PRACTICE NOTE

Kinship Care: Home and Housing

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GWSF Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations

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INTRODUCTION

Produced by ALACHO with support from The Promise Scotland, the Scottish Government and the Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption (AFKA) Scotland, this note is intended as a good practice resource for housing practitioners. It is not statutory guidance and should not be regarded as a definitive statement of practice. Rather, it aims to raise awareness of the circumstances and experiences of kinship families and to support housing services to consider how their policies, processes and day-to-day practice can contribute to successful and sustainable kinship care arrangements. To this end it sets out practical considerations that can help kinship families and encourages effective partnership working across housing, children's services and other relevant services.

This note builds on the 'Housing Need and Kinship Care' briefing for housing officers, published by AFKA Scotland in 2024[1]. It is for housing service providers across local authorities and registered social landlords including advice services, housing management and those responsible for policy development and strategic planning. It is relevant to cross-service strategic and practice collaboration between housing, children's services and others who may be supporting kinship families.

Housing has an important role to play in supporting kinship care. Stable, suitable housing can help children remain within their family and community networks, while housing pressures can place additional strain on families already experiencing significant change and complexity. Recognising and responding to the needs of kinship families is therefore an important part of delivering effective housing services and supporting wider ambitions to keep The Promise[2] and meet the 'UNCRC Requirements' of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024[3]. That wider landscape includes the preventative focus of 'Ask and Act', an increasing focus on housing services working closely alongside others, and early identification and action to address housing issues playing a central role in supporting families[4].

1 Kinship_care_Housing_officer_brief_digital_2024.pdf

2 The Promise

3 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024

4 Housing (Scotland) Act 2025 - The 'ask and act' homeless prevention duties included in Part 5 will be in force from November 2028.

THE SMITHS

The experience of every kinship family is unique. But two 'composite stories', drawn from lived experience, illustrate some of the opportunities for improving the lives of the Smith family, with home and housing support.

Becky is the oldest of three siblings. She is 15, Callum is 12 and Emily 4. They are not able to live with either of their parents.



WHAT IS KINSHIP CARE?

Kinship care refers to situations where a child cannot live with their parent(s) and is instead cared for by someone with whom they already have an established relationship, such as a grandparent, sibling, aunt, uncle, family friend or other trusted adult. These arrangements are often established at short notice and can bring significant changes to a family's circumstances, including their housing needs.

In Scotland, eligible carers and children can receive kinship care assistance under Part 13 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014[5] and the Kinship Care Assistance (Scotland) Order 2016[6]. Separate arrangements apply where a child is formally 'looked after' by the local authority and placed with a kinship carer. Children living in kinship families have a diverse range of experiences and may be subject to a range of legal orders, or none. Whatever the legal route or 'informal' family arrangement, kinship carers take on responsibility for meeting a child's day-to-day needs and supporting their wellbeing.

The number of children in kinship care has grown significantly over the past decade. In July 2025, kinship care was the most common setting for children living away from their parental home, accounting for 35% of all formally 'looked after' children[7]. More broadly, around 12,800 children were living in kinship care in Scotland in 2022[8], two thirds of whom were not formally looked after.

5 Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

6 The Kinship Care Assistance (Scotland) Order 2016

7 Children's Social Work Statistics: Looked After Children - 2024-25 - gov.scot

8 Kinship Care Statistics - gov.scot

Supporting and sustaining kinship care is central to keeping The Promise[9] - Scotland's transformational commitment, in the light of the Independent Care Review, to become a nation where all children grow up loved, safe and respected so they can realise their full potential. Kinship care helps many children remain connected to their family, school, community and identity. Delivering Scotland's Vision for Kinship Care[10] and implementation of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026[11] will further strengthen support for kinship families.

BEST PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL LANDLORDS

1. SERVICE PLANNING AND COORDINATION

Kinship families should be at the heart of approaches that help identify their home and housing needs, and what will most help meet them.

Understanding and planning for the needs of kinship carers starts with strategic planning and joint working with children's social work services and broader children's services and health and social care partnerships.

The 2026 edition of the Local Housing Strategy guidance[12] is clear that understanding and planning for the needs of kinship care households is an integral part of keeping The Promise. This includes the needs of families providing kinship care and for those young people seeking to move on from a kinship care arrangement. In this context, those planning services should also consider how best to give effect to the Housing Options Protocol For Care Leavers[13], for the young people it covers, and plan for the housing needs of other young people moving on from kinship care.

The needs of kinship care families and those leaving such arrangements are likely to be specific and best understood based on direct knowledge of those involved. For this reason, landlords and strategic housing authorities should consider allocating responsibility for liaising with kinship care families and partners working in children's social work and local health and social care partnership to specific named officer(s).

This need not be a full-time role or a single individual but it will be important to have someone within housing services with a detailed understanding of the provision of kinship care locally and the specific needs of those families, as well as the ability to discuss and explain housing options and wider service availability as those households move through the kinship care experience. In many areas there are now specialist kinship care teams within children's services, and/or

9 The Promise

10 Scotland's vision for kinship care: our offer of support for families - gov.scot

11 Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026

12 Local Housing Strategy Guidance 2025

13 Introduction - Housing options protocol for care leavers: guidance for corporate parents - gov.scot

third sector organisations providing support to kinship families, where close links can be developed.

Kinship care families should be consulted on their needs and how best to ensure that they are met. It is important that the local housing strategy should include explicit reference to the scale of kinship care needs and the actions planned to address them. This should include consideration of issues arising from housing allocation and homelessness, key pressure points in housing management, and the provision of adaptations where these are required to ensure that a kinship care arrangement is effectively supported.

A key strategic aspect that requires thought in every area is how housing services are best able to identify which families are providing kinship care. Circumstances will vary broadly, including in relation to whether there is or is not any social work involvement with the family. Processes should support appropriate and sensitive identification, including self-identification by carers, in ways that enable all kinship families to receive good support.The development of 'Ask and Act' will further enable approaches to appropriate sharing of information across services.

2. ALLOCATION, HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING OPTIONS

There will be some families where the house is inadequate to meet the needs of a kinship family and alternative housing options need to be considered.

Where this is the case a 'housing options' approach should be taken, working with the family to look at the range of options that could meet their needs, and exploring the practicality, desirability and achievability of each.

For most tenants the best option is likely to be remaining in social housing and seeking a move to a more suitable home. The statutory framework for the allocation of social housing is relatively complex. The Scottish Government has worked with social landlords and others to develop comprehensive guidance[14] on how social landlords should approach developing their allocations policy and how they should be reviewed.

This guidance is clear that the needs of kinship carers should be considered when developing or reviewing an allocations policy. It underlines that kinship carers and those providing advice and support services to them should be consulted as part of the development or review of an allocations policy. In many areas there are now kinship groups and networks of peer support, providing valuable opportunity for working together[15].

Where there is a specific kinship care-related housing need it is likely to fall within the "reasonable preference category: People who are living under unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs".

It will also be important to ensure that kinship care arrangements are properly identified and

14 Social Housing Allocations in Scotland: A Practice Guide - February 2019

15 More information can be found on the KCASS (Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland) website: Welcome | Kinship.scot

addressed in any policy relating to homelessness.

The most common ‘unmet need’ that kinship care families are likely to experience will be overcrowding.This may arise at short notice, when a kinship care placement becomes necessary to safeguard the wellbeing of a child or young person. High levels of overcrowding put significant strain on family members, often in the context of wide-ranging complexity and challenge in the family’s lives. It can create a risk to the sustainability of the care being provided, or to the possibility of kinship care being provided from the outset.

Prompt responses to significant housing need will often be of central importance to kinship families or potential kinship carers considering care. In many situations that may be challenging to achieve, with complexity and competing demands within allocations.

However, it is important that:

- Families are given comprehensive and realistic advice on their housing options.
- Arrangements are in place to quickly consider their needs and allocate any additional priority that is allowed through the allocations policy.
- Services work together with families to identify more straightforward, ‘quick win’ options that may help improve their immediate situation within their home. That can include furniture, repairs and financial assistance to support the family’s own solutions. A number of areas are now developing such approaches.

Good communication with the family is key, ensuring that home and housing needs are identified early and support is provided where possible. Allocations staff should have a sound knowledge of kinship care and its importance within the framework of The Promise, Scotland’s Vision for Kinship Care, and human rights enablement for children and young people.

Where the policy allows for urgent or special consideration for families with levels of need or risk that can’t be fully covered by an allocations policy, access to this “special case” consideration should be as quick as possible. It shouldn’t be overly intrusive in the way in which the family are asked to articulate their story or their needs. They will often have done so already, with other professionals. However, it is important that the longer-term risks to children from a breakdown in a kinship care arrangement are clearly taken into account in the decision-making, and that other professionals involved in supporting the family are part of the process. Those professionals may work within social work or kinship teams, broader children’s services or the third sector.

In the very last resort, it may be appropriate to recognise that the definition of statutory homelessness includes any situation where it is “unreasonable” for a household to continue to live in their accommodation. That could include situations where overcrowding is significant, there are other risks to the sustainability of the kinship care arrangement, and/or a breakdown could result in significant harm to the children involved. However, early advice, joint working and a broader strategic approach that wherever possible avoids any need for a

family to identify as homeless is essential.

3. ADAPTATIONS

Ensuring that the home meets the needs of all within the family is often central to the success of a kinship care arrangement, and adaptation can often offer significant benefits. It is important to that housing staff work closely with the family, social work services and/or others involved in supporting the family to deliver the work required quickly and sensitively based on the needs of the household as a whole. In some areas, successful options have also included making use of garden space for 'pods' or other spaces that can imaginatively meet need.

If an adaptation isn't possible for technical reasons, a housing options approach should be adopted, as outlined above.

This could include a referral to Housing Options Scotland (HOS)[16]. They specialise in finding appropriate housing solutions, including ownership options, for disabled people and people with serious health concerns, which can be an aspect of kinship family situations. HOS has a person-centred approach and has a strong track record in advocating for clients and finding appropriate housing solutions.

4. HOUSING MANAGEMENT

Kinship carers are providing loving care to children and young people across Scotland. All kinship family's circumstances are unique, but many find themselves navigating complex emotional, practical and financial challenges. Many children living in kinship care, and many kinship carers themselves, may have experienced significant adversity, family disruption or trauma. Housing services should seek to engage families in ways that are trauma-informed, compassionate, relationship-based and minimise the need for families to repeatedly retell difficult experiences.

Feedback from kinship carers highlights the impact of wider family relationships, additional support needs, experiences of trauma, and the needs of carers themselves, many of whom are older and may have their own caring responsibilities.

Many kinship care arrangements are established at short notice and can bring significant changes to family circumstances, household composition and housing needs. Recognising when a household is providing kinship care can help housing staff understand those circumstances, ensure appropriate support is available where needed, and contribute to the stability of the arrangement. In doing so, housing services can play an important role in helping children remain within their family and community networks.

Kinship families may often be navigating a number of significant pressures and changes as new household dynamics are established or evolve. The complexity of relationships both within the kinship home and with parents and family members beyond it is often highlighted by kinship carers.

16 Housing Options Scotland

In this context, an awareness and sensitivity to the following will be important aspects of housing management:

- Families often need time and support to adjust to new circumstances, and there may be long-term changes in their overall approach to managing the tenancy.
- Kinship care often entails increased financial pressure. That can include increased food and utility costs, changes to employment pattern and benefit entitlement. Some kinship carers will be entitled to the Scottish Recommended Allowance[17], but others will not.
- Where rent arrears begin to accrue, work with the family and other professionals who may be involved, look to the underlying issues, ensure that benefit income is maximised, and provide time and support to help the family address the situation.
- Kinship care is explicitly recognised in the Scottish Government guidance on discretionary housing payments (DHP)[18], which sets out a number of circumstances that local authorities may want to take into account when considering DHP applications. That includes specific reference to potential support for kinship families, where doing so would help children remain in a familiar area, continue attending their local school, or access suitably sized accommodation.
- Housing staff should actively explore the availability of DHP and support the family through the application process, rather than just refer them to another team.
- The existence of a kinship care arrangement should be considered a key material factor when considering any escalation of rent arrears action. In the case of kinship care arrangements where there is an allocated social worker in place, they should be fully involved, alongside the family, in any consideration of actions that could result in the loss of a tenancy and given the necessary information and time to work with the family to avoid any threat of court action or eviction. Where there is no allocated social worker and the family may benefit from additional support, housing staff should discuss with the family whether a referral to local children's social work services would help. If there is evidence of a safeguarding or child protection concern, staff should follow local child protection procedures and share relevant information without delay.

Kinship families and professionals working alongside them repeatedly emphasise the importance of understanding and relationships in helping meet needs and address challenges. Working together with families and fellow professionals is key. Information, understanding, proportionate responses and early intervention should underpin engagement with kinship families, recognising the vital role that kinship care plays in children's lives, and the importance of sustaining a safe and stable home.

17 Scottish Recommended Allowance

18 Discretionary Housing Payments guidance manual (Scotland). Updated March 2025

5. PROVIDING LINKS TO AND SIGNPOSTING FAMILIES TO ADDITIONAL NATIONAL AND LOCAL INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Whatever the nature of housing services' interactions with kinship families, an awareness of the range of national and local information and support that is available for them will always be important. Some key current links are provided in Appendix 1. More will emerge from the work to deliver Scotland's Vision for Kinship Care.

CONCLUSIONS

Housing services have an important role in supporting kinship care arrangements to succeed. Understanding the needs of kinship families should be an integral part of strategic housing planning, service development and day-to-day housing practice.

By identifying kinship families, understanding their circumstances and working collaboratively with children's services, health and social care partnerships and third sector partners, housing services can help ensure that families receive the right support at the right time.

While housing challenges are rarely the only issue facing kinship families, suitable housing, timely advice and proportionate responses to emerging difficulties can make a significant difference to the stability and sustainability of care arrangements. In doing so, housing services can help children remain safely within their family and community networks and contribute to Scotland's ambition to keep The Promise.

THE SMITHS: STORY ONE

Becky, Callum and Emily have moved to live with Mary, their paternal gran, in a two-bedroom terraced council house with a small garden. Mary is 66. She is loving, resilient and deeply committed to keeping the children together. But she's physically and emotionally exhausted. She's on low income, and worried about her entitlements as she approaches state pension age.

Becky is facing prelims. She shares a bedroom with Emily. She wishes she had some space to study.

Callum shares a room with his younger cousin, Jamie, who already lived with Mary. He finds school hard. He feels crowded and overlooked at home.

Emily adores Becky, who she copies constantly. The tight space makes bedtime routines tricky.



The house can feel damp, a particular worry for Mary because of Emily's asthma.

Mary sleeps on a sofa bed in the sitting room.

The entrance area is very cluttered. There is nowhere to store shoes.

Mary doesn't want to move— she's close to the kids' schools, to the GP, and to neighbours she has known for years.

THE SMITHS: HOW COULD STORY ONE UNFOLD?

Mary is in a meeting with Mhairi, the Housing Officer, because of growing arrears. She mentions the damp. As Mhairi explores that issue, it emerges that Mary is caring for Becky, Callum and Emily.

Mhairi is aware of the local focus on supporting kinship carers, and the networks of support. Arun, a colleague in the Housing team, has lead responsibility for partnership approches to supporting kinship carers, and provides regular updates to the team as a whole.

Other aspects of the challenges being faced by Mary emerge from their conversation. Mary is happy for Mhairi to explore what might be done, and gives the details of her link social worker in the kinship team.

4 weeks later:

The damp has been sorted. Mary and the children have new shelving and hooks in the entrance area, for shoes and clothes. Emily has an amazing box for all her toys.

12 weeks later:

Callum is out every Tuesday evening, spending time with a mentor who enjoys football. He looks forward to those days.

Work is taking place in the garden to erect a pod space, including a bed and a fold-down desk. Callum and Becky are arguing about who will have the main use, but Mary thinks they'll sort it out.

Funding has come from the joint 'spend to save' Housing/Social Care pot, agreed at the monthly cross-service Panel. That approach has been running for two years, and has helped prevent breakdowns in a number of kinship family arrangements.

Arun regularly attends the kinship carers network group to meet with carers and their families alongside members of the kinship team.

THE SMITHS: STORY TWO

Becky, Callum and Emily live with their uncle Alan in his two-bedroom flat, along with Jamie, Alan's 6-year-old.

Alan works full-time. He has a mortgage, and financial pressure is constant. He is desperate to keep the children safe and together, but often feels overwhelmed and alone. He is not sure how much longer he can cope.

Becky is embarrassed to invite her friends over.

One bathroom means constant stress in the mornings.

The dog is loved, but adds to mess, noise and responsibility.

There is no garden space, and nowhere to hang clothes to dry.

The tap in the kitchen has been dripping for months.

How might Story 2 unfold… ?



This Practice Note has been developed with support from the Scottish Government, The Promise Scotland and AFKA Scotland. It builds on recommendations from the Brothers and Sisters: Staying Together and Connected group, a subsequent Scottish Government roundtable in November 2025 on housing and kinship care, and collaborative work in New Horizons – Kinship Care, Home and Housing involving a number of local and national partners.

afka SCOTLAND

The Promise Scotland
SUPPORTING CHANGE FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & CARE EXPERIENCED ADULTS

Kinship Care
Advice service for Scotland

APPENDIX 1: NATIONAL LINKS AND RESOURCES

Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers

Welcome | Kinship.scot - Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland

Information on An Open Door: A Kinship Care, Home and Housing Consultation; And New Horizons - Kinship Care, Home and Housing

The Promise Scotland

AFKA - Association for Fostering, Kinship & Adoption Scotland

Scottish Federation of Housing Associations

Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations

Chartered Institute of Housing

Home - Shelter Scotland

Housing Options Scotland

Child Poverty Action Group

Clan Childlaw

Money Talk Team | Citizens Advice Scotland