



Wokingham Kinship Local Offer

23rd June 2026

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A. Kinship Carer's Core Journey

1. Welcome and Introduction

"When family and friends step up, we step alongside you to support."

This statement underpins our approach at Wokingham Borough Council. We know it takes a village to raise a child and we recognise the vital role kinship carers play in providing stability, continuity, and care for children during times of uncertainty.

Wokingham Borough Council believes children do best when they are cared for within their families, where this is safe and possible. When this cannot happen, relatives and friends often step in to provide care, stability and continuity, sometimes at short notice.

This Kinship Local Offer brings together clear information about the support available in Wokingham, so kinship carers can better understand their role and the journey ahead, know what help is available, and how to access it.

The offer has been developed in close collaboration with kinship carers and colleagues from across services for children, ensuring it reflects lived experience as well as professional expertise. It complements and reinforces the support we provide to children and families across the local area. Notably, it has been designed to ensure a coordinated service offer for those accessing our SEND Local Offer, our Care Leaver Offer, and services provided by our Virtual School.



Understanding this Local Offer

Wokingham Borough Council's Kinship Local Offer provides an overview of the support available to kinship families in Wokingham. It is designed to give you a clear starting point and to help you understand what support is available.

This Local Offer is a guide to help kinship carers understand the support available to them. In some cases, your individual circumstances or journey may be different from what is described in this document.

If anything is unclear, or if there is any difference between this document and other council policies or procedures, we will explain clearly what applies to you and why.

A range of agencies and services are included in this Local Offer to help you access support. This includes up-to-date contact details to make this as easy as possible. You can find these in Section 12: Contact, Advice and Independent Support. If you are unsure about anything or notice anything missing or incorrect, please contact your social worker or the Kinship Team at: **kinshipcare@wokingham.gov.uk**. They will help you understand your options, clarify any information, and will ensure the Local Offer is kept up to date.

What is kinship care?

Kinship care is when a child lives with and is cared for by someone they already know and trust, instead of their parent.

This may include grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, family friends or others with a meaningful relationship to the child.

Arrangements can be informal or supported by legal orders such as a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order.



Why kinship care matters

Kinship care helps children stay connected to the people, relationships, and communities that are important to them. Being cared for by someone they know, and trust can provide greater stability, help maintain their sense of connection and identity, and support their emotional wellbeing.

In Wokingham, we recognise the difference this can make for children. We also know that kinship carers often step in at short notice and may face challenges, including navigating services and supporting children who have experienced loss and trauma. We are committed to supporting carers in this vital role.

Our approach and commitment

We will:

- Put children's safety, wellbeing and long-term outcomes at the centre of decisions
- Listen to children and ensure their voice, wishes and feelings are understood and reflected in decisions about their care
- Provide support based on the needs of the child and family, not just legal status
- Offer early help and clear information without delay
- Work in a respectful, strengths-based and non-judgemental way
- Ensure services are joined up across the council and partners



Who this Local Offer is for

This Local Offer is for people caring for, or supporting, a child with a connection to Wokingham Borough Council, including those who:

- are caring for a child who is not their own
- are thinking about becoming a kinship carer
- are supporting a child in a family or friends care arrangement

This includes:

- informal kinship carers
- connected persons and kinship foster carers
- carers with a Child Arrangements Order
- special guardians
- adoptive relatives

It also provides information for children, young people and professionals supporting kinship families.

Accessing support early

As outlined earlier, we are committed to working with you at every stage of your kinship journey. This Local Offer is designed to help you understand what support is available and how to access it.

Support is available at any stage, including:

- when considering caring for a child
- when a child moves into your care
- when circumstances change

There can be a lot to navigate and we know that getting support early can make a real difference for children. Information on how to access support is set out in the sections that follow.

How this Local Offer was developed

This Local Offer has been shaped and co-produced with children and their families, who have told us what is important to them, ensuring that the voices and experiences of kinship carers, children and young people, and partner organisations have shaped its content.

We worked with:

- Kinship carers, who shared their experiences through consultation and survey responses
- Children and young people, who contributed through surveys and face-to-face activities
- Partner organisations, including colleagues across children's social care, health, education, the voluntary sector, and legal services
- Existing feedback, drawing on insights from Connected Care and Foster Home Reviews over the past three years

We also held face-to-face engagement sessions with kinship families and children, creating opportunities for open, informal discussions about their experiences and what support makes a difference.

This wide range of engagement has helped us build a strong understanding of kinship care in Wokingham. Feedback consistently highlighted the importance of:

- clear and accessible information
- early support
- access to advice and guidance

This Local Offer also reflects national guidance on kinship care, including the Kinship Care Statutory Guidance (2024), alongside wider developments in children's services.

We are committed to continuing to listen and learn, and our Kinship Local Offer will be regularly reviewed and updated based on feedback and the experiences of kinship families.

What this Local Offer provides

This Local Offer helps you understand:

- the different types of kinship care

- what support is available
- how to access help
- what you can expect from services

It covers key areas including financial support, education, accommodation, therapeutic support, legal guidance and family time.

It is designed to help you understand your situation, access the right support, and make informed decisions for you and the child in your care.

The next section explains the different types of kinship care arrangements and what they mean in practice.

2. Types of Kinship Care

Kinship care can take different forms. Some arrangements are made privately within families, while others involve the council or the courts.

Understanding the type of arrangement you are in, or considering, is important as it will affect:

- who makes decisions about the child
- what support is available to you and the child
- how the council is involved

Having clarity about your arrangement will help you understand your responsibilities and access the right support.

A kinship care arrangement will usually fall under one of the following six categories:

Informal (family) arrangements

What this means

This is when a child lives with a close family member (such as a grandparent, aunt, or sibling) and the arrangement is made privately within the family. There is no involvement from the court or Children's Services, and the council may not be involved.

This type of arrangement is not private fostering where the carer is a close family relative.

For example, a grandparent or aunt may take on the day-to-day care of a child when the parents are unable to do so.

Important:

If the child is cared for by a **family friend or someone who is not a close relative**, and the arrangement lasts for **28 days or more**, this becomes a **private fostering arrangement** and must be reported to the local authority.



Key points

- No court order is in place and the court is not involved
- Children's Services are not involved
- The arrangement is made privately within the family
- It is usually with a close relative (such as a grandparent, sibling, aunt, uncle, or step-parent), so it does not fall under private fostering arrangements

Who has responsibility

- Parents retain parental responsibility and this is not shared with the carer
- You provide day-to-day care for the child

Support available

- You can ask the council for advice and guidance
- If the child is assessed as a "child in need", support may be provided (for example Early Help or other services)



Example: Informal (family) arrangement

Sophie is 10 years old and lives with her mum. Her mum becomes unwell and is unable to look after her for a period of time. Sophie's maternal grandmother agrees to care for her, and Sophie moves into her grandmother's home.

The arrangement is agreed within the family – no court order is made and Children's Services are not involved. Sophie's mum still makes important decisions about her life (such as education and medical care), but the grandmother looks after Sophie day-to-day, including taking her to school, cooking meals, and providing a stable routine.

Because Sophie is living with a close family member (her grandmother), this is considered an informal family arrangement, not private fostering.

If the grandmother later feels she needs support, she can contact the council for advice, and the family could receive help if Sophie is assessed as a child in need.

Private fostering

What this means

A child (under 16, or under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not a close relative for 28 days or more. If you are a carer in this arrangement, you must notify the council by law.

Key points

- This is a private arrangement
- The council must be told by law

Who has responsibility

- Parents keep parental responsibility
- The carer provides day-to-day care

Council role and support available

- The council will assess the arrangement to ensure it is safe
- A worker will visit the child regularly
- The council will offer advice and support where needed

Short example: Private fostering

- Liam (14) falls out with his parents and, with their agreement, goes to live with his football coach's family. He stays there for several months. This is a private arrangement because the coach is not a close relative, and it will last over 28 days, so the coach must notify the council by law.

Liam's parents retain parental responsibility, while the coach provides day-to-day care (food, routines, school support). The council will check the arrangement is safe, visit Liam regularly, and offer support or advice to both Liam and the carers.

Child Arrangements Order (CAO)

What this means

A court order is made that says a child lives with a carer (for example, a family member or friend).

Key points

- The carer shares parental responsibility with the parents
- Birth parents continue to have a legal role, but how they use their PR depends on the situation and the terms of the order (PR is shared, not transferred)
- The carer can make day-to-day and important decisions about the child's care

Support available

- Advice and guidance from the Kinship Team, Family Help services, or your social worker (where involved)
- In some cases, support may be arranged by the council following an assessment of need

Connected person (kinship foster care)

What this means

The child is looked after by the local authority but lives with someone they know (for example a relative or family friend).

Key points

- You are assessed by the fostering team as a Kinship foster carer
- You are approved as a kinship foster carer by the fostering panel process (connected person)
- The council is fully involved

Who has responsibility

- The local authority holds parental responsibility and makes key decisions about the child's care
- Parents usually retain parental responsibility
- The carer provides day-to-day care and supports the child's needs

Support available

- Financial allowance to help carers meet the costs of caring for a child, including everyday expenses such as food, clothing, and activities
- Support from a social worker, including regular visits and reviews to check how things are going and to support the child's needs
- Training to help carers develop the knowledge and skills needed to provide safe and appropriate care for the child
- Regular check-ins with a social worker (supervision), where carers can talk through how things are going, discuss any challenges, and get advice and support

Example: Connected person (kinship foster care)

- Mia (9) is unable to live with her parents for a period of time, so the local authority arranges for her to live with her aunt, someone she knows and trusts. Her aunt is assessed and approved by the kinship team as a connected person (kinship foster carer) through the fostering panel process.
- The local authority is fully involved in planning Mia's care and shares parental responsibility, while Mia's parents usually still retain parental responsibility. Her aunt provides day-to-day care, helping with routines, school, and emotional support.
- Mia's aunt receives a financial allowance, has regular contact and support from a social worker, and can access training to help her provide a stable and nurturing home for Mia.

Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

What this means

A court order giving you primary parental responsibility for a child.

Key points

- The carer is assessed by the local authority as part of the Special Guardianship process
- A court grants a Special Guardianship Order to the carer
- The council may remain involved in supporting the arrangement, depending on the child and family's needs

Who has responsibility

- The special guardian holds parental responsibility and can make most decisions about the child's care
- Parents retain parental responsibility but cannot override the special guardian's decisions
- The carer provides day-to-day care and supports the child's needs

Support available

- An assessment of support needs
- Possible financial support (usually means-tested)

Access to advice, training and services

Example: Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

- After living with her grandmother for some time, Ava (7) is made subject to a Special Guardianship Order by the court so she can grow up in a stable, permanent family environment. Ava's grandmother is assessed by the local authority during the SGO process, and the court grants her the order. The council may still provide support depending on Ava's needs.
- Ava's grandmother now has primary parental responsibility and can make most decisions about her care, such as schooling and healthcare. Ava's parents still have parental responsibility, but they cannot override the grandmother's decisions. The grandmother provides day-to-day care, ensuring Ava has a consistent and nurturing home.
- Following the order, the family receives an assessment of support needs, may be eligible for financial support, and can access advice, training, and services to help maintain a stable and positive arrangement.



Adoption by relatives or friends

What this means

You become the child's legal parent permanently.

Key points

- Full parental responsibility transfers to you
- Birth parents no longer have legal parental responsibility

Support available

- Adoption support services where eligible
- Therapeutic and practical support following assessment

Summary

There are different types of kinship care, but in all cases:

- the child's safety and wellbeing come first
- family relationships are important
- you can ask for support if you need it

Example: Adoption by relatives or friends

- Jack (6) has been living with his aunt for some time. She applies to adopt him, and the court approves. She becomes his legal parent permanently.

She now has full parental responsibility, and Jack's birth parents no longer have legal responsibility. Adoption support may be available if needed. If you are unsure what type of arrangement you have, or what support you may be entitled to, you can contact the Kinship Team for further advice.

Types of Kinship Care (at a glance)

Type of arrangement,	What this means,	Who has responsibility	Council involvement	Support available
Informal (family) arrangements	Private arrangement where a child lives with a close family relative or friend . A 'close family relative' is defined as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, or step-parent (including relationships by marriage or civil partnership).	Parents keep parental responsibility; you provide day-to-day care	May not be involved	Advice and guidance; support if child is assessed as in need (e.g. Early Help)
Private fostering	If a child lives with a family friend or non-relative for 28 days or more (e.g. a neighbour or parent's friend), this is private fostering and must be reported to the local authority.	Parents keep parental responsibility; you provide day-to-day care	Must be notified; checks and visits	Advice and support from the council
Child Arrangements Order (CAO)	Court order confirming the child lives with you	You share parental responsibility with parents	Limited involvement	Advice and guidance; possible support after assessment
Connected person (kinship foster care)	Child is looked after by the council but placed with someone they know	Local authority shares responsibility; you provide daily care	Fully involved	Financial allowance, social worker support, training and supervision
Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	Court order giving you primary parental responsibility	You have main responsibility; parents cannot override decisions	Some involvement (as needed)	Assessment of needs, possible financial support, advice and services
Adoption by relatives or friends	You become the child's legal parent permanently	You have full parental responsibility	No ongoing parental role	Adoption support (where eligible), including therapeutic support

3. Your Kinship Care Journey

This section explains what usually happens when a child comes to live with you.

Every situation is different. Sometimes arrangements happen very quickly, and other times they develop over time. You may not go through every step, and we will support you throughout the process.

Step 1: A child comes to live with you (first few days)

This may happen suddenly, often in response to concerns about a child's safety.

What to expect

- Immediate decisions are made to keep the child safe
- You may be asked to care for the child at short notice
- Basic plans are put in place to support the child

If the council is involved:

- A social worker will speak with you and the child to offer support, gather information and explain what will happen next
- Early plans for the child's care will be put in place in consultation with you
- If the child is looked after, a care plan will be shared with you

Step 2: Early support and checks

If the local authority becomes aware of the arrangement, a practitioner from Children's Services may make contact to understand the situation and ensure the child is safe.

This may include

- Gathering information about the child and family
- Checks with other services (such as school or health)
- Talking to you about your household

Support can include

- Family Help services
- A family network meeting to bring people (typically family members) together



Timescales

- Initial contact reviewed within 24 hours
- Family Help may begin within 5-10 working days

Important:

The local authority will not always be aware of informal arrangements unless they are informed. If you would like advice or support, you can contact Children's Services. With your agreement, information can be shared with relevant services (such as health or education), so you do not have to repeat your situation multiple times.

Step 3: Assessment (understanding needs and planning support)

If the local authority becomes involved, an assessment may be carried out to understand the child's needs and identify what support may be required.

The local authority will not carry out an assessment in every situation and you can still access support services for the child you are caring for e.g. through our Family Hubs. An assessment is usually only undertaken where the local authority becomes aware of the arrangement and there are concerns about the child's wellbeing, or where it appears that additional support may be needed.



An assessment helps to consider:

- What support may be needed
- Whether the current arrangement is meeting the child's needs
- Whether a different type of arrangement may be more appropriate

What to expect

- A social worker will meet with you and the child
- You will be asked about your situation and support network
- The child's wishes and feelings will be considered
- You will be kept informed and can comment on the assessment

Different types of assessment may be used depending on your situation (see Section 5 for more detail).

Step 4: Urgent placements (connected person pathway)

This pathway applies where a child needs to be, or becomes, looked after (in the care of the local authority), for example due to safeguarding concerns about their current care arrangements.

If the child is placed with you urgently:

- You may be temporarily approved as a kinship foster carer

- This allows the child to stay with someone they know

Timescales

- Temporary approval lasts up to 16 weeks (may be extended)

During this time:

- A full assessment is completed
- You receive support, visits and financial allowance

Step 5: Planning for the future

As more information is gathered, decisions are made about what is best for the child.

Decisions consider

- the child's safety and wellbeing
- stability and long-term care
- the child's wishes and relationships

You may be involved in meetings to plan next steps.

If the child is looked after, planning for a stable long-term home (permanence) will begin early.

Step 6: Ongoing support and reviews

Support continues after the child is settled in your care.

You can expect

- regular contact with professionals (if services are involved)
- reviews of the child's plan
- support that changes as needs change

Typical review timescales

- Early Help / Child in Need: every 6 weeks
- Looked after children:
 - o first review within 20 working days
 - o then at 3 months
 - o then every 6 months

Step 7: Long-term arrangements (permanence)

The goal is to create a stable, long-term home for the child.

This stage is called permanence planning.

Options may include:

- the child returning home (if safe)
- staying with you long-term
- legal arrangements such as:
 - o Child Arrangements Order
 - o Special Guardianship Order
 - o Adoption
 - o Long-term fostering

Your views will be listened to, and decisions will be based on the child's needs.

Step 8: Long-term support

Once a longer-term plan is agreed, support may continue.

This may include:

- financial support (where eligible)
- advice and training
- education and health support
- access to support groups

Support is based on the needs of the child and your family.

A quick summary

Your journey may include:

1. A child comes to live with you
2. Early support and checks
3. Assessment
4. Temporary approval (if needed)
5. Planning for the future
6. Ongoing support and reviews

7. Long-term decisions

8. Continued support

A final reassurance

The start of a kinship journey can feel fast and overwhelming. You will be kept informed, and support is available at every stage.

If you are unsure about what is happening, you can speak to your social worker, if you have one, or contact the Kinship Team or Children's Services for advice and support.

4. Family Group Conference (FGC) or Family Network Meetings (FNM)

When a child comes to live with you, it can help to bring together the people who know the child best, including you as the carer.

A Family Group Conference (FGC) or Network Meeting (FNM) is a meeting where family members, friends, carers, and (where appropriate) professionals come together to share information and plan how to support the child.

Family meetings are usually arranged by the local authority where they are involved, and are used to:

- Understand the child's situation
- Identify strengths and support within the family network
- Agree how the child will be cared for and supported
- Help plan for the child's longer-term future

In some informal arrangements, a meeting like this can also be requested if families feel it would be helpful, even where the local authority has not been involved in previously supporting arrangements and is not involved.

What happens at a meeting

At a Family Group Conference or Network Meeting:

- everyone can share their views
- the child's needs and wellbeing are central
- the group looks at how the family can support the child
- plans are made together in the child's best interests

A professional will usually help guide the meeting to make sure everyone is heard and discussions stay respectful.

When meetings take place

A meeting may be offered:

- when a child first comes to live with you
- during early help or assessment
- when plans are changing
- when longer-term arrangements are being considered

Meetings are often offered early by children's services (for example, a social worker), but you can also request one at any stage by contacting your social worker, the Kinship Team or Family Help services.

Your role

As a kinship carer, you play an important role. You can:

- share your views and concerns
- help identify who can support you and the child
- ask questions and seek clarity
- bring someone with you for support if you wish

Family Group Conferences

Family Group Conference (FGC) may be offered by children's services through our Family Group Conference service.

This is a more formal type of Family Network Meeting, usually used when:

- important decisions need to be made about the child's future
- there are safeguarding concerns
- longer-term care arrangements are being considered

Family Group Conferences give families private time to make a plan together, which is then shared and agreed with professionals.

Why these matters

Family Network Meetings help to:

- bring people together
- build on family strengths
- agree clear plans



- reduce pressure on you as a carer

You are not expected to manage everything on your own. Your wider network can be an important source of support.

5. How We Assess and Support You

Assessments help us understand what support you and the child need.

They are not about passing or failing; they are about understanding your situation, identifying what support may help, and planning together for the child's future.

We will work alongside you throughout this process, explaining what is happening and making sure you feel involved.

When an assessment might happen

An assessment may take place:

- when a child comes to live with you
- if support is needed through Early Help or Children's Services
- if legal arrangements (such as SGO or CAO) are being considered
- if your situation changes
- when you ask for support

What an assessment looks at

We will work with you to understand:

- the child's needs (health, education, emotional wellbeing)
- your strengths and ability to care for the child
- your family and support network
- what support may help

We will also gather information from you, the child, and other professionals who support children and adults (such as schools or health services).

We will always explain:

- what information we are collecting
- why we need it
- how it will be used

Types of assessment (brief overview)

You may hear different terms used for assessments. These depend on your situation, for example:

- **Child and Family Assessment** - looks at the child's needs and what support may help
- **Viability assessment** - a short assessment used when a child may need to move quickly, to consider whether you can safely care for them on a temporary or emergency basis
- **Kinship (connected person) assessment** - if a child may stay with you as a foster carer
- **Court assessments (Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order)** - for long-term legal arrangements

Your worker will explain what type of assessment applies to you.

What to expect

- A worker will meet with you and the child
- You will be asked about your situation and support needs
- The child's wishes and feelings will be included
- You will be kept informed and can comment on the assessment

After the assessment

You will be told the outcome clearly, including:

- what support is agreed

- the reasons for decisions
- what happens next

If support is needed, we will create a support plan with you.

Your support plan

Your plan will:

- set out what support will be provided
- explain who is responsible
- include timescales and next steps

You will:

- have a chance to read and comment on the plan
- receive a copy
- know who your main contact is

Timescales

We aim to work within the following timeframes:

Stage	Timescale
Initial response to request for support	Within 2 working days
Early Help support start	Usually within 5-10 working days
Child and Family Assessment	Up to 45 working days
Kinship / SGO full assessment	Usually up to 12 to 16 weeks
Decision following assessment	As soon as possible after completion
Support plan shared	Within 10 working days of decision

We will explain if there are any delays.

Reviews

Support is reviewed regularly to make sure it is still right for you.

Typical review times:

- Early Help / Child in Need: every 6 weeks
- Looked after children: statutory review cycle

- SGO and ongoing support: as agreed
- Financial support: usually once a year

Support can change as your needs change.

The child's voice

We will ensure that children's views are heard, understood and considered in all decisions.

We will:

- talk to the child in a way they understand
- help them share their wishes and feelings
- make sure their views are considered

What you may be asked to provide

You may be asked to:

- share information about your household and support network
- talk about your experiences
- provide documents (for example ID or financial information, if needed)

We understand this can feel personal. We will explain things clearly and handle your information with care.

How assessment links to support

Assessments and plans are closely linked:

- The assessment identifies needs and strengths
- The support plan sets out how those needs will be met and how strengths will be built on
- Reviews ensure support continues to be right

This helps make sure support is:

- proportionate
- flexible
- based on the needs of the child and family

What good practice looks like

You can expect:

- Clear explanations at each stage



- One main point of contact where possible
- Joined-up working between services
- Your views and the child's views being listened to
- Decisions made in a timely and transparent way
- A focus on supporting your family to succeed

A final reassurance

We will work alongside you throughout the process.

Our aim is to understand your situation and help you access the right support.

You are not expected to have all the answers; we are here to support you through the process.



B. Support Available to Kinship Families

6. Support Available

Caring for a child in your family can bring both great rewards and sometimes challenges. You may need support at different times, and this may change as the child grows.

There is a range of support available in Wokingham for you, your family and the child in your care. You can access universal support services for children, such as health visiting and through schools and our Family Hubs and support through your social worker, Early Help services, the Kinship Team or Permanence Support Team Adopt Thames Valley for post order Special Guardianship support, as well as by contacting other services directly where this is available.

Your rights to support

Some support is a legal entitlement (for example, for looked after children or where needs are assessed under the Children Act 1989).

Other support is discretionary and will depend on an assessment, local policy and available resources. We will always explain clearly what applies in your situation.

How support works

Support is not one-size-fits-all. It is based on the needs of the child and your family, not just your legal arrangement.

- You can ask your social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services for support at any time
- Some support is available to all kinship carers
- Some support depends on assessment, eligibility and resources
- Support can change as your situation changes

Some support is a legal entitlement (for example, support for looked after children or where needs are assessed under statutory duties). Other support is discretionary, meaning it depends on assessment, available resources and your individual circumstances.

We will always explain which applies in your situation, how decisions are made and work alongside you to make sure the right support is in place, at the time that you need it.

Core and enhanced support

Core support (usually available to all carers):

- Information, advice and guidance
- Signposting to local services
- Support from schools, health and community organisations

Enhanced support (following assessment):

- Financial support and allowances
- Social work or coordinated support
- Therapeutic or specialist services
- Practical or housing support

How to access support

You can access support by:

- contacting the Kinship Team
- speaking to your social worker or Early Help practitioner
- asking your child's school or other professionals
- self-referring to some services

When you make contact, we will:

- listen to your situation
- offer advice or immediate support
- help you access services or arrange an assessment if needed



Support for different kinship arrangements

All kinship carers can request an assessment of support needs at any time by contacting their social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services.

Type of arrangement	Legal status	What support you can usually expect
Informal (family arrangement)	Private family arrangement (no court order)	Advice, guidance and signposting; access to universal and Early Help services. An assessment of support needs can be requested at any time by contacting children's services (for example, through a social worker, Early Help practitioner, or the Kinship Team), and services may be provided if the child is identified as in need.
Private fostering	Private arrangement (non-relative, notified to the council)	The local authority has a duty to assess and monitor the arrangement, including regular visits; advice and support provided; additional services where the child is assessed as needing them
Child Arrangements Order (CAO)	Court order	Parental responsibility shared with parents; access to advice and support; an assessment for support can be requested, and services may be provided where the child is assessed as in need
Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	Court order	Enhanced parental responsibility; assessment for support services; possible financial support (usually means-tested); access to therapeutic support (e.g. SGO Support Fund where eligible)
Connected person / kinship foster care	Child is looked after	Full fostering support including financial allowance, training, supervision and ongoing support; regular review
Adoption (including kinship adoption)	Full legal parental responsibility	Access to adoption support services where eligible, including therapeutic support and advice; support based on assessed need

Wokingham Borough Council Early Help and Family Support

Early Help services support families early, before difficulties increase. You can access support at any time – you do not need to wait for a crisis or social care involvement.

Support is available through universal services such as Family Hubs, schools, health services and community organisations. Where needed, targeted Early Help can provide coordinated support for families.

You can access support:

- by contacting the Early Help team
- through your child's school or other professionals
- with support from a social worker or practitioner

Early Help can support you to:

- access local services
- coordinate support
- build confidence at home
- strengthen family relationships

Early Help works with schools, health services and other partners to provide joined-up support and prevent needs from escalating.

Support from the Wokingham Borough Council Kinship Team

Support from the Kinship Team

The Kinship Team provides advice, guidance and practical support to help you understand your situation and access the right help.

We can:

- help you understand your kinship arrangement, rights and options
- support you to access services and support for you and the child
- provide guidance during assessments or changes in your situation
- complete specialist kinship and court related assessments (such as viability, fostering, SGO or CAO assessments)
- work with other professionals to coordinate support

We will work alongside you at every stage – from when a child first comes to live with you, through assessments, and as longer term plans are made – to help you access the right support at the right time.

Legal Advice and Support

Understanding your legal situation can feel complex. Advice and support are available to help you understand your rights, responsibilities and options.

This may include:

- information about legal arrangements (such as Child Arrangements Orders, Special Guardianship and fostering)
- advice from your social worker or the Kinship Team
- signposting to independent organisations such as:
 - o Family Rights Group (www.frg.org.uk)
 - o Kinship (www.kinship.org.uk)
 - o Fosterline (www.fosterline.info)

In some cases, financial support towards legal costs may be considered where this supports a child's long-term stability.

You can ask for advice at any stage by speaking to your social worker, the Kinship Team, or an independent organisation.

Financial Support and Stability

Financial support and stability

You may be able to access financial support to help meet the child's needs.

This may include:

- allowances (such as fostering or Special Guardianship allowances)
- help with urgent or one off costs (for example school uniforms or essential items)
- advice and support to access benefits (such as Child Benefit or Universal Credit)
- contributions to legal costs in some circumstances

Financial support is usually means tested and based on your individual circumstances. You will normally be expected to claim any benefits you are entitled to first and we will support you to know what you are entitled to.

You can request an assessment of your support needs at any time by contacting your social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services. They will help you understand the process and what support is available.

Reviews and changes

- Financial support is usually reviewed regularly (often annually)
- You may be asked to provide updated financial information
- Support may change if your circumstances change

Support for older children and young people

Additional support may include:

- help with education or travel costs
- financial support linked to training or employment
- support with moving towards independent living (where eligible)

Support is based on the needs of the child and your family, not just your legal arrangement.

Housing, Benefits and Practical Support

We will support you to provide a safe and stable home for the child.

This may include:

- advice about housing and tenancy
- support to prevent housing difficulties or breakdown
- help to access suitable accommodation
- practical support such as home visits, equipment (for example beds or essential items), and Early Help services

For older children and young people preparing for independence, support may include:

- help to understand housing options and pathways
- support to manage tenancies and household bills
- access to setting up home grants or essential items
- advice on housing benefits

What this might look like:

- an Early Help worker supporting routines and stability at home
- help to prevent rent arrears or housing difficulties
- a young person being supported to move into their first home

You can ask for this support by contacting your social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services. They will help you access the right support for your situation.

You can also contact the Housing or Benefits team directly for advice about accommodation, tenancy or financial support.

Emotional and Therapeutic Support

Caring for a child who has experienced trauma, loss or change can be complex. Support is available for both you and the child.

This may include:

- advice on trauma informed care
- support to understand behaviour and build strong relationships
- access to services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Adopt Thames Valley (including the SGO Support Fund where eligible)

These services aim to help children feel safe, build resilience and recover from past experiences.

What this might look like:

- a child attending therapeutic sessions
- a carer receiving support to manage anxiety or trauma-related behaviour
- a Special Guardianship family accessing funded therapeutic support

How to access support:

- Speak to your social worker or Kinship Team
- Ask your GP, school or health professional about CAMHS
- If you have a Special Guardianship Order, speak to the Kinship Team or Adopt Thames Valley about therapeutic support

Specialist Permanence and Therapeutic Support (Special Guardianship) – Adopt Thames Valley

Access to Adopt Thames Valley Permanence Support Team services is based on an assessment of need and eligibility. This support is mainly available to families with a Special Guardianship Order or adoption and is usually provided following referral from Children's Services or the Kinship Team. Support is tailored to each family, helping ensure you receive the most appropriate and helpful support for your situation.

Support is provided by the Permanence Support Team and may include:

- support from an allocated practitioner



- access to a multidisciplinary therapeutic team (Anchor Team), including:
 - o clinical psychologists
 - o therapeutic social workers
 - o educational psychologist
 - o occupational therapist

Therapeutic support

Some children and families may need extra support, especially if they have experienced loss, change, or trauma.

We can help you access the right kind of support, which may include:

- Advice on therapeutic parenting
- Help to access local services, such as CAMHS or other specialist support
- Guidance on approaches that can support relationships and behaviour

Support will be based on what you and the child need, and may be offered:

- One to one
- In groups
- Through referral to specialist services

Workshops, training and support groups

Families may also be able to access:

- workshops on topics such as life story, behaviour and parenting
- support groups for carers
- groups for children and young people
- opportunities to connect with other families

Some sessions may be delivered online, and availability can vary.

Education and Learning Support

We want every child in kinship care to feel supported in education and achieve their potential.

Support is available to help with attendance, learning, wellbeing and transitions:

School support

Schools can provide support such as:

- emotional wellbeing support (for example ELSA - Emotional Literacy Support Assistant support in school, or counselling)
- adjustments to learning or timetable
- support during transitions or changes in school
- help where there are concerns about attendance or risk of exclusion

Sharing your child's situation with the school can help them provide the right support.

Pupil Premium

Some children in kinship care may be eligible for additional funding called Pupil Premium, which is provided to schools to support a child's learning and wellbeing.

Children who are currently looked after, or who have previously been looked after by the local authority, are usually eligible for Pupil Premium Plus. This funding is given to schools to help improve their progress, attendance and emotional wellbeing.

Children in other kinship arrangements (such as Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Orders) may be eligible if they meet certain criteria (for example, based on family income). This funding is not automatic and depends on eligibility.

Pupil Premium funding is paid to the school, not directly to carers. Schools decide how the funding is used to support each child, based on their needs.

How to access Pupil Premium support

You can speak to your child's school or SENCo to check whether your child is eligible and how the funding is being used. The Virtual School team can also provide advice, particularly if your child has previously been in care.

Virtual School

The Wokingham Virtual School can offer advice and guidance, particularly if a child has been in care or needs additional support.

They can:

- promote attendance, attainment and progress
- provide guidance to kinship carers (including SGO and CAO arrangements)
- support schools to understand and meet children's needs

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

If a child has additional needs, support may include:

- SEND support in school
- an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- advice, advocacy and guidance

How to access SEND support

You can access SEND support by speaking to your child's school or SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator), who can explain what support is available in school. You can also contact your social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services for advice and help accessing additional support.

Practical and financial support for learning

Support may include:

- help with education-related costs (for example equipment or travel)
- access to laptops or digital devices where needed
- support to access further or higher education

How to access practical and financial support for learning

You can ask for this support through your child's school or the Virtual School team (particularly if your child has been in care), as well as your social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services. They will help you understand what support is available and how to access it.



Support for older children and young people

As children grow, support may include:

- help with education, training and employment
- support applying for college, apprenticeships or jobs
- careers advice and local training programmes

How to access this support

You can ask for this support through your child's school or the Virtual School team, as well as your social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services.

For older young people, additional support may be available through careers services, local training providers or the Leaving Care Service (where eligible).

More information about support for young people growing up and becoming an adult can be found in Section 11: Transition to Adulthood.

Emotional wellbeing and mental health

Children may need support with their emotional wellbeing at different times, especially if they have experienced change or uncertainty.

Early support can include advice from school, Early Help services, and guidance to help you support your child at home. If needed, children may be referred to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) for more specialist support such as counselling or therapy. We will support you to identify concerns and access the right help.

Children who are looked after may be able to access priority mental health support, with faster access and services that understand trauma and care experiences.

Additional and specialist support

If your child has additional or complex needs, we will support access to specialist services such as paediatric care, therapies (for example speech and language or occupational therapy), and community health services. This may link with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) support or an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan).

Some families may also access therapeutic support, including trauma-informed approaches and specialist services.

Support for teenagers and transitions to adulthood

As children grow older, they may need different support.

Young people can access confidential advice through their GP, school or school nurse. Support may also be available for emotional wellbeing, relationships and mental health.

Planning for adult health services usually begins from around age 16, with support from health professionals and, where appropriate, your social worker or Personal Adviser.

How to access support

You can access health support by:

- contacting your GP, health visitor or school nurse
- speaking to your social worker or the Kinship Team
- asking for support through Early Help
- speaking to your child's school or SENCo (this is usually a teacher in the school who is responsible for supporting children who learn differently with additional needs or disabilities)

Support for carers (your wellbeing)

Looking after your wellbeing

We recognise that stepping in to care for a child in your family can be very rewarding but can have a significant impact on your wellbeing, relationships and daily life. You may be taking on this role unexpectedly, and it is important that you feel supported in your own right.

In Wokingham, there are local services that can support you as a kinship carer. This includes practical advice, training, emotional support, and opportunities to connect with other carers who understand your experience.

Balancing work and caring responsibilities can also be challenging. Support is available to help you understand your employment rights, explore flexible working options, and feel more confident in conversations with your employer.

Support available in Wokingham

- **Wokingham Carers Partnership** - advice, support and carer assessments.
Website: <https://carerspartnership.org.uk/wokingham-carers-partnership/>
Contact: 0118 959 4242 or **Email:** carers@ageukberkshire.org.uk
- **Parenting Special Children** - training, workshops and peer support.
Website: <https://parentingspecialchildren.co.uk/>
Contact: 0118 986 3532 or **Email:** helpline@parentingspecialchildren.co.uk
- **SEND Voices Wokingham** - information and parent networks.
Website: <https://www.sendvoiceswokingham.org.uk/>
Contact: info@sendvoiceswokingham.org.uk
- **Promise Inclusion** - family support and parenting programmes.
Website: <https://promiseinclusion.org/>
Contact: 0300 777 8539 or **Email:** admin@promiseinclusion.org
- **Dingley's Promise** - support for families with younger children and SEND.
Website: <https://dingley.org.uk/wokingham-2/>
Contact: 0118 977 1234 or **Email:** admin.wokingham@dingley.org.uk

This support might include attending workshops or groups, getting advice, connecting with other carers, or receiving support with your own wellbeing. You may also be offered a carer's assessment to understand your needs and the support that could help you in your caring role.

In some cases, support may include short breaks to give you time to rest, as well as advice about financial support or benefits where this may help your family.

Peer support and community connections

You are not alone. Connecting with other people who understand your situation can make a real difference.

We can help you access peer support, including kinship buddy schemes, local support groups such as those run by Kinship and Parenting Special Children, and wider community groups and activities. These opportunities can help you share experiences, get advice and feel more connected with people who might be in a similar situation to you.

How to access support

You can access support by:

- contacting services directly (see Section 12: Contact, Advice and Independent Support)
- speaking to your social worker or the Kinship Team
- contacting Early Help
- speaking to your child's school or SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator)
- using the Wokingham SEND Local Offer website: www.wokingham.gov.uk/send-local-offer
- checking whether a young person who has been in care may be entitled to leaving care support, including support from Wokingham's Care Leaver Local: HYPERLINK "<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/children-families-and-young-people/get-support-if-youre-care-or-leaving-care/get-support-care-leaver/being-care-leaver-and-whos-here-you/care-leaver-local-offer>" Care Leaver Local Offer.

Support for children with disabilities and additional needs

Where a child or young person has a disability or additional needs, specialist support may be available to help meet those needs and support your caring role.

Support may include:

- Support from the Children with Disabilities Team
- Occupational therapy, equipment, or home adaptations
- Advice and support with behaviour, sleep or development
- Access to specialist services and assessments

Autism and neurodiversity support (ASSIST)

Wokingham's ASSIST (Autism Spectrum Service for Information, Support and Training) offers support to families of autistic children and young people.

ASSIST provides:

- Information and advice for parents and carers
- Training and workshops (including pre- and post-diagnosis support)
- Parent programmes and drop-in sessions
- Opportunities to meet other families and build support networks
- Targeted support where children and families are experiencing particular difficulties

You can access some support from ASSIST without needing a diagnosis or referral.



Short breaks and respite support

Support may be available to give carers a break from caring and to support children to take part in activities.

This support is usually arranged and provided by Wokingham Borough Council Children's Services (including the Early Help service and relevant specialist teams).

This may include:

- Short breaks (daytime or overnight)
- Activity-based clubs or group sessions
- Support from approved carers or specialist services

Support for teenagers and care-experienced young people

As young people grow, the support they need will change.

For teenagers and care leavers, support may include:

- A Personal Advisor (PA) to guide and support them into adulthood
- Help with education, training and employment
- Support to find and maintain accommodation



- Financial advice and support
- Help to develop independence and life skills

Personal Advisors support young people to plan for the future and navigate services.

In Wokingham, this support is provided by Wokingham Borough Council's Leaving Care Service.

What this might look like

- A young person meeting regularly with their Personal Advisor
- Help applying for college, training, or jobs
- Support managing money or learning to budget

Preparing for adulthood

Wokingham Borough Council's Leaving Care Service will support young people to build the skills and confidence they need for adult life.

This can include:

- Learning practical life skills (budgeting, cooking, managing bills)

- Support with education, training and apprenticeships
- Help finding employment (including CVs, interviews, and work preparation)
- Access to careers advice and local programmes such as employment support services
- Support to access further or higher education

What this might look like

- A young person attending a life skills workshop
- Support writing a CV or preparing for interviews
- Help applying for apprenticeships or further education

How to access support

Support is usually accessed through your social worker or Personal Adviser (where eligible), who will help you plan next steps and access the right support. Young people may also access support through the Leaving Care Service or local careers and training providers.

Digital access and practical essentials

Where needed, support may be available to help with:

- Access to laptops or digital devices for education or job searching
- Help with Internet connectivity and essential items
- Equipment needed for education, training or work

What this might look like

- A young person receiving a laptop to support college work
- Help with equipment needed for a training course

How to access this support

You can ask for this support through your social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services. They will help you explore what is available and support you to access digital devices, connectivity or other essential items where needed.

Young people may also be supported through their school, the Virtual School team or training providers to access equipment for education or employment.

Life story work / identity support

Life story and identity support

Children may need help to understand their past and make sense of their experiences.

Support may include:

- Help to talk about their story in an age-appropriate way
- Guidance for carers on supporting identity and belonging
- Life story work where appropriate

What this might look like

- Creating a life story book together
- Having supported conversations about family and identity

How to access this support

You can ask for this support through your social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services. Where appropriate, support may also be provided through schools or specialist services.

7. Training and Peer Support

Learning, support and connection

Kinship carers in Wokingham have told us they want more opportunities to learn, build confidence and connect with others in a similar situation. They also told us that talking to other carers can make a big difference.

Training and peer support are available to help you feel supported in your role.

They can help you to:

- understand your child's needs, including trauma and loss
- feel more confident in your parenting
- connect with other kinship carers
- feel less alone

We work with local services and organisations to offer a range of training and support groups.

Training for kinship carers

What you can learn about

Training focuses on the areas carers tell us matter most, including:

- understanding kinship care and your role
- supporting children who have experienced trauma or loss

- managing behaviour and emotional needs
- education, SEND and learning at home
- online safety and safeguarding
- identity and life story work
- supporting teenagers and transitions
- your own wellbeing

Some training may be offered as part of your support plan (following an assessment), but you can also access many sessions directly.

Who provides training

Training is delivered by local services and trusted partners, including:

- **Wokingham Borough Council** (Kinship Team, Early Help, Adult Learning)
- **Permanence Support Team, Adopt Thames Valley** (ATV) – specialist support for Special Guardians and adoptive families
- **Parenting Special Children** – training for families with SEND or additional needs
- **ASSIST** (Autism Service) – advice and training on autism
- **Kinship** (national charity) – training, webinars and advice

How to access training and peer support

There are different ways to access training and support:

- There are different ways to access training and support:
- speak to your social worker, Early Help practitioner or Kinship Team
- access support through your support plan
- with support from your worker, who can link you into training (for example via the Training Hub or My Learning platform)
- attend sessions through Adopt Thames Valley or local organisations, where these are open to kinship carers or offered following referral

If you are unsure where to start, your worker can help you find the right support.

When training is available

- Many sessions run throughout the year
- Some are monthly or termly



- Some are one-off workshops
- Online training is available at any time

Cost of training

- Most training available through Wokingham and partners is free of charge
- Some specialist training may be funded through:
 - o your support plan
 - o the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) (where eligible)

We will always explain if there are any costs.

Peer support - connecting with other carers

Many kinship carers tell us that speaking to others who understand their situation is one of the most helpful forms of support.

Peer support can help you to:

- share experiences
- get practical advice
- feel less isolated
- build confidence



What is available in Wokingham

You can access:

- local kinship or fostering support groups
- Special Guardianship support groups through **Adopt Thames Valley**
- support through organisations such as **Parenting Special Children**
- online peer support through the **Kinship charity**
- the Kinship Team Buddy Scheme, which matches you with an experienced kinship carer who can offer informal support, share their experience and help you feel less alone

These may include drop-ins, workshops or social events.

Support for children and young people

Children and young people can also take part in groups where they can meet others, build confidence and join social or wellbeing activities.

Examples of local provision include:

- youth clubs run by **Berkshire Youth**, offering safe spaces for teenagers to socialise and take part in activities
- **Me2 Club** groups, including teen groups for young people with additional needs
- the **ASD Family Help Teen Club** in Wokingham, providing a relaxed and inclusive space

- Explorers Extreme at Wokingham **Youth Centre** for young people with additional needs
- opportunities to take part and have their voice heard, such as the Say YES **SEND Youth Forum**

These groups may be informal drop-ins, regular sessions, workshops or social activities. Availability, age range and eligibility can vary.

Who can attend

- Most training and support groups are open to kinship carers in Wokingham.
- Some specialist sessions (for example through **ATV**) are for:
 - o Special Guardians
 - o families receiving post-order support

Summary of training and peer support

Type of support	Provider	What's offered	Frequency	How to access
Core kinship and parenting training	Wokingham (Family Placement / Early Help)	Parenting, behaviour, safeguarding, trauma	Ongoing throughout the year	Training Hub, My Learning, or via worker
Family learning courses	Adult Learning (WBC)	Supporting learning (phonics, maths, parenting skills)	Termly / ongoing	Referral or direct sign-up
Specialist SGO / permanency training	Adopt Thames Valley (ATV)	Life story work, behaviour, self-care, online safety	Monthly / scheduled programmes	Email booking / referrals
Education support training	Virtual School	Advice and guidance on supporting education	As needed	Via school or worker
SEND and autism support	ASSIST / Parenting Special Children	Training on SEND, autism, behaviour support	Regular groups and sessions	Direct contact or referral
Peer support groups (carers)	WBC / ATV / partners	Support groups, discussion, advice	Monthly / regular	Through worker or group contact
Peer groups (children & young people)	ATV / partners	Social groups and activities	Monthly	Booking through ATV
Online learning resources	National (Kinship, OpenLearn, MindEd etc.)	Flexible online courses	Available anytime	Direct access online

A final note

You can take things at your own pace and choose what feels right for you and your family.

You are not expected to do everything – support is there when you need it.

8. Financial Support and Practical Help

What financial support is available

We understand that financial support can play an important role in helping you provide a stable and secure home for the child in your care.

In Wokingham, support is based on the needs of the child and your individual circumstances, rather than only the type of legal arrangement in place.

Some financial support is a legal entitlement (for example, fostering allowances for looked after children or support linked to assessed needs).

Other support is discretionary and will depend on assessment, your circumstances and available resources.

We will explain clearly what has been agreed and why.

Types of financial support

Type of arrangement	What this means for financial support
Connected person (kinship foster care)	You receive a weekly fostering allowance. The amount depends on the child's age and follows fostering allowance rates.
Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	You may be considered for a weekly allowance following an assessment. This is usually means tested and linked to fostering rates, taking benefits into account.
Child Arrangements Order (CAO)	You may be able to access financial support following an assessment of need. There is no standard allowance.
Informal family arrangements	You do not usually receive a regular allowance. You may be able to claim benefits and access one-off or discretionary support if needed.

Regular financial support

Some kinship carers may receive a financial allowance to help meet the child's day-to-day needs.

This is more likely where:

- the child was previously looked after
- you are a connected foster carer

- you are caring for a child under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or other permanency arrangement

Any ongoing financial support will be based on an assessment of need and will usually be reviewed regularly.

One-off or additional payments

In some situations, we may agree one-off or time-limited payments to help meet specific needs, for example:

- essential items such as beds, clothing or equipment
- support when a child first moves into your care
- help with exceptional costs linked to the child's needs

These payments are not automatic and are not guaranteed. These are considered on a case-by-case basis, following an assessment of need by Children's Services.

Support linked to Special Guardianship or adoption

If you are a Special Guardian, you may be eligible for:

- financial support as part of a Special Guardianship support plan
- additional therapeutic support funded through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF), where eligible

This will always be discussed with you as part of your support planning.

Wider financial help and advice

You may also be able to claim national benefits and financial support, such as:

- Child Benefit
- Universal Credit or other welfare benefits

We can support you to understand what you may be entitled to and signpost you to further advice where needed.

Practical support

In addition to financial help, practical support may also be available depending on your situation. This could include:

- help to access local services and community support
- support linked to education, activities or wellbeing
- advice and signposting to local charities or resources

How decisions are made

Financial support is not automatic and is usually based on an assessment of the child's needs and your circumstances.

In line with the Children Act 1989 and national guidance, we consider:

- the child's needs and wellbeing
- the cost of meeting those needs
- your individual circumstances
- whether there are other sources of support available

AA social worker will complete an assessment, which may include a financial (means) assessment where appropriate. This looks at your income, savings and household circumstances to help decide what financial support may be available.

Decisions are reviewed by a manager to ensure they are fair, consistent, and in line with current policies and the assessed needs of the child in your care.

Our approach

We follow a needs-led approach to financial support. This means:

- support is based on what the child needs, not just legal status
- we aim to provide the right support at the right time
- support is used where it helps maintain safe and stable family arrangements

We recognise that every family's situation is different. In some circumstances, we may agree additional or time-limited support where this is needed to help maintain stability.

Reviewing support

Financial support is reviewed to make sure it continues to meet needs.

Reviews may take place:

- at agreed intervals
- when circumstances change
- as part of ongoing planning for the child

You can ask for a review at any time by contacting your social worker, the Kinship Team or Early Help services if your situation changes or you feel your support no longer reflects your needs.

Being open and transparent

We are committed to being clear about how decisions are made.

- Decisions are recorded and explained clearly
- You will be told what has been agreed and why
- Ongoing support will be confirmed in writing, including how it will be reviewed

If anything is unclear, let us know and we will talk this through with you.

If you disagree with a decision

We want you to feel confident that decisions are fair. If you are unhappy with a decision, you can:

1. Speak with your social worker
2. Ask to speak to a Team Manager
3. Request a review of the decision
4. Use the Council's complaints process

We will always aim to resolve concerns openly and as quickly as possible.

Our commitment

We are committed to:

- being clear and open about financial support
- taking a fair and consistent approach
- ensuring support is based on need and makes a real difference

If you are unsure about any aspect of financial support, please speak to your worker – we are here to help.

C. Supporting Your Family and Relationships

9. Support for children and families who have experienced trauma

Understanding your child and how we support your family

This section explains how we support you to understand your child's behaviour and emotional needs, and how we will work with you to help your child feel safe, settled and supported.

Many children in kinship care have been through difficult experiences, such as loss, separation from parents or changes in who cares for them. These experiences can affect how children feel, behave and build relationships.



In Wokingham, we take a trauma-informed and whole-family approach. This means we recognise what children may have experienced and support you and your family in ways that help children feel safe, understood and settled.

We focus not just on behaviour, but on what might be behind it. For example, a child who feels anxious or angry may be expressing worry, uncertainty or past experiences. We will help you understand this and respond in ways that support the child's wellbeing.

This approach reflects national guidance, including the Kinship Care Statutory Guidance (2024) and *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)*, which emphasise understanding children's experiences and responding in supportive, consistent ways.

Why This Matters

Children may show their feelings in different ways. They might:

- find it hard to trust adults
- struggle with routines, school or friendships
- become anxious, withdrawn or angry
- need lots of reassurance

These responses are often linked to early experiences, including loss, change and uncertainty.

With the right support, children can feel safer, build trusting relationships and begin to thrive.

How we support you and your family

You are not expected to have all the answers. We will work alongside you to build your confidence and understanding over time.

Support may include advice from your worker, training, guidance on routines and behaviour, and specialist help where needed. This will be tailored to your family and may form part of your support plan.

We take a whole-family approach, recognising that kinship care affects everyone in the household. We will consider the needs of:

- you as a carer
- the child in your care
- other children in your family

Our aim is to help your whole family feel safe, supported and able to adjust to changes.

Understanding needs and support

The table below shows some common needs and how we can support you:

What a child may need	What this might look like	How we support you
Feeling safe	Anxiety, worry, needing reassurance	Consistent routines, guidance and support for carers
Building trust	Difficulty forming relationships, testing boundaries	Relationship-based parenting support and advice
Managing emotions	Anger, withdrawal, emotional outbursts	Strategies, training and therapeutic input where needed
Understanding identity	Questions about family, life story	Life story work and guidance for carers
Support at school	Behaviour or learning difficulties	Virtual School advice and SEND support
Family stability	Stress or changes in relationships	Whole-family support and Early Help services

What you can expect

You can expect us to:

- take time to understand your child and family
- listen to your experiences
- offer practical advice and support
- work with you in a respectful, non-judgemental way
- focus on building stability over time

A final note

Children in kinship care can and do thrive when they feel safe, understood and supported.

We are here to support you and your family, helping you build strong relationships and a stable, positive future together.

10. Working with birth families and family time (contact)

Supporting your child's important relationships

This section explains how we support safe and positive relationships between children and their birth families, and how we will work with you to manage family time in a way that supports your child's wellbeing and emotional security.

For many children, relationships with their birth family are important. Where it is safe and appropriate, staying in touch with parents, siblings or extended family can help children understand who they are, maintain important connections and feel a sense of belonging.

We also recognise that these relationships can sometimes be complex or emotionally challenging. Children may have mixed feelings about family time, especially if they have experienced loss or uncertainty. We will work with you to make sure arrangements are safe, manageable and support your child's emotional wellbeing.

Planning family time

Family time (sometimes called contact) is planned carefully based on:

- the child's needs, wishes and feelings, and your role in supporting theirsafety and wellbeing
- any legal arrangements, such as court orders
- professional advice and assessments

Arrangements will be clearly set out in the child's Care Plan or support plan, so everyone understands what has been agreed.

Family time can take different forms, including face-to-face time, phone or video calls, or exchanging letters and updates. What matters most is that it is right for your child and supports their sense of stability.

How we support you and your family

You are not expected to manage family time on your own.

Your main point of contact will usually be your social worker or Early Help practitioner. They will help you plan, review and manage family time, and will work with you if things become difficult.

Other professionals or services may be involved where needed, for example if additional support is required.



We will work alongside you to:

- plan arrangements that feel safe and realistic
- support positive relationships where possible
- reduce stress and uncertainty for you and your child
- review and adjust plans as your child's needs change

This reflects our trauma-informed and whole-family approach, recognising that family time affects not only the child, but everyone involved.

Reviewing family time

Family time is not fixed and may change over time as children grow and their needs develop.

We will regularly review how arrangements are working, taking into account:

- your child's emotional wellbeing and development
- your experience as a carer
- how well the arrangements support stability and relationships

Changes will be made where needed to ensure family time continues to be safe, appropriate and beneficial.

When family time is difficult

We understand that family time can sometimes feel emotionally challenging or unpredictable, particularly if children are managing strong feelings or changes in relationships.

If you have concerns, we will:

- listen and take them seriously
- review arrangements with you
- offer guidance or mediation where needed
- make changes where necessary

If you are finding family time difficult, please speak to your worker as soon as possible so we can support you and review what is in place.

Our aim is to support you to manage these situations in a way that helps your child feel safe and understood.

Keeping children safe

Your child's voice is central to decisions about family time.

We will support children to share how they feel in ways that work for them, and their views will be considered alongside their safety and wellbeing. This is particularly important as children grow older and their needs and relationships change.

Listening to your child

Your child's voice is central to decisions about family time.

We will support children to share how they feel in ways that work for them, and their views will be considered alongside their safety and wellbeing. This is particularly important as children grow older and their needs and relationships change.

What you can expect

You can expect family time to be:

- carefully planned and clearly explained
- reviewed regularly as your child grows
- focused on emotional wellbeing and stability
- supported by professionals working together

A final note

We know that every family situation is different, and that relationships can change over time.

We will work alongside you to find practical solutions, support positive relationships where appropriate, and always prioritise your child's safety, wellbeing and long-term stability—including when situations feel challenging or change quickly.

You are not alone in managing family time—we are here to support you.

11. Transition to Adulthood

Preparing for adult life

This section explains how we support young people in kinship care to prepare for adulthood, and how we will work with you to make sure this happens in a planned and supportive way.

Our aim is to help young people move into adulthood feeling safe, confident and supported to make their own choices.

Growing up and becoming independent is a big step. For young people in kinship care, this can bring both opportunities and uncertainty.

In Wokingham, we take a gradual, relationship-based approach. This means young people are supported to build skills, make decisions and move towards independence at a pace that feels right for them.

Support for young people

Some young people will be entitled to additional support if they have been looked after by the local authority.

This may include:

- a needs assessment from around age 16
- a Pathway Plan setting out support into adulthood
- a Personal Adviser to provide guidance and practical help
- support up to age 21 (or up to 25 where needed)

This support is set out in law to help young people move safely into adult life.

If a young person is not eligible for this support, we will still work with families to ensure they are not left without help.

How we support you and your family

We will work alongside you to make sure transitions are planned, not rushed.

Support will be practical, tailored and focused on building independence over time.

This may include help with:

- planning next steps, such as education, training or work
- building confidence in day-to-day skills
- finding and keeping safe, suitable accommodation
- staying connected to trusted adults and relationships

Your main point of contact will usually be your social worker or Early Help practitioner, who will help coordinate support and make sure plans are clear. Where eligible, support may also be provided by a Personal Adviser or Leaving Care services.

Planning ahead

We will start planning early to avoid last-minute decisions or crisis situations.

Planning usually begins from around age 16, or earlier if needed, and will be reviewed regularly as things change. We will support young people to ensure their views will always be central to these plans.

What you can expect

You can expect support to be:

- planned early and reviewed regularly
- based on trusted relationships
- flexible and at the young person's pace
- focused on building confidence, independence and future opportunities

A final note

Every young person's journey into adulthood is different, and they may need support at different times. We will work with you to help your young person feel ready, confident and supported as they move forward.

12. Advice, Support and Independent Services

Knowing who to contact

This section explains who you can contact for advice and support, both locally in Wokingham and through independent organisations.

We want you to feel confident about where to go for help.

Local support in Wokingham

If you are already working with Children's Services, your social worker or supervising worker will usually be your first point of contact. They can offer advice or help you access the right support.



If you do not have a worker, or are unsure who to contact, you can speak to the **Children's Services Duty Team**, who will guide you.

Other local support includes:

- **Kinship Team** – for support with kinship care and placements
- **Early Help** services – for support with family life, parenting and wellbeing
- **SENDIASS** (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service) – provides free, independent advice and support on education, SEND and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

Independent advice

You can also get independent advice if you would prefer to speak to someone outside the council.

- **Family Rights Group (FRG)** offers free, confidential advice about your rights and working with Children's Services
- **Kinship (national charity)** offers free advice, training, peer support and online support groups for kinship carers
- **CoramBAAF (Coram)** provides information and guidance on kinship care and legal options
- **Fosterline (The Fostering Network)** offers free, independent and confidential advice for foster carers and kinship foster carers in England

These services can help you understand your options and feel more confident.



Who to contact for what

If you are unsure where to start, contact the Children's Services Duty Team; they will guide you to the right service.

If you need...	Who to contact	How to contact
Immediate danger or emergency	Emergency Services	☎ 999
Urgent concerns outside office hours	Berkshire Emergency Duty Service (Out of Hours)	☎ 01344 786 543
Urgent health or mental health advice	NHS 111	☎ 111
General advice or not sure where to go	Children's Services Duty Team / Early Help Hub	☎ 0118 908 8002 ✉ triage@wokingham.gov.uk
Support from your worker	Your Social Worker or Supervising Worker	Contact directly
Support with kinship care or placements	Kinship Team	☎ 0118 908 8002 ✉ Kinshipcare@wokingham.gov.uk
Early or preventative family support	Early Help Services	☎ 0118 908 8002
Help with SEND or school issues	SEND Team / SENDIASS	☎ 0118 974 6000
Support for children in care / previously looked after	Virtual School	✉ virtualschool@wokingham.gov.uk

Housing, benefits or financial help	Housing and Benefits Team	☎ 0118 974 6000 ✉ benefits@wokingham.gov.uk
Housing Needs and Options Service	Housing	☎ 0118 974 6000 ✉ housing.needs@wokingham.gov.uk
Support for teenagers leaving care (where eligible)	Leaving Care Service	Via your worker or Personal Adviser
Post SGO and therapeutic support	Adopt Thames Valley	☎ 0118 908 8009 ✉ ATVhelpdesk@Oxfordshire.gov.uk 🌐 adoptthamesvalley.org.uk
Emotional wellbeing (school nursing / 0-19 service)	Berkshire Healthcare 0-19 Service	☎ 0118 904 7330 📞 Parent text: 07312 263 194 📞 Young people text: 07312 263 266 ✉ csnwokingham@berkshire.nhs.uk
Health visiting (0-5 years)	Health Visiting Service	☎ 0300 365 7000 ☎ 07312 263 283 ✉ DutyHVWokingham@berkshire.nhs.uk
Specialist mental health support (CAMHS)	CAMHS (Berkshire)	☎ 0118 949 5060
Independent advice about your rights	Family Rights Group	☎ 0808 801 0366
Advice, training and peer support for kinship carers	Kinship (national charity)	☎ 0300 123 7015
Information and guidance on kinship care	Coram (CoramBAAF)	🌐 Website
Independent advice for foster and kinship foster carers	Fosterline (The Fostering Network)	☎ 0800 040 7675

What you can expect

We aim to respond to enquiries clearly and promptly.

- most enquiries are responded to within a few working days
- urgent concerns will be prioritised

If you feel your concerns have not been addressed, you can:

1. follow up with the service
2. ask to speak to a manager
3. use the Council's complaints process

D. How We Work and Make Decisions

13. Listening to your views and working together

Working together with families

This section explains how we work with kinship families to shape and improve services in Wokingham.

We believe the best support is developed with families, not just for them. This means listening to your experiences, understanding what matters to you, and using this to improve how services are designed and delivered.

Kinship carers, children and young people bring valuable insight through their lived experience. Your feedback helps us understand what is working well and where we can do better.

How you can be involved

There are different ways you can share your views, depending on what feels right for you. This might be through conversations with your worker, surveys, group discussions or taking part in local engagement activities.

In Wokingham, this includes working with our Participation Team or Kinship Team, attending local sessions, or taking part in the Kinship Families Partnership Group, which brings carers together to share experiences and help shape how services develop.

We will keep kinship carers and partner agencies informed through newsletters, emails, targeted meetings and website updates, so you know about opportunities to get involved.

You can also take part in surveys, events or the Kinship Families Partnership Group. To find out more, contact the Kinship Team.

How we use your feedback

We are committed to listening and learning from families. We use what you tell us to improve services, develop new ideas and make sure support reflects real experiences.

We will also aim to keep you informed about how your feedback is being used, so you can see the difference it makes.

Our commitment

We are committed to working in partnership with families, listening to your experiences and using your feedback to improve support for kinship families in Wokingham.

14. Governance, Oversight and Continuous Improvement

How we make sure support is effective

In Wokingham, we are committed to providing a Kinship Local Offer that is clear, fair and continuously improving. We want families to feel confident that services are well-led and that your experiences help shape how support develops over time.

Leadership and accountability

Overall accountability for the Kinship Local Offer sits within Children's Services.

Children's Services in Wokingham are inspected by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), providing independent oversight and supporting continuous improvement in the quality and effectiveness of services for children and families.

The Responsible Officer is:

Adam Davis, Service Director - Homes, Care and Provision

He oversees the Local Offer to make sure it:

- meets legal duties and national guidance
- reflects Wokingham's practice and approach
- is regularly reviewed and improved

How decisions are made

Decisions about services are based on what children, young people and families tell us, alongside learning from practice, performance information, and national guidance. This helps ensure decisions are consistent, evidence-based and focused on children's needs.

Working with families

We work alongside kinship carers and young people to shape services. This includes gathering feedback, involving families in service development, and using lived experience to improve support so it reflects what families need in real life.

Quality and continuous improvement

We regularly review how well services are working by looking at the quality of support, feedback and complaints, and outcomes for children such as stability and wellbeing. This helps us improve services and ensure support remains fair and effective.

Decision-making processes

Some decisions involve formal processes, including panels and senior management oversight. These follow current council policies and procedures, helping to ensure decisions are well considered, consistent and based on the needs of the child.

Reviewing the Local Offer

This Local Offer is reviewed at least once a year, and updated when needed, taking account of changes in law or guidance, feedback from families, and learning from practice.

15. Dispute Resolution and Complaints

If something isn't working

We want you to feel heard, respected and supported. If something doesn't feel right, please tell us. Most concerns can be sorted quickly by talking things through, and we will always try to resolve issues as early as possible.

Raising a concern or complaint will not affect the support you receive.

Raising a concern

Many issues can be resolved informally.

Start by speaking to your social worker or the person involved. If needed, you can ask to speak to a Team Manager or request a meeting to talk things through.

We will listen, explain decisions clearly, and work with you to find a way forward. If you disagree with a decision, we can review it with you and make sure you understand how it was reached. In some cases, a review meeting or mediation may help resolve things.

Before making a formal complaint, you can request a review of a decision through internal processes (for example, by a Team Manager or senior manager, and, where appropriate, a panel).

Making a complaint

If your concern cannot be resolved, you can make a formal complaint through the Council's Children's Services complaints process.

You can do this by speaking to your worker, contacting the service directly, or emailing:

ChildrensServicesComplaints@wokingham.gov.uk

We will acknowledge your complaint, look into what has happened, and respond clearly and fairly. If you are not satisfied, you can ask for your complaint to be reviewed.

You can request a copy of the complaints policy at any time. We also welcome compliments and feedback to help us improve.

Independent advice and support

You do not have to manage this alone.

Children and young people, and sometimes carers, can get support from an **independent advocate** to help them understand their rights, express their views or make a complaint.

If you are still unhappy after completing the complaints process, you can contact the:

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

☎ 0300 061 0614

🌐 www.lgo.org.uk

They are independent and can review whether the Council has acted fairly.

16. Accessibility and Inclusion

Making support easy to access

We want all kinship carers, children and young people to be able to understand and use this Local Offer easily.

We are committed to making information and services clear, inclusive and fair for everyone. This includes meeting our legal duties to make reasonable adjustments and ensure support is accessible.

Support with communication

If you need help understanding information, we can support you. This may include interpreters, translated information, or taking extra time to explain things clearly.

Please let your worker know what works best for you, or contact the Kinship Team if needed.

Accessible information

We aim to provide information in ways that are easy to understand. This includes using plain English and offering information in different formats, such as large print or audio, where needed.

If you find something difficult to access, we can provide it in a way that suits you.

Supporting your needs

We will make reasonable adjustments so you can take part fully in meetings and decisions. This might include changing how meetings are held or providing extra support.

We also recognise and respect differences in culture, language, disability, identity and family structure.



If something isn't accessible

If something is difficult to access or understand, please let us know by speaking to your worker or contacting the service.

We will work with you to find a solution and improve how we provide support.

17. Policies and Guidance We Follow

How this Local Offer fits with wider services

This Local Offer is part of Wokingham's wider Children's Services approach. It brings together information about support for kinship families in a clear and consistent way, and connects with other Local Offers so families receive joined-up support.

National legislation and guidance

Our approach is guided by national legislation and statutory guidance, including:

- Children Act 1989
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)
- Kinship Care Statutory Guidance (2024) and National Kinship Care Strategy (2023)
- Special Guardianship Regulations

- Equality Act 2010
- SEND Code of Practice (2015)
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act (2026)
- National developments to strengthen kinship care, including the Kinship Care Ambassador programme (2026)

These set out how services should support children safely within their family networks, and ensure support is fair, consistent and focused on children's wellbeing.

Alignment with Wokingham services

This Local Offer reflects how services work together in Wokingham. It aligns with Children's Services policies, practice standards, care planning and support arrangements, helping to ensure families experience consistent and joined-up support.

Review and oversight

This Local Offer is reviewed regularly to keep it accurate and up to date.

Overall responsibility sits with:

Adam Davis, Service Director - Homes, Care and Provision

Updates take account of changes in guidance, feedback from families, and learning from practice.

A living document

This Local Offer will continue to develop as services improve. We use feedback from kinship carers, children and partners to make sure support reflects real needs and experiences.

This Local Offer will continue to develop as services improve. We use feedback from kinship carers, children and partners to make sure support reflects real needs and experiences.

Your voice is an important part of this. By sharing your feedback through conversations with your social worker, the Kinship Team or Participation Team, or by taking part in surveys, groups or events, you help shape what comes next for kinship families in Wokingham.

A final thanks to those who contributed

We would like to thank all kinship carers, children and young people, and our local partners who have contributed their time, experience and insight to inform this Local Offer. Your input helps us build services that are supportive, fair and responsive to families' needs.

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Designed by WBC Digital Solutions July 2026

TH6401

