

National Vision for Kinship Care: Consultation

Social Work Scotland response

February 2026

Introduction

Social Work Scotland (SWS) is the professional body for social work leaders, working closely with our partners to shape policy and practice, and improve the quality and experience of social services. We are committed to the rights-based principles and values of our profession, and therefore supportive of the ambitions of the Promise and efforts to improve the lives of those with whom we work. As co-chair of the Kinship Care Collaborative, we have long championed and contributed to improvement in the kinship care landscape and welcome this opportunity to comment on the Scottish Government's vision for kinship care.

Background

Extended family care in Scotland has a long history, growing from historical informal arrangements to a formal place as first choice of alternative care for children unable to remain with their immediate family. This is enshrined in the legislative framework for Scotland and has over the past 20 years, become more formalised in a series of processes for looked after and certain non looked after children.

This formal recognition of kinship care as part of the landscape of care in Scotland is welcomed and reflects the foundational and continuing flexible and inspirational nature of Getting it Right for Every Child and ensuring that the right support is provided to children at the right time. Social Work Scotland has and continues to be

supportive of ensuring that this is as actively applied where a child lives with their kin as it is for any other situation.

Attempts to focus attention on legislative change to meet the needs of those in kinship care has though resulted in a complex legislative and support context for those in kinship care, which is not well understood. Kinship care and those living in a kinship care situation are not a homogenous group and the use of one term to cover many contexts is confusing for families and children and often also for those supporting those children and families.

We recognise the well-researched impact of the trauma experienced by children and young people, particularly where this results in a period in care. The experience of care, even where necessary and positive, involves separation and loss, but this can be mitigated by a child finding a home with extended family or those with a close connection. As an organisation representing leaders in a profession working with those families and young people, we seek to influence practice and policy to improve the experiences of children and families, and recognise the criticality of the right support being available to kinship carers to enable them to properly care for a child in their care. Underpinning much of this is the recognition of the importance of combating financial need and the impact of poverty, as well as support to manage the range of emotional and psychological needs which may arise.

In this context we welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed vision for kinship care. Our response will reflect views from those providing and funding support about how the vision might give opportunity to simplify and contextualise the legislative, policy and practice context to ensure that it is more easily understood, to ensure that those who need support are able to receive the right support at the right time over their lives in kinship care, and to take forward clarity of definition and language.

In doing so, we underline the opportunities within the existing legislative landscape and how these can be utilised to provide the support kinship carer seek, and the foundational principles of minimum intervention and having the child at the centre. We finally underline the criticality of any vision being achievable in terms being able to fulfil the expectations it engenders, fund fully the resource and provisions needed to make it a reality and improve take forward the improvements timeously.

Social Work Scotland has appreciated the strong and ongoing relationships with those working in this area and look forward to those continuing as the vision and future work takes shape.

The reflections within this response are drawn from consultation with our membership which covers senior leaders, including Chief Social Work Officers, service and team manager from across the country and from both local authorities and third sector organisations involved in delivery of services to children and adults. and specifically, those working in alternative family care and fostering and kinship care.

Consultation Questions:

Does the National Vision for Kinship Care (Section 5) reflect what matters most to kinship families?

SWS members work closely with the children in kinship care and the carers who care for them, not only at point of placement but also beforehand, and throughout their time together. They note that the term 'kinship care family' is one which encompasses a wide range of situations eg emergency arrangements where the child may be subject to emergency protection processes, short term placements while intensive work is undertaken with parents, and longer term arrangements which may be related to either looked after status or children who no longer require that level of state protection and where the child has been secured by means of a section 11 KCO.

As such members noted the range of needs which both children and carers will have depending on the nature of the arrangement, the age and experiences of the child and the circumstances of the family, and that those needs, as with any family may change over time. They described a range of family supports which assist carers to look after the children in their care, and how these flex over time, and a strong commitment to the benefits of children being able and supported to grow up in their extended family

Members also noted that care within family is and has long been, the first consideration where a child is unable to live with birth parents and were positive about the increased attention given to placements in kinship care over recent years which has enabled better support to be provided.

Given this, SWS members were broadly supportive of the vision, viewing it as over-arching and appropriate for all kinship circumstances, and aligned to GIRFEC as the Scottish framework for providing children with the right support at the right time.

Slight concern was expressed by a small number about the vision reiterating the principles of GIRFEC around voice, family and support but all welcomed the focus on meeting children's needs and flexible support.

There is an eagerness to ensure that all kinship families are supported so that they can provide the care needed, but a concern that care is taken that in a desire to support all kinship families, state intervention is not taken too far/becomes intrusive for some families. Some members highlighted the difference between duties when a child is looked after, where the local authority is responsible for that child, and non-looked after situations where the carer is likely to hold parental responsibilities and duties, and the importance that this line is not blurred, Members are strongly of the view that GIRFEC and the GIRFEC principles eg child at the centre, proportionate and timely support - are the critical drivers, regardless of the legal basis of a placement, and are supportive of the framing of the vision in this way. This also facilitates support via universal and community provision rather than a reliance on formal provisions.

Finally, it was noted that any changes to progress the visions must take account of capacity to deliver and be properly funded. Should the provisions in the Children's Care Care experience and Services Planning Scotland Bill be passed then a large number of children with experience of kinship care will have eligibility for aftercare

What do you like about it, and what would you change? Are there aspects that feel unclear, unrealistic, or missing?

See comments in response to question 1.

SWS is strongly committed to the principles of GIRFEC and those consulted noted the benefits of looking at kinship care through the GIRFEC 'lens' with its clear focus on providing the right support at the right time in the right manner, and on working across disciplines and agencies.

Most members spoke positively about the focus given to the 10-family support principles, but some, while appreciating the applicability of the principles, expressed anxiety that this emphasis might push kinship, with its specific features and challenges, into a family support 'box' fearing this could limit the understanding of the unique kinship context and challenges.

What feels most important to you, and is there anything missing?

Please see response to the previous two questions.

SWS members are supportive of the GIRFEC framing feeling that this ensures that no kinship family is missed out, but some expressed concerns reflected above.

SWS members encompass both local authority and third sector agencies, and those operating in more rural areas indicated that what is meant by equitable access will require careful discussion

No gaps were identified, though it was noted that explanatory information on what universal support for all kinship care families might look like in terms of delivery is yet to be developed.

Does the Scottish Offer to Kinship Families (Section 6) include the kinds of support that would make the biggest difference for kinship families?

There were mixed views on the framing of support as an 'offer' with some feeling that this provided focus and certainty to kinship care situations and others

expressing the view that it detracted from the opportunity for carers and local areas to work together and could result in a 'them and us' type situation.

Overall, SWS members feel that it is helpful that the final vision includes clarity about the types of support that may be provided but underline that it is critical that local flexibility to meet need, taking account of geographical and contextual factors is not undermined.

Some members questioned the need for an offer at all, noting that the vision for Scotland's children is that Scotland becomes the 'best place in the world to grow up' and that the national framework promises the right support at the right time to address poverty inequality and need, in order to make this a reality.

Additional comments:

- The offer repeats matter already in legislation eg children having a meaningful say in decisions affecting their lives. Members consider it unnecessary to repeat as an offer something which is already a legislative right
- There was some anxiety expressed at the inclusion of areas which are part of the CCCESP Bill therefore still to be determined
- Definition of care experienced. A strong view about not including those who have not been 'in care' was expressed. To expand the definition to all those in kinship care in invasive in terms of children and carer rights, particularly where there has been no earlier intervention or concerns.
- While supportive of advocacy, our members consider that *choice* of who advocates on their behalf is critical for children, and that this is the approach which best reflects UNCRC. Children should not be pushed into only being able to access one form of advocacy. Clarity of the difference between support and advocacy is also critical. We would suggest that this aspect of the offer is reframed to focus on children, where they need and wish someone to advocate on their behalf, being supported to choose who does this for them – and it could be a range of individuals eg family, friends, teacher, social worker, children's rights officer or independent advocate
- The offer suggests at points that it is referring to those with earlier experience of state care. This may not be the case for all children in kinship care settings
- Support that keeps families together. SWS is supportive of this as a principle but unclear what it looks like as an 'offer', given the right for a child in need to be assessed is already enshrined in legislation. We recognise however, that specifically naming those children in kinship care would provide enhanced security to kinship situations.
- Statutory listing of the range of supports available. Members appreciate the benefits of the supports listed but feel that inclusion of this in legislation and statutory guidance is unnecessary.
- Equitable support. Defining this is at best a challenge, and as noted earlier, not reflective of different geographical and local contexts.
- Aftercare. SWS supports young adults who have experienced adversity in their lives being able to access support in their adult lives.

However, we have strong issues on the means of ensuring this as reflected in the recent amendment to the CCCESP Bill that includes a right of aftercare for all care experienced young people and the inclusion of all section 11 children – many of whom will not have been looked after. Additionally, such extensive aftercare provision comes with a massive price tag, is probably not deliverable, and for families with no care experience, is intrusive.

- SWS members are interested in exploring alternative means of ensuring those with experience of kinship care are able to access the support they need as adults
- Language – while appreciative of the intent SWS members note that some language is not helpful – cliff edge, abrupt loss,
- SWS members and the carers they support speak highly of dedicated staff and teams and the increased quality of support that can result. However, for small areas dedicated staff is often not viable. Some areas therefore cautioned care in highlighting dedicated approaches.
- Using foster carers to support kinship carers. While in theory, members were positive about this some saw issues with the practicalities – shortage of foster carers, oversight. A pilot is considered important before this is taken further

All services operate currently under pressures – resources, staffing, capacity. Having the infrastructure to implement any new duties related to the ‘offer’ is therefore essential to avoid raising expectations which cannot be met. This must be looked at across the wider new duties and expectations also underway – care and justice, Promise, early help etc.

Members noted the very positive experiences of the KCASS, particularly prior to the recent change when it operated as part of wider adoption and fostering provision. Concern about the service as a national hub and main point of contact were though expressed.

Members spoke of their local kinship support and the value to their carers of support provided locally. SWS members expressed strongly that the focus should be on encouraging access to advice and support locally but supported by the national KCASS. Too much focus on the KCASS as ‘the’ point of contact and referral risks bureaucratising the process for carers.

Members are keen that they are able to engage in developing what the offer might look like, and work with government partners and their local carers to do so

What feels most important to you, and is there anything missing?

Please see the detailed comments above

Are there supports you currently struggle to access that should be prioritised nationally?

Members acknowledged the complex and pressurised environment they operate in and noted only that insufficient staff within localities impacts on the support they are able to provide to kinship carers and their families – along with others.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the vision or offer for kinship care?

Members hope that the development of the Scottish Social Work partnership as the 'doing' arm of the NSWA will provide impetus to the workforce issues which underpin any improvement work. They note that without attention to this area, then expectations may be raised which will be unable to be fulfilled. Appropriate and realistic timescales for improvement are therefore critical.

SWS as co-chair of the Kinship Care Collaborative and a partner in the SSWP is committed to working on the next stage of the vision

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