

RESPONSE TO THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S 'VISION FOR KINSHIP CARE' CONSULTATION

FEBRUARY 2026

Aberlour is the largest solely Scottish children's charity. Delivering more than fifty services, we work with children, young people and families, providing services and support in communities across Scotland.

We work with families to overcome the challenges they face, such as the impact of drugs and alcohol, growing up in and leaving care, poor mental health, living with a disability, experience of domestic abuse or the impact of poverty and disadvantage.

We offer compassionate support to families and support them in their journey to heal and grow.

Introduction

In 2020 Scotland made a pledge to children, young people and families to do all we can to keep families together and where this is not possible, to provide the best care so all children can thrive.

Aberlour is committed to delivering The Promise, ensuring all children and young people across Scotland experience being safe and loved. We provide care and support for children and families, helping them to overcome challenges in their lives. Wherever possible we help families to stay together and flourish. When a child is unable to live with their family, we ensure they are nurtured within safe and loving homes.

We support incorporation of the UNCRC. Our approach to supporting people is built on ensuring children and young people's human rights are fully realised. We are committed to making rights real for the children, young people and families we support and are unwavering in our ambition to ensure all of Scotland's children have an equal chance to thrive.

Ending child poverty is Aberlour's central mission. We believe eliminating poverty ensures a fairer and more equal society. Poverty can contribute to and, often, be a cause of the multiple and intersecting challenges in families' lives – contributing to poor physical and mental health, low educational attainment, addiction and domestic abuse. At Aberlour we believe all children have a right to grow up and live free from poverty.

We believe in tackling the root causes of poverty and disadvantage, such as inadequate income, lack of affordable housing, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. We also support reducing levels of debt as this can trap families in poverty. Increasing family income helps families to flourish and is a positive investment in Scotland's children and communities.

In response to this consultation, we have provided insight from our work supporting kinship families and reflected the views and experiences of children, young people and families with experience of kinship care.

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

Yes.

The vision for Kinship Care detailed in the consultation generally reflects the views of kinship carers we support and what they say matters most to them.

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

We welcome the recognition of the importance of voice and participation of those with experience of kinship care. Our families consistently tell us they do not feel heard, and we believe that addressing this should be an immediate priority. We also welcome the commitment to more consistent support across local authorities, making it easier to raise awareness of what is available and reducing the current postcode lottery resulting in an inconsistency of access to help and support for kinship families, dependent on where they live.

We would ask that financial support is made more explicit as a core principle - especially in relation to ASN-related pressures, the costs associated with transitions, and necessary household adjustments. More broadly, we believe the vision could be clearer in acknowledging additional support needs and disabilities as a key dimension of kinship care. Support for kinship families must shift away from crisis-driven interventions and focus on earlier support. While the vision reflects this direction in several areas, its intentions could be stated more clearly.

We would also welcome greater clarity on how support will be delivered in practice. We strongly advocate for flexible provision, including out-of-hours and school-holiday support. These periods can be particularly challenging for kinship families, and we hope that services will be shaped around individual family circumstances and priorities.

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

Yes.

Income maximisation and financial support remain major areas of concern for our kinship families. One aspect we welcome in the offer is for kinship families, regardless of the formality of their care arrangement, to get the financial support they need. Often informal kinship families are out of pocket to care for children which can put a strain on the placement and can lead to breakdown.

The Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund (UAF) is a hardship fund accessible to families anywhere in Scotland experiencing extreme financial crisis. Through small cash grants for life's essentials that families otherwise cannot afford, we provide direct financial support to families who have nowhere else to turn. Social workers from across the country regularly make requests through the UAF to support kinship families in informal arrangements often for basic things a child needs, such as clothing or beds, or help families pay for food or utilities. For example, we recently supported a grandfather who is caring for his two grandchildren through an informal kinship arrangement due to significant issues arising as a result of the mother's mental health. The grandfather was on basic benefits and struggling with the cost-of-living pressures, particularly the rise in cost of energy bills. He could not afford the two beds for the children or the associated things needed for their bedroom, which our UAF covered. The grandfather, and many kinship carers across Scotland, should be as supported financially as any family in a formal kinship arrangement. They should not have to feel this strain or

to go out looking for more support when they should have received the appropriate financial support in the first instance.

More generally, financial support is a broader issue for many of our kinship families. We have many families who are struggling with the support they do receive. For context, we have supported a grandmother caring for a young boy with very complex needs. Due to his disability, the young person frequently caused damage in the home. The grandmother had to cover the repair costs herself, which pushed her into significant level of public debt. Despite the context, there was no recognition or flexibility from the local authority regarding their circumstances who pursued the outstanding debt. We believe that in such instances there must be consideration of families' financial insecurity and the consequence of punitive approaches to debt recovery that creates further hardship for our poorest and most disadvantaged families, including kinship families.

Many kinship families are unaware of what financial support they are entitled to, and the same challenge applies to general information, advice, and guidance. It is essential that these are seen as core elements of the kinship offer. We believe that advice and information must be provided as early as possible so families can be better prepared for challenges that may arise later, and so they know how to access available support before situations escalate into crisis.

Through our work, we see that kinship families often struggle with everyday family life and can often experience crises due to the strain and demand placed on kinship families. Emotional and therapeutic support is therefore vital, especially where a child or young person has a disability and children are likely to experience distress. We strongly welcome proposals for peer and community-based support, as well as practical help with home repairs, transport and unexpected issues that might occur. Kinship carers frequently tell us they feel isolated and must cope alone, and these proposals would significantly improve their experience and increase the likelihood of stable, positive outcomes for children and carers. We are also pleased to see short breaks included within the offer. Short breaks are essential, yet current provision is often inadequate or inaccessible. More funding and resources are required to meet the level of need across Scotland.

We welcome the inclusion of learning and development opportunities for kinship families. This support would need to be tailored to equip families for their unique situations. Dedicated support should be inclusive of learning opportunities for kinship carers to support children's development, attachment and additional support needs. A trauma responsive and restorative approach is critical to helping families where there has been disruption, trauma and issues such as bereavement, familial mental health, problematic substance use and other challenges that will impact and be felt by children.

We believe it would be especially helpful for carers to have access to training on neurodiversity, communication strategies, and behaviour regulation. We have supported families caring for children with additional needs who are deeply committed to the child but struggle due to the steep learning curve - sometimes contributing to breakdown of the caring arrangement. Kinship families tell us they want to feel informed, equipped and supported at every stage. At present, we are particularly concerned about the transition from children's to adult services for young people with disabilities. Support often ends too abruptly, rather than moving at the slow and supported pace families require. Moreover, transitions are difficult for families no matter the context of that process. We have also found that family placements sometimes struggle when a child grows up and becomes an adolescent, which indicates there is a need for more support for families as the child transitions eventually into adulthood.

Overall, we recognise that the proposed offer does respond to many of the needs of kinship families. We note, however, that many of these commitments have been stated by local authorities and Scottish Government before, without resulting in meaningful change. We hope that the new offer delivers on the improvements set out in the proposals. If Scotland is to truly deliver on the Promise, we must do all we can to support children in kinship care and their families. We need to ensure families have access to early help and support and dedicated, specialist help when they need it.

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

There needs to be greater recognition of the importance of early engagement by social work with families at the very start—when a kinship placement first becomes likely—and that this period is vital to help set families up to feel prepared and supported. Early interaction can make a significant difference. We would welcome social work taking a more proactive role in managing expectations, ensuring families understand their rights, and clearly explaining what support will be available to them.

We also believe there needs to be greater recognition in the offer of the impact that additional support needs have on kinship families. These families often require earlier access to information, stronger peer networks, and more tailored support. Strengthening these areas would make a meaningful difference to families caring for children with complex needs.

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

Emergency and effective short break services

Families consistently struggle to access emergency and planned short breaks, even when needs are critical. Current arrangements often collapse at short notice because services are overstretched, insufficiently trained, or limited to standard 9–5 hours. For kinship families - especially where children have complex needs - breaks must be reliable, staffed by trained carers, and available flexibly, including at evenings and weekends. Short breaks must also be part of early intervention rather than only offered in crisis. Many families reach breaking point long before any support is provided.

Support during school holidays

School holidays are one of the most difficult periods for kinship families, particularly where children have additional support needs. Without school structure and routine, many young people experience increased distress, behavioural escalation, and regression. This leaves carers isolated, exhausted, and often unable to manage alone. Prioritising this type of support would significantly reduce family stress and prevent placement instability.

Smooth transitions to adult disability services

Transitions remain one of the areas where families feel most abandoned. Transitions for disabled young people from children's to adult services are often a time of significant anxiety and stress for young people and their families and too often young people are failed by a drop off or reductions in support at the time they need it most. When a young person with a disability moves from children to adult services, support often ends abruptly, with long delays before adult packages are in place. Families are left to cope for months without the resources they previously relied on. Adult services are underfunded, thresholds are high, and processes are slow. A well-resourced transition pathway is essential to ensure continuity, reduce crisis, and prevent placements from breaking down.

Clarity around processes and timeframes

When kinship carers express that they can no longer cope, they expect a clear, timely response. Currently, even in severe crisis, families can wait months for assessments, decisions, and moves, leaving them unsupported and at risk. There is little transparency around how long processes will take, what the steps are, or who is responsible. National guidance on timelines, communication standards, and escalation routes would greatly improve confidence and ensure families are not left to navigate crisis alone.

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

We are pleased to see the proposed Kinship Advice Service for Scotland (KCASS). This focus is appropriate given the distinct nature of kinship families and will allow for specialised support. However, we also recognise that kinship families across Scotland already receive support from a wide range of local family support services, and that many of the challenges they face are not unique to kinship arrangements but are shared by families more broadly. Local family support services will therefore continue to play a vital role, and with appropriate scaling and investment, families will be less reliant on specialised, national services. National specialised services will not be able to replicate the way family support services mobilise around the family in a local context. Services like these need to be properly resourced as they will be essential to meeting the needs of all families as early as possible, including those with kinship arrangements.

We believe family support should be available to every family who needs it, so they can access the right support, at the right time, for as long as needed. Children and families' right to support can best be realised through guaranteeing holistic, whole family support for any family who may need extra help. Holistic family support includes a combination of practical, emotional and financial support and is provided in a way that reflects each families' individual circumstances. Services designed to support families must be shaped by the perspectives of families themselves, ensuring their voices are elevated and amplified and influence future care and support.

Article 18 of the UNCRC states that government must do all it can to provide parents with the help they need to bring up their children, where they may struggle to do so on their own due to the challenges in their lives. Realising the right to family support is a crucial part of how we best support and promote the wellbeing of all families across Scotland. This right to family support must be recognised on an equal footing as a child's right to health and education services. Our vision is all families can access services locally within their community, and this must include kinship families.

In strengthening the vision and offer for kinship families, there should also be a clear focus on reinforcing the rights of Kinship carers. Kinship families should be able to access the support they require - regardless of the context in which that support is needed - and should be proactively supported to navigate available services. The level of investment in family support must reflect the scale of need, ensuring that all families, including Kinship families, can receive the right help at the right time.

For more information contact Chloe Robertson (Policy and Participation Officer)

Chloe.Robertson@aberlour.org.uk