- [Championing kinship care: the national kinship care strategy](#)
Children's Social Care National Framework(December 2023)- [Children's social care national framework](#)

Kinship Care: Statutory guidance for local authorities (October 2024)- [Kinship care: statutory guidance for local authorities](#)

Practice Guidance, Kinship Care- [Kinship Care - Foundations](#)

Report sign off:

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