



Kinship Care Policy and Local Support Offer for Kinship Carers

2025 – 27

Author: Róisín Hegarty-Tait, Service Manager
Policy date: April 2025
Next update due: April 2027

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PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

Kinship care can offer stable and permanent care options for children who cannot live with their parents. The London Borough of Islington (from hereon in referred to as 'Islington') understands and appreciates the strengths of family networks which help children maintain connections with siblings and other relationships into adulthood, support identity and belonging, and lead to better outcomes in education and health.

Islington is committed to informing kinship carers of the different options available to them should they currently be, or considering, caring for a child with whom they have a connection. The purpose of this policy is to set out Islington's approach towards promoting, assessing, and supporting the needs of children living with kinship carers.

Information is shared with all potential or current kinship carers, about the implications of different legal options, the rights of carers and of the children's parents, and the nature of decisions which kinship carers will be able to make in relation to the child. The responsibility for sharing this information sits with the child's Social Worker, with support from the Permanency Team.

Please refer to **Appendix A**, which includes a link to statutory guidance outlining the legal framework that may apply when caring for somebody else's child and the entitlement to support services relating to each option.

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Islington is committed to:

- Enabling children to remain within the care of their kinship network, unless this is not consistent with their safety and welfare.
- Promoting children's permanent care in their kinship network.
- Ensuring that assessment of support for all types of kinship care is based on the needs of the child.

WHO IS THE RESPONSIBLE SENIOR MANAGER?

Service Manager for Fostering and Permanency

LEGISLATION

- Children Act 1989
- Children (Leaving Care) 2000
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Children and Adoption Act 2006
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Children and Families Act 2014

STATUTORY GUIDANCE

- Fostering (England) Regulations and National Minimum Standards (2011, as amended)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010, as amended)
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005
- Special Guardianship (Amendment) Regulations 2016
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (2011)
- Special Guardianship Guidance 2017

DEFINITION OF KINSHIP CARE

The Department for Education 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.

The following are all types of kinship care arrangement, however this list is not exhaustive:

- a. Informal kinship care arrangements (not approved foster care) including:
 - i. A private family arrangement in which a close family member who does not hold parental responsibility, raises the child and
 - The local authority has had no major role in making the arrangement for the child; and
 - Where a Family Court has not made an order in respect to the care of the child.
 - ii. Where a child under the age of 16 is being provided with accommodation for less than 28 days by an individual in their own home who is not a close relative
 - iii. Where a 16 or 17 year old is being provided with accommodation by an individual who is not a close relative in their own home.
- b. A private fostering arrangement in which someone who is not a close relative of the child under the age of 16 looks after the child for 28 days or more (as per section 66(1)(a) and (b) of the Children Act 1989).

- c. Where a 'lives with' Child Arrangements Order has been granted in respect of the child, in favour of someone who is a friend or family member but is not the child's parent (see glossary regarding who is a parent).
- d. Where a Special Guardianship Order has been granted appointing a friend or family member as the child's special guardian.
- e. Where a child is a 'looked after child' by virtue of either an interim or final care order or being accommodated by the local authority (usually under section 20 of the Children Act 1989) and each of the following apply (this may be described as 'kinship foster care' or 'family and friends foster care'):
 - i. The child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent, and
 - ii. The friend or family member is approved as a local authority foster carer either on a temporary basis or following full assessment.
- f. Where an Adoption Order has been granted in respect of the child and, prior to the making of the order, the adopter was a friend or family member.

The categories of friends and family that are often kinship carers can include:

- i. a close relative of the child (this includes anyone who is defined as a relative under the Children Act 1989 such as 'a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt – whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership, or step-parent')
- ii. a close relative of the child's half blood brother or sister
- iii. someone who was formerly the child's step-parent (they may or may not have parental responsibility for the child)
- iv. someone who was previously in a cohabiting relationship with the child's parent and whose relationship with the child was like that of a child of the family
- v. a close friend of the child, or of the child's parent(s)
- vi. a close friend of the child's close relative
- g. a person with a prior connection to the child who does not otherwise fall within one of the other categories above (for example, a teacher, youth worker, childminder or former foster carer).

Kinship Care: Statutory guidance for local authorities (October 2024).

FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING (FGDM)

Islington fully supports the use of Family Group Decision Making to ensure that family and friends are explored and involved in the care plans and support of care arrangements for children.

FGDM is a process where a child's extended family, friends, and relevant agencies come together, with the support of a coordinator, to create a plan for the child's care and safety. The goal is to empower families by recognising their strengths, enabling them to find their own solutions to challenges, and enabling them to create a supportive network to keep children safe and connected with their family.

Within Islington, the allocated child's Social Worker will make a referral to arrange and coordinate a form of FGDM called Family Group Conferences where there is a clear risk of family breakdown and/or children may already be in care.

Social Workers from the Permanency Team are able to attend these initial Family Group Conferences when requested to assist in explaining permanence options, assessment processes, and support available to the child's family and friend network.

From then on, Family Group Decision Making is encouraged to enable the family network to come together, discuss and agree how to support the kinship care arrangement.

ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOSTER CARERS

Kinship carers are considered to be 'Connected Person(s) Carers' when they are caring for a child who is 'looked after' by the local authority before they are fully assessed and approved as family and friends foster carers. The below information applies to these cases, whether the placements were made on a planned or unplanned basis, and is applicable when any of the following applies:

- a child who cannot remain within his or her birth family is assessed as needing to be looked after by Islington Council and is placed with relatives or friends;
- a child is already living with a relative or friend and subsequently becomes looked after by Islington Council;
- a child who is already looked after is placed with a relative or friend.

1. Viability assessment

Whether in an emergency, in a planned way, or as part of a long-term plan, a viability assessment should be undertaken prior to a child being placed with a kinship carer. This viability is a joint assessment, carried out by the child's Social Worker and a Social Worker from the Permanency Team. Islington uses an internally designed tool for undertaking viability assessments of potential kinship carers, based on the recommended viability template used in the "Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment: A good practice guide", published by the Family Rights Group in February 2017. This guide can be found at <https://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-and-friends-carers/assessment-tool>.

The viability assessment is designed to assist Social Workers establish the strengths, risks and support needs of prospective kinship placements and the relationship between the child and the prospective carer. It covers:

- an assessment of the quality of the existing relationship between the child and the connected person;
- the child's wishes and feelings about the placement;

- a visit to the connected person's home by the Social Workers, which should confirm that the physical environment and space available is suitable for the particular child/ren;
- whether the connected person would require any additional resources in order to meet the particular needs of the child/ren;
- the quality of the relationships between the members of the household, including children and young people, and their views about the proposed caring arrangement, impact of the proposed caring arrangement on other children and young people in the household, based on information about their history and current lifestyle;
- the connected person must be interviewed to consider their ability to provide safe and appropriate care, to promote contact to birth family, to work with the Care Plan and to ensure they understand that should the placement continue, they will need to be fully assessed as foster carers;
- the accommodation, including sleeping arrangements, must be inspected;
- information must be obtained about other persons in the household and those who are regular visitors to the home;
- the proposed carer, all members of the household and anyone outside of the home (who offers unsupervised care of the child frequently or overnight) aged 16 and above, must give written consent to Police, DBS, and other relevant checks; and
- the wishes of those with parental responsibility for the child must also be ascertained.

If an immediate, emergency placement is required, an assessment must be undertaken to form the basis for making this decision (see below for **Approval of immediate placements under Regulation 24**).

2. Approval of Immediate Placements under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010 as amended)

In the event that a child needs to move to live with a connected person in an emergency (before a full Connected Person(s) Carer assessment can be completed) under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010 as amended), temporary fostering approval needs to be sought from the Service Manager for Fostering and Permanency for the carer/s. Statutory guidance makes clear that temporary approval is intended to be used exceptionally, where the connected person is already known to the child, to avoid an unnecessary move to a stranger foster carer, and in 'circumstances which could not easily have been foreseen'.

The Regulation 24 Decision template is a form of assessment used in these instances to provide the Service Manager with the information to make the decision as to whether the kinship carers are able to offer a safe and suitable temporary foster care arrangement. The addition of the Service Manager's comments and signature at the end of the completed template forms the decision to place under an emergency and grants interim approval of the placement. From this point on, these kinship carers are considered temporary foster carers and subject to the statutory requirements of mainstream foster carers.

Interim fostering approval can be provided to a connected person for a period of up to 16 weeks, during which time the Permanency Team should complete a full Connected Person(s)

Carer assessment. The carer should also be formally approved via the Fostering and Permanence Panel process, including ratification of this decision via the Agency Decision Maker (Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting), within 16 weeks of the child being placed.

In exceptional circumstances, temporary approval can be extended for up to a further 8 weeks (including the presentation to panel and subsequent ratification by the ADM). These circumstances include:

- where temporary approval is likely to expire before the assessment can be completed; or
- the outcome of the assessment is that the connected person(s) are not approved and a review is sought.

Before making the decision to extend temporary approval, Regulation 25a requires the agency to seek a view from their Fostering and Permanence Panel (as well as notify the IRO, and ensure the IRO considers the placement still the most appropriate to meet the child's needs etc.). The request to extend the temporary approval must then be presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel to gain their views regarding the continue suitability of this care arrangement within 16 weeks of the child being placed. The ADM uses these views to inform their decision.

Early considerations in the assessment process include:

- Identifying the child/children's specific needs in order to accurately assess the prospective carer's ability to meet those needs and any information from the child's record, including the chronology, would be useful information to consider as a preliminary before undertaking the assessment (this is provided by the child's Social Worker to inform the assessment);
- Checking old case files for historical information in respect of kinship carers where there has been Social Care involvement in the family to identify any issues or risks. These should be included in the assessment;
- Clarifying the legal proceedings with the Social Worker or legal representative;
- Having sight copies of any other assessments that have been undertaken in relation to the current child or in recent proceedings relating to siblings, or any that to be commissioned;
- Reading the Regulation 24 Decision and any viability assessments.

Once the assessment is complete (either within 16, or 24 weeks, if an extension is granted), it needs to be presented to Islington's Fostering and Permanency Panel along with a full genogram and the relevant statutory checks. Panel members then make a recommendation as to whether the kinship carers are suitable to be approved as family and friends foster carers.

3. Checks required before immediate placement

Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (2011) states that the local authority must ascertain as much information as is possible in the circumstances. Where a child is placed with a connected person who is to be temporarily approved, every effort has to be made to maximise the level and quality of information that will be used to decide whether the connected person should be temporarily approved. In addition to the ratified viability assessment, the child's Social Worker must arrange for the following checks to be carried out on the prospective carers and all household members over the age of 16 years:

- PNC (police checks); and
- Child Protection checks.

4. Checks required during full 16-week Connected Person(s) Carer assessment

- The allocated kinship care Social Worker will arrange for the prospective carers to undertake a medical examination with their GP, with support from a Social Work Coordinator. Where the applicants live, or have lived outside the local authority area, the checks must be made with the local authority and health trust where the applicants live/have lived;
- Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks must be progressed urgently by the assessing Social Worker;
- Where the applicant or any member of the household has been known to any Social Care Department, information should be obtained from the Social Worker and/or files in that department;
- Where applicants have recently moved to the UK (within the last 10 years), checks will also be made through International Social Services and/or the relevant Consulate on all members of the household aged 16 and over; and
- Where the applicant has children of school age, the relevant school(s) will be contacted, with the permission of the applicant, for information regarding the applicant's ability to promote the child's education and how well they work with professionals in this context.
- Current employers (of paid or voluntary roles) should be contacted to confirm the information given by the applicant/s about their employment, and to gather evidence regarding their suitability to care for a family member or friend. Previous employers should also be contacted if an applicant was working with children or vulnerable adults to ensure that there were no safety or protection concerns, and to gather evidence regarding their suitability. This is always done in discussion with the kinship carer to ensure information relating to their family circumstance are approached with sensitivity.
- Social media checks may be undertaken using social networking sites and internet search engines.

- Pet questionnaires

On receipt of the statutory checks, the prospective carer's electronic records must be updated to record the outcome.

Where there are concerns about an applicant's circumstances as a result of the information obtained from the above checks, this should be referred to the Permanency Team Practice and Team Managers and the applicant may be advised not to proceed with the application.

Where the checks relate to an offence which does not automatically disqualify the applicant, for example because the applicant is seeking approval in relation to a specific child only, the manager must consider whether the application should still proceed. Such convictions will not necessarily preclude an application, but this will depend on the seriousness of the offence and how long ago it was committed. In a case where the conviction would usually disqualify an applicant, the case should be referred to the Fostering and Permanence Panel and the Agency Decision Maker (Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting) for a preliminary decision. In any other case where there is doubt, discussion with the Permanency Team Manager and Social Worker will be required. An early referral (pre-completion of assessment via a brief report) may be made to the Fostering and Permanence Panel and/or Agency Decision Maker for this purpose.

5. References

- Each applicant will be asked to provide the names of a minimum of two personal referees, who are adults, and who have known the applicant for at least five years. Where the child's permanence plan is likely to be special guardianship, these regulations require a minimum of three referees. Only one of the referees can be a family member; the second and subsequent references must be non-family members. All referees should be people who know the applicants well in a personal capacity. For a kinship carer it is useful if one of their personal referees is someone who has known them whilst parenting their own children (if they are parents).
- Where there is a joint application, at least one referee must know both applicants, or additional referees will be required. A proforma questionnaire must be sent to the referees prior to the visit. This information can then be used in the interview to lead the discussion. A separate record of the interview must be completed, and the assessing Social Worker must comment on the weight to be given to the referee comments.
- A written reference must be obtained from each applicant's current employer regardless of the applicant's occupation. Where the carer has had a previous job working with children it will be useful to follow up a reference with an ex-employer, even where this was of a voluntary nature. Where the prospective applicant has made a previous application to foster or adopt, the relevant agency must be asked to confirm in writing the outcome of the application and provide a written reference.

- Other family members spoken to during the preparation of the report should be informed in writing about the position in relation to confidentiality. A written reference will not be shown to an applicant unless the applicant requests disclosure and the referee consents to disclosure. The same applies to information and opinions shared in the course of conversation. These will not be disclosed to an applicant without permission. However, referees and others should be made aware that it will often be necessary to discuss with applicants' information and opinions expressed although where this happens, the particular source of the information or opinion will not be disclosed.
- Where there are existing children in the household, contact with health visitor, nursery or school should be made. These checks should not focus on the achievements or otherwise of the particular children, but should attempt to gather information about how well the applicant/s supports the child in these settings, and how well they work with professionals in this context and could be seen as very relevant to parenting capacity.
- All adult children of the applicant(s) living away from home or adult children who are no longer household members must be contacted and interviewed. If they are unavailable for any reason, such as living abroad, they can supply a written reference with a possible follow-up telephone call.
- The assessing Social Worker will also contact the previous partners / spouses of the applicants, particularly if they have cared for children together (taking care not to disclose confidential personal information about the applicant). Unlike some of the other checks and references gathered as part of the assessment, a former partner check need not be detailed and can simply state whether the ex-partner is aware of any risks to children if they are fostered by the applicant.

Where there were any children of the relationship or where children were cared for jointly, the Social Worker will arrange to interview them face-to-face wherever practicable.

Where former partners have not jointly parented or cared for a child, but have been in a significant relationship, they may still be well placed to provide important information about the applicant/s as Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services [England] Regulations 2011 [as amended] requires information as to the prospective foster carer's previous marriage of similar relationship, and so seeking former partner references will assist with this.

There may be circumstances in which it is deemed inappropriate to approach a former partner, for example, where domestic violence has been an issue. If the decision is made not to contact any particular ex-partner who has jointly parented or cared for a child, then the reasons for this should be clearly recorded in the assessment, and additional references sought from individuals who knew the couple at the time. Any information obtained from former partners which raises concerns about an applicant's suitability to care for a child will always be considered in the context of how that relationship ended, and wherever possible should be checked against other sources.

6. Presenting to the Fostering and Permanence Panel

The assessing Social Worker will present the completed Connected Person(s) Carer report in the form of a full assessment covering the following areas:

- Summarizing the prospective carers circumstances;
- highlighting any issues or concerns that have arisen during these enquiries;
- a full chronology;
- an analysis of the implications for the placement; and
- a conclusion with an analysis of the risks and benefits of the proposed care arrangements, including what actions need to be taken to minimise any identified risks.

If a long-term placement is proposed, the report must clearly outline how the carer is able to meet the child's current and developing needs and their understanding of the levels of commitment this could entail.

The assessing Social Worker will submit the following documents to support their assessment report:

- Feedback of any medical reports, including the agency Medical Advisor's comments (applicants only);
- Details of enhanced DBS checks for all household members over 16;
- Details of agency checks;
- Records of interviews with referees;
- Records of interviews with adult children and ex-partners, or reasons why these were not pursued;
- Health and safety report, including any pet questionnaires; and
- Safer caring report.

The Child's Social Worker must complete and present:

- The profile on the child's needs

The child's Social Worker and assessing Social Worker must both attend the Panel meeting when the report is considered.

The Panel's recommendation regarding the suitability of the Connected Person(s) Carers is presented to the ADM for a decision to be made.

The ADM will notify the carers in writing of the decision, and the terms of their approval within 7 working days. Verbal feedback will be given to the applicants by their assessing Social Worker or the Team Manager within 48 hours of a decision being ratified.

7. Action required by the child's Social Worker and assessing Social Worker immediately following the child's placement

Immediately following the child's placement, the child's Social Worker must:

- provide the carers with the following documents relating to the child:

- Copy of the child's care plan
- Copy of the Child and Family Assessment (where agreed)
- Child's Placement Plan
- Details of important and out of hours contacts, e.g. duty numbers and EDT
- make a referral to the Permanency Team and ensure the details of the child's admission to local authority care are correct on LCS
- arrange a Placement Planning Meeting
- visit the placement and see the child weekly until the first CLA Review (if the child placed under Reg 24).

The assessing Social Worker will:

- provide support to the placement;
- complete the assessment, including referee interviews, birth children interviews, ex-partner references, health and safety and safe caring documents
- initiate all statutory checks, medicals and DBS (with support from Social Work Coordinators);
- Arrange for the fostering allowance to be paid to the carers
- Ensure the carers are correctly set up on LCS; and
- Ensure the carers understand the requirements of fostering (national minimum standards, mandatory training, meeting attendance and recording expectations).

8. Court directed assessments of family and friends during care proceedings

It may be that the court requires an assessment of a prospective kinship carer to be undertaken prior to the child moving to live with them, in which case they should be assessed and approved whilst the child is with birth parents or with local authority foster carers. Planned placements of children with relatives or connected person(s) carers should enable sufficient time for the full assessment of the proposed carers. The same template is used, whatever the type of kinship assessment.

Where the relatives of children who are the subjects of court proceedings are to be assessed it is the responsibility of the child's Social Worker to make the necessary referral with the Permanency Team for a viability assessment via LCS. However, this assessment can be carried out jointly by the child Social Worker and a Permanency Team Social Worker.

If the court directs a full assessment of identified family members, a referral for a full assessment should be made to the Permanency Team via LCS.

In all assessments involving a connected person, consideration should be given to specific practice issues, including working within an equality, diversity, identity, and equity framework with families from different ethnicities, cultures, generations. And with different life experiences. BAAF Practice Guide "Relative Benefits" offers useful guidance and practice principles.

ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESS FOR SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS (SGO) OR CHILD ARRANGEMENTS ORDERS (CAO)

The assessment for kinship carers progressing to these orders is the same process as for connected person(s) carers or family and friends foster carers. However, presentation to Islington's Fostering and Permanency Panel is not necessary as SGO and CAOs are court orders and made by a judge as part of proceedings instead.

SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO KINSHIP PLACEMENTS

a) Social work and practical support:

- **for those caring for children who are looked after**

Each connected person looking after a child/ren who is "looked after" by the Local Authority will have access to the child's Social Worker and also a kinship assessing/supervising Social Worker. They will receive support via telephone and home visits.

Supervising Social Workers have a minimum statutory responsibility to visit family and friends foster carers every 4 weeks once they are approved foster carers. During a Connected Person fostering assessment, visits will be more frequent due to the assessment process and safeguarding responsibilities. Connected Person foster carers can also expect that some of these statutory visits will be unannounced visits in line with regulations.

Children's Social Workers also have a minimum statutory responsibility to visit the child in placement every 4 weeks.

As approved foster carers for the Local Authority, family and friends foster carers can expect to receive financial support via a fostering allowance, support groups and training. They will be expected to complete their Training, Support and Development Standards workbook within the first 18 months following approval.

All supervising Social Workers are qualified practitioners and registered with Social Work England.

- **for those caring for children under Special Guardianship Order (SGO) / Child Arrangements Order (CAO)**

Social work support will be dependent upon the needs of the children and the support plan devised before the granting of the court order.

All carers will be contacted by a social worker in the Permanency Team every 8 weeks for 12 months post-order, the purpose of which is to check in with the family to see how things are going and ensure that they know how to access the support available to them.

- **for those caring for children under Private Fostering arrangements**

A private fostering assessment will be carried out by the local authority's front door team once a private fostering referral has been received. Private Fostering arrangements will be monitored by a Social Worker from the Child In Need Service with 6 weekly visits undertaken to ensure the care arrangement remains suitable.

- **for those caring for children under private family arrangements**

Under these arrangements, local authority involvement should be based on the needs of the child.

The Permanency Team is able to provide information and advice to all private kinship carers either in person or via telephone, or signpost them to a service that can assist.

b) Training and Support groups

Family and friends foster carers will be encouraged to attend training to enhance their skills and assist them to meet the needs of the child/ren they are caring for. Their continued development is a requirement of the role under fostering regulations.

A comprehensive training programme is offered to family and friends foster carers, Special Guardians and Child arrangements order holders via the general Islington Fostering Training programme.

The local authority encourages kinship carers to meet with other kinship carers as an opportunity to network and seek support and encourages all kinship care applicants to attend a preparation course for those new to kinship care during the process of assessment.

Support groups for kinship carers are managed by the Permanency Team.

c) Contact:

Contact between young people and their families is supported by the local authority where it is seen to be in the best interests of the child/ren.

Contact is often a difficult area for kinship carers, and the Local Authority recognises that there may be situations when carers are not able to manage the contact between the child/ren

in their care and their birth parents. Support can be offered with this via a dedicated Contact Coordinator within the Permanency Team.

- **for Looked After Children**

In these situations, Islington's Contact Service will be able to assist the family and friends foster carer by supervising contact. Contact support provided to family and friends foster carers will be reviewed on a regular basis.

- **for children under SGO/CAO**

Where possible, any contact needs for children in SGO or CAO placements will have been identified as part of the assessment and support plan prior to a court order being made.

Financial commitments required of the local authority will require agreement by the Service Manager for Fostering and Permanence, and may need to be presented to the Access to Resources Panel (ACRP).

While some families require assistance with contact, other families will be able to manage contact between children and their parents and extended families with minimal intervention from social services and it is felt that children benefit from this type of arrangement where possible. It is an expectation that all carers will work with the local authority where possible towards a situation where they are able to manage contact for the child/ren in a safe and suitable environment. There is usually a period of transition where management and supervision of contact is transferred from the contact service to the special guardian.

d) Therapeutic / Behavioural Support

Children in kinship placements have often experienced abuse and neglect and consequently often have emotional and behavioural needs, which require therapeutic intervention. The local authority is committed to making sure that each child has the appropriate emotional and psychological support that they need in order to assist them with any emotional or behavioural needs. Kinship carers are offered training in PACE for Parenting to support them in therapeutic, trauma-informed parenting and we have a dedicated Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Clinician within the Permanency Team who can offer consultations as a means of additional support to the family. The specifics of this support will be outlined as part of a social work assessment, Child Looked After (CLA) Care Plan or in a Special Guardianship Support Plan.

If the assessed support need requires a service which requires additional funding, agreement needs to be sought prior to the service commencing. This will be in the form of a presentation to ACRP.

Support can include the following:-

- Mentoring
- Advocacy
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Psychological and Psychiatric intervention
- Training for carers.

Family and friends foster carers will be provided with a comprehensive list of supports available and a list of contacts. See **Appendix B** for a list of local contacts and **Appendix C** for a list of community and national organisations.

e) Financial Support:

- **Fostering Allowances for carers of children who are looked after**

Kinship carers who are caring for children who are looked after are considered to be family and friends foster carers – temporarily approved under Reg 24 and then fully approved following a positive recommendation and decision from Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker, respectively. Whether temporarily or fully approved, these carers will receive a fostering allowance for each looked after child in their care. These allowances are based on the age of the child.

The Local Authority has clear guidelines for foster carers in the use of these fostering allowances and more information can be found in the annual 'Placements Rates and Guidance' document. All Connected Person foster carers will receive a copy of the 'Placements Rates and Guidance' policy once they are approved, or following a placement being made.

- **Allowances for children cared for under CAO/SGO**

Islington family and friends foster carers who go on to apply for Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) or Child arrangements orders (CAO) for the children in their care will continue to receive the fostering allowance until the court orders are granted.

Islington is committed to a 'no detriment' policy in financially supporting kinship carers to minimise the negative impact on the household finances of taking out a permanent order for the child/ren in their care. Islington therefore pay special guardians and those who take out a CAO the equivalent of a fostering allowance – this is more than the standard allowance suggested by the Department for Education, via their *standardised means test model for adoption and special guardianship financial support*. Any additional payments received by children looked after (money for birthday or festival presents) are no longer paid however, as special guardian and CAO carers are entitled to claim child benefit and universal or pension credit (depending on circumstance), which is a larger amount than was previously paid for presents for the children when they were looked after.

Fostering allowance payments start from the date the child moves to live with the kinship carer and payments to special guardians and CAO carers start from the date the order is granted.

CAO allowances will **not** be paid to birth parents that are caring for or living in the same household as their own biological children under this legal arrangement.

Generally, the local authority will only consider financially assessing and paying an SGO/CAO allowance in situations where children were previously “looked after” by the local authority prior to the making of the court order. However, there may be some private application cases where the family’s circumstances are considered to be exceptional. These cases will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and if deemed exceptional, a financial assessment can be completed as part of the support plan. In these situations, the applicants will be provided with the local authority’s rationale for why this is an exceptional case in writing.

It is important to be clear that a special guardian’s right to apply for financial help does not mean that they are entitled to receive the financial support they are seeking to receive.

All SGO/CAO allowances are reviewed annually.

In addition to the above, special guardians are entitled to the same benefits as birth parents. They are entitled to claim child tax credit and child benefit, though the amount they receive is dependent upon their income.

If the child has been receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) the special guardian may need to start managing this.

A special guardian may be entitled to Guardian’s Allowance, which is different to the Special Guardianship Allowance. They might qualify for this if the child is in their care because one or both parents have died. It will not affect their pension credit or any means-tested benefits they are claiming.

The allowances received under SGO or CAO do not count as income when working out means-tested benefits.

Prospective carers should speak to their assessing Social Worker for more information about benefits to which they may be entitled and speak to their local Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) office via the following link.

[Why do you want to contact Jobcentre Plus? - Find your nearest office - GOV.UK.](#)

Special guardians can check which benefits they may be able to claim by visiting the following link. www.direct.gov.uk.

- **Financial support for private fostering arrangements**

Financial support may be offered under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and is considered on a case-by-case basis.

- **Financial support for Private Family arrangements**

Financial support may be offered under Section 17 (Children Act 1989) in exceptional circumstances, and this is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Advice on financial support to kinship carers caring for children under private family arrangements/private fostering arrangements can also be sought from a Local DWP office using link above, and the Family Rights Group – please refer to **Appendix D** for details of national organisations.

f) Accommodation

Kinship placements must comfortably accommodate all who live there and are expected to be warm, adequately furnished and decorated, and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The home and immediate environment must be free of avoidable hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm and contain safety barriers and equipment appropriate to the child's age, development and level of ability.

The Viability Assessment or Reg 24 Decision document must clearly state the appropriate sleeping arrangement for each child. Each child must have his or her own bed and accommodation arrangements must reflect the child's assessed need for privacy and space or for any specific need resulting from a disability.

If a child is required to share a bedroom with other young people/carers, it is imperative that the child's views are sought prior to the care arrangement beginning if they are of an age and ability to consult.

It is acknowledged by the local authority that space is an issue for many kinship carers, whether they are foster carers for the local authority or they have entered into a private kinship arrangement.

The local authority is unable to support kinship arrangements by providing financial support for loft conversions, extensions or building works. The only possible exception to this may be placements for children who have a complex disability that requires this type of support or modification.

However, Islington Permanency Team is able to support kinship carers through letters of support in acquiring larger properties, securing additional housing points via the Director's Quota where appropriate. Kinship carers should speak to their assessment Social Worker to explore this further.

g) Child Care / Nursery Provision

Islington believes that children who are looked after benefit from being able to grow up in families with good role models in relation to work, and benefit from living in families who are able to provide for them financially, and demonstrate a willingness and desire to work. It is acknowledged that prospective kinship carers do not come to the caring task because they have made a conscious decision or career choice to foster, and therefore this local authority understands that there is a need to support kinship carers if, and when, they are working.

This needs to be balanced with the need for children who are looked after and children in private kinship placements to have stable and consistent care, with adults that they can develop good, secure attachments.

Islington would generally not support a young child being cared for within formal childcare provision between the hours of 8am-6pm, 5 days a week.

The local authority can support kinship foster carers with applications for social care nursery places in Islington or reasonable financial requests for childcare provision.

For special guardians and CAO carers, funding for nursery provision will be considered within their support plan, or prior to any court orders being granted.

For all nursery funding requests, Islington will use the below scale to make a decision on whether funding will be provided.

Where there is one carer at home full time with the child, there will be no funding agreed for nursery provision.

Carers should be aware that for 2- and 3-year-olds, most London local authorities provide a certain number of free hours of nursery time, and this will be factored in when determining the level of support Islington may provide.

Day/s per week carer is working	1	2	3	4	5
Agreed days of nursery funding	0	1	1 and ½	2	2 and ½

h) After School Clubs

There may also be a need for kinship carers to use before and after school provisions for childcare purposes. Carers will generally be asked to pay for these activities out of the fostering allowance, SGO allowance or CAO allowance paid to them by Islington.

i) Loss of Earnings / Income

In exceptional circumstances, some children will require their kinship carer to consider time off from work in order to settle the child/ren into a new care arrangement and home. If this is the case, Islington will consider requests to compensate carers for loss of earnings or income. These requests will be considered when the time off is specifically for settling children into a permanent placement and will be for a time limited period, not exceeding a period of 1 month. It will then be reviewed to determine the child's needs at the time.

j) Vehicles and Transport

Islington does not provide vehicles for foster carers, special guardians or Child Arrangements Order carers.

k) Education and Health Support:

- **for children who are looked after**

Children in Reg 24 or family and friends fostering placements are able to access specific support offered to children who are looked after in relation to their education and health.

Islington has a Virtual School, with a designated advisory teacher responsible for supporting all children in kinship care arrangements with their academic progression and identifying educational provision.

- **for children cared for under SGO/CAO**

Children in kinship care arrangements under the age of 5 years who were previously, or are currently, in the care of children's services, may be eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium Plus, which is a special funding to support them to attend Early Years providers. This is not a personal budget for the child but is paid directly to the childcare provider to be spent in a way that benefits the child.

School aged children in kinship care who were previously, or are currently, in the care of children's services, are eligible for Pupil Premium Plus, which is a special funding for schools to support the education of these children. Pupil premium plus is not an individual budget for the child but can be spent on:

- practical adjustments to support children with attainment at school
- support for children's academic, social and emotional needs

- training teaching and support staff

To claim this funding, kinship carers must provide the school with a copy of the SGO or CAO.

The government's recent Kinship Strategy (December 2023) adapted the role of virtual school heads to specifically include championing the attendance, attainment and progress of all children in kinship care, whether previously looked after or not, to support kinship carers. This includes:

- raising awareness of the unique needs and disadvantages of children in different types of kinship care arrangements through training for schools and other learning support services such as those for children with SEND;
- promoting practice that supports the attendance and engagement of kinship children in education, including facilitating partnerships between, and within, education settings, local authority children's social care including any designated kinship teams, and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations that work with kinship families; and
- promoting practice that improves the educational attainment of children in kinship care, including working with education settings to strengthen how they address barriers to educational progress for kinship children and how they can support all children subject to special guardianship orders and child arrangement orders to improve behaviour to help avoid exclusion becoming necessary;
- providing advice and information, on request, to all kinship carers with special guardianship orders and child arrangement orders, regardless of whether their child was previously looked after by the local authority, on areas such as behaviour management, exclusions, and admissions.

- **for children cared for in informal kinship care arrangements**

Virtual school heads are not expected to provide information and advice to kinship carers with informal arrangements. The eligibility of pupil premium plus remains limited to only children who are currently, or were previously, looked after.

Islington also offers specific health support for children who are looked after.

Kinship carers should speak to their assessing or supervising Social Workers if they would like support with the health needs of the children in their care.

1) Legal Costs:

Before agreement is given to provide financial support for legal purposes, carers are requested to establish whether they are eligible for legal aid through their solicitors.

Social Workers can provide carers with details of appropriate childcare solicitors/firms on request.

- **for children who are looked after**

For those (potential) carers who are being assessed within care proceedings where the recommended outcome is that the child/ren will be placed permanently with these carers, or remain in their care permanently Islington is able to fund a one-off legal consultation prior to the conclusion of the proceedings. This funding should not exceed £350 (exclusive of VAT) for one consultation. It is recommended that these (potential) carers have their one-off consultation once a *draft* support plan is made available to them.

Where a child is looked after and a kinship carer wishes to apply to care for the child permanently, Islington may fund the application for the SGO or CAO. Agreement for legal funding would be considered by the Service Manager for Fostering and Permanency in consultation with Islington's Legal Service in specific relation to services rendered.

- **for private kinship arrangements/SGO/CAO**

For carers who are caring for children in a private kinship arrangement who wish to apply for either Special Guardianship or a Child Arrangements Orders, support for financial assistance will need to be arranged and agreed by Islington's Children in Need Teams, via Section 17 (Children Act 1989) financial support until an order is in place.

m) Support for overseas kinship placements

It is acknowledged that kinship placements outside the UK may have specific and unique needs, which require consideration as part of a fostering support plan or a SGO/CAO support plan for children who are looked after by Islington.

Each of these cases should be considered in light of this policy, but also with consideration to the specific needs of the children in the context of their proposed permanent placement.

Areas of additional support may include:

- Education - carers may require support with school fees, uniforms, books;
- Health - there may be situations where carers have to purchase private health insurance/cover due to the health system in their specific country;
- Contact with birth parents and siblings in the UK – this is often an additional cost associated with placing children outside of the UK. It is important to consider these costs as part of the support plan prior to placement being finalised. Birth parents should also be included in these discussions so that all parties are clear about the

support being offered and the expectations of the Local Authority in relation to this contact;

- Legal advice and costs for prospective carers in relation to how the legalities of the care arrangement will translate in their country of origin.

Living costs in the particular country of placement should also be taken into account when planning additional support. It is expected that any allowance provided to the carers will be calculated in the context of that specific country's cost of living index and used to contribute to the additional expenses listed above.

There may also be situations when the prospective carers require support from the local authority prior to the children being placed in order to attend court hearings, establish contact with the children in the UK etc. In these situations, it is not the responsibility of the local authority to assist the prospective carers with their passport, visa and immigration needs in respect of coming to the UK.

Islington will, however, assist the prospective carers with flights, accommodation and maintenance/travel allowance while they are in the UK for the purposes of the proposed placement. This will be for a time-limited period.

There may also be occasions where it is felt that a Social Worker should accompany the carer and child on their journey home. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be specifically related to the Social Worker's assessment and the specific needs of the child/ren.

Support with undertaking assessments overseas is sought via the International Child Abduction and Contact Unit (ICACU), who assess the suitability of the carer, home, contact with the local social services in the kinship carer's country of origin, and identify the scope of support on offer by the carer's local services, how these services work, and how the carer is to access them if required. This information should be built into the support plan for the identified placement.

KINSHIP CARE ARRANGEMENTS NOT COVERED BY THIS POLICY

This Procedure does not apply when either:

- a child goes to live with a close relative and this is a **private family arrangement** between the parent with Parental Responsibility and the relative. In these situations, it is not necessary for Islington Council to become involved unless there are concerns for the child's welfare or the family request help; or
- a child goes to live with a less immediate relative or friend and this is a **Private Fostering arrangement** between the parent with Parental responsibility and the carer. If this placement continues for 28 days or more, the situation must be assessed under the Private Fostering Regulations. Please refer to the Private Fostering Procedure and **Appendix A** below for options of caring for someone else's child.

COMPLAINTS/COMPLIMENTS

We always try to provide excellent services. But things sometimes go wrong and, when they do, we want to know so that we can put things right, and learn from our mistakes.

For more information about how to make a complaint, please see [Complaints and feedback | Islington Council](#)

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Links to the Department for Education’s Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (2024), National Kinship Care Strategy (2023) and the extension of the role of the Virtual School Head

Appendix B – Local contacts

Appendix C – List of community and national organisations for kinship carers

APPENDIX A – Link to statutory guidance

- Department for Education’s Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (October 2024).

[Kinship care: statutory guidance for local authorities](#)

- Department for Education’s National Kinship Care Strategy (December 2023).

[Championing kinship care: the national kinship care strategy](#)

- Department for Education's Virtual School Head's role extension (September 2025).

Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension - GOV.UK

APPENDIX B – LOCAL CONTACTS

Main Reception: 020 7527 7000

Daytime Fostering Team Duty: 020 7527 7297

Fostering Team Out of Hours: (5-10pm weekdays and 10am-10pm weekends and bank holidays): 07714 170 294

Permanency Team Duty: 020 7527 1012, Monday – Friday, 10am – 1pm

Permanency Team Support Group: Once a month (last Tuesday of every month, 10am – 12:30pm) for Special Guardians and Family and Friends' foster carers. The support group offers an opportunity for carers to get together and take part in informal training by specialist in-house staff. The training covers different themes each month, such as: managing contact, safer caring and managing children's behaviour. The group are very welcoming of new members, and it can be a really useful place to make contact with other carers and keep up to date on the latest things going on in the borough for carers.

North London Fostering and Permanency Consortium (NLFPC)

This is a group of six local authorities: **Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington**, who work together to help and support children and families. Their website is dedicated to those who have a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or are thinking about becoming special guardians using learning from special guardians and the Social Workers that support them, as well as external professionals and organisations. Support can be accessed by any special guardians currently living in, or who have a court order made through, any of the Consortium boroughs (listed above).

www.specialguardiansnorthlondon.co.uk

There are a variety of training courses run by the Consortium for Special Guardians, the topics include: how to talk to your child about their early life experiences, how to manage

contact with family members, and how to support children manage more difficult feelings and behaviours. The Permanency team can support with accessing a place on these.

APPENDIX C – COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS FOR KINSHIP CARERS

Family Lives <https://www.familylives.org.uk/>

Works to reduce the negative impact of imprisonment on prisoners' families, amongst other issues facing families. Produces publications and resources, and provides advice, information and training as well as networking opportunities.

Tel: 0808 800 2222

E-mail: askus@familylives.org.uk

We Are With You - <https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/>

Offers a range of online support developed for families and carers affected by substance misuse.

Open Monday to Friday - 9am to 9pm, Saturday and Sunday - 10am to 4pm

Adfam- www.adfam.org.uk

Works with families affected by drugs and alcohol, and supports carers of children whose parents have drug and alcohol problems.

Tel: 020 7553 7640

Email: admin@adfam.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)- www.ace-ed.org.uk

Offers free independent advice and information for parents and carers on a range of state education and schooling issues, including admissions, exclusion, attendance, special educational needs and bullying.

General advice line: 0808 800 5793

Exclusion advice line: 0808 800 0327

Exclusion information line: 020 7704 9822 (24hr answer phone)

BeGrand.net- www.begrand.net

Website offering information and advice to grandparents, plus online and telephone advice.
Helpline: 0845 434 6835

Children's Legal Centre- www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Provides free independent legal advice and factsheets to children, parents, carers and professionals.

Citizens Advice Bureaux- www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice through local bureau and website.

CoramBAAF

CoramBAAF is an independent membership organisation for professionals, foster carers and adopters, and anyone else working with or looking after children in or from care, or adults who have been affected by adoption. It is a successor organisation to the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).

Tel: 020 7520 0300

E-mail: advice@corambaaf.org.uk

Department for Education- www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families

Lists details of telephone help lines and online services to provide information, advice and support on a range of issues that parents and families may face in bringing up children and young people.

Family Fund Trust- www.familyfund.org.uk

Helps families with severely disabled or seriously ill children to have choices and the opportunity to enjoy ordinary life. Gives grants for things that make life easier and more enjoyable for the disabled child and their family.

Email: info@familyfund.org.uk

Family Rights Group (FRG)- www.frg.org.uk

Provides advice to parents and other family members whose children are involved with or require children's social care services because of welfare needs or concerns. Publishes resources, helps to develop support groups for family and friends carers, and runs a discussion board.

Advice line: 0800 801 0366 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 3pm)

Email: advice@frg.org.uk

The Fostering Network- www.fostering.net

Supports foster carers and anyone with an interest in fostering to improve the lives of children in care. Publishes resources and runs Fosterline, a confidential advice line for foster carers including concerns about a child's future, allegations and complaints, legislation and financial matters.

Email: info@fostering.net

Fosterline: 0800 040 7675

Email: fosterline@fostering.net

Kinship

Champions the role of kinship carers and the wider family in children's lives, especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances. This organization offers support and guidance, specifically designed for kinship carers.

The office is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Address: The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London, SE11 5RR

Phone: 03300 167 235

Email: info@kinship.org.uk

National Family Mediation (NFM)- www.nfm.org.uk

Provides mediation services to support couples who are separated, and their children and others affected by this.

Tel: 0300 4000 636

Email: enquiries@nfm.org.uk

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group- www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk

Operates helpline and provides a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners and other agencies.

Tel: 0161 702 1000 (Monday – Friday 11:45am – 4:45pm, Saturday – Sunday 8am – 5pm)

Email: info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.co.uk

Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)- www.prisonadvice.org.uk

Provides practical and emotional support to prisoners and to their children and families.

Telephone: 0808 808 2003

Parents Against Drug Abuse (PADA)- www.pada.org.uk

Delivers support and services to the families of substance users, including a national helpline.

Address: The Foundry Marcus Street Birkenhead CH41 1EU

Phone: 0151 649 1580

National Families Helpline: 08457 023867

Parentline Plus- www.familylives.org.uk

Provides help and support in all aspects of family life, including information, an online chat facility and a 24 hour helpline.

24hr Advice line: 0808 800 2222

Email: parentsupport@familylives.org.uk

TalktoFrank- www.talktofrank.com

The government's national drugs helpline, which offers free confidential drugs information and advice 24 hours a day. Information and advice is also available via the website.

24 hour advice line: 0300 123 6600

Email: frank@talktofrank.com

Coram Voice- www.coramvoice.org.uk

Advocacy organisation for children living away from home or in need.

Tel: 020 7833 5792

Young person's advice line: 0808 800 5792

Email: info@coramvoice.org.uk

Young Minds- www.youngminds.org.uk

Works to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people and empowering their parents and carers.

Parents helpline: 0808 802 5544 (Monday – Friday, 9:30am – 4pm)