



Kinship Carers Local Offer.









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Introduction

Information, advice and support for kinship families in Milton Keynes.

This Local Offer explains the support available when a child is being raised by a relative, friend or another person with whom they have a meaningful relationship because they cannot live with their parents. It applies to informal kinship care, private fostering, kinship foster care, Child Arrangements Orders and Special Guardianship Orders.

It has been prepared in line with the Department for Education's Kinship care statutory guidance for local authorities, updated in October 2026, including the National Kinship Standards; the Children's Social Care National Framework; and the National Kinship Care Ambassador's 2026 report on improving local offers.

It should be read alongside Milton Keynes City Council's fostering, special guardianship, Family Help, safeguarding and financial support policies. This offer complies with the legal duties under the Equality Act 2010.

If you do not know which arrangement applies to you, contact us. You do not need to understand the legal framework before asking for advice.

Our Commitment and Governance

Milton Keynes City Council recognises kinship care as a distinct form of family care and a whole-family transition. We will work with children, carers, parents and wider family networks in a respectful, strengths-based and culturally responsive way.

We will:

- place the child's safety, welfare, identity, relationships and long-term stability at the centre of decisions;
- identify and involve family networks early, including through family-led decision-making;
- provide clear, timely and accessible information about legal options, assessments, support and finances;
- avoid unnecessary intrusion into private family life while offering help early and proportionately;
- ensure the child's wishes and feelings are understood and influence plans;
- coordinate support across Children's Services, education, health, housing, welfare and voluntary-sector partners;
- make decisions fairly, explain reasons in writing and provide review and complaint routes;
- co-produce and review this offer with kinship families.

The Director of Children's Services is accountable for the Local Offer. The Head of Corporate Parenting is responsible for operational oversight, supported by leaders across Family Help and Early Protection, Safeguarding, Fostering, Permanence, Education, Housing and Public Health. Delivery and outcomes will be reviewed at least annually.

Kinship Arrangements and What They Mean

Informal Kinship Care

A private family arrangement agreed privately with the parents and parental responsibility remains with the parents. The child is not looked after by the Council. Parents retain parental responsibility. Families can still ask for information, Family Help and an assessment where needs or safeguarding concerns arise.

Private Fostering

A private arrangement for a child under 16, or under 18 if disabled, to live for 28 days or more with someone who is not a parent, guardian or close relative. For private fostering a close relative is defined as including a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt, including by half-blood, marriage or civil partnership.

The child's parent, the private foster carer and anyone else involved in arranging the placement must notify the Council as we have a duty to undertake a private fostering assessment to ensure that appropriate arrangements have been made to meet the needs of the child. Where possible, notification must be given at least six weeks before the arrangement starts.

If it will start in less than six weeks, the Council must be told within that period; if the child is already living with the carer, notification must be immediate.

Further information is on the Milton Keynes private fostering page.

Kinship Foster Care

The child is looked after by the Council and placed with an approved relative, friend or connected person following the carer having been approved as a foster carer by the Council. The Council retains its legal duties to the child. The carer receives supervision, training, support and fostering kinship payments

Lives with Child Arrangements Order (CAO)

A court order naming the person with whom the child lives. The carer shares parental responsibility with the child's parents, or others with parental responsibility, until the age of 18 or unless the court order states otherwise.

Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

A court order intended to provide a secure, long-term home for the child. The Special Guardian has enhanced parental responsibility and may make most decisions about the child without the agreement of others who hold parental responsibility but need permission from the court to make important decisions, such as changing the child's surname. This order lasts until the child reaches 18 unless the court varies or discharges the order before the child reaches 18.

The Council will prepare a report for the court dealing with the suitability of the applicant to be a special guardian for the child.

The support available to kinship carers depends upon the legal arrangement in place, the child's history and assessed needs. We will not assume that a family needs less support simply because the carer is a relative or friend.

Getting Help and Assessment

The Post-SGO Support Service is the first point of contact for Special Guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangements Order: 01908 253652 or PostSGOSupport@milton-keynes.gov.uk.

Prospective kinship foster carers and approved kinship foster carers can contact the Fostering Assessment Duty Team at Fosteringassessmentduty@milton-keynes.gov.uk.

Informal kinship carers, initially private foster carers and families unsure which route applies for them can contact MASH, the front door to Children's Services, or speak to an allocated practitioner. There is no requirement for any family to understand the legal framework before asking for help.

Where needs can be met through universal or community services, we will help families to connect with Family Centres, schools, health services, welfare advice and voluntary organisations. Where additional needs are identified, we will consider completing a single assessment to determine whether support under a Family Help (CIN) plan is most appropriate.

A request for help will not automatically lead to statutory intervention but will subject to an assessment of need.

Assessments will be proportionate, timely and based on the needs of the child and family. We will acknowledge a request, explain the proposed route and give a named contact or service within five working days. Where an assessment is required, the family will be told its purpose, the information needed, the decision-maker and the expected completion date.

Financial assessments will normally receive a written outcome within 20 working days of all required information being provided. If these timescales cannot be met, the family will be told why and given a revised date. Decisions and agreed support will be recorded in writing. A request for reconsideration will be acknowledged within five working days and a written response normally provided within 20 working days.

For an immediate safeguarding concern during office hours, contact the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub on 01908 253169 or 01908 253170, or email children@milton-keynes.gov.uk. Outside normal office hours, contact the Emergency Social Work Team on 01908 265545. Call 999 where there is an immediate danger. Further information is available on the Emergency Social Work Team page.

Family Networks, Relationships and Legal Advice

Family-led Decision-Making

We will always identify and involve the wider family network early where it is safe and appropriate. Family-led decision-making, including Family Group Conferences, gives families clear information, preparation, a suitable meeting space and private time to develop a plan for how the child will be supported.

Children will be supported to participate in a way that reflects their age and understanding. An independent coordinator will be used where required.

Relationships and Family Time

We will support safe, meaningful relationships with parents, brothers and sisters and other important people where this is in the child's best interests. Support may include planning, reviewing arrangements, mediation, supervised or supported contact, help with communication and consideration of travel costs where an assessment identifies this need. Safeguarding concerns and the child's wishes and feelings will guide decisions.

Independent legal advice

Kinship carers should understand the legal and financial consequences of each option before making a long-term commitment or applying for an order. The Council will consider funding independent legal advice where it is necessary to secure or assess a plan for the child,

including advice before a proposed Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order application.

A Head of Service will decide requests, taking account of the complexity of the case, whether proceedings are under way and the need for the carer to make an informed decision.

In the first instance 3 hours of legal advice at legal aid rates would be offered. Any additional legal advice would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Any scope or financial limit will be agreed in advance. A refusal will be explained in writing with details of reconsideration and complaint routes.

Carers may also obtain their own advice through a children-law solicitor, the Law Society, Child Law Advice, Citizens Advice Milton Keynes or Kinship.

Health and Wellbeing

Kinship families can use universal health services, including GPs, health visiting, school nursing and community services. We will help families understand referral routes and coordinate with health partners where needs are complex.

Support may include:

- help for children affected by trauma, loss, separation, bereavement or disrupted relationships;
- mental health and emotional wellbeing advice, including referrals to specialist services where thresholds are met;
- support for carers' physical and mental health;
- help for children or carers with disabilities, SEND or additional communication needs;
- therapeutic assessment and support through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund for eligible children and young people up to and including age 21, or 25 where they have an education, health and care plan. Where there are Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangements Order in place, access to support requires an assessment of support needs;
- information about local peer support, training and community groups.

Where a service has eligibility criteria or waiting times, these will be explained and alternative or interim support considered where possible.

Education, Training and Employment

Early years settings, schools, colleges and training providers should understand the experiences of children in kinship care and respond to their educational and emotional needs.

Carers are encouraged to inform the setting of the arrangement where it is safe to do so to ensure that education professionals are able to support.

The Milton Keynes Virtual School provides advice to schools and kinship families, including support relating to previously looked-after children. The Virtual School supports schools and settings to improve their understanding of the needs of children who have experienced trauma, advocating for schools to be better informed and develop their practice. The Virtual School can review cases on an individual basis and provide bespoke support as needed. Support can be requested here: Request for support for Previously Looked After Children.

Pupil Premium Plus is available for eligible children from Reception to Year 11 who left local-authority care through adoption, a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangements Order. It is not available solely because a child lives in another kinship arrangement. The carer must tell the school and provide evidence of the child's status. Funding is paid to the school, not directly to the carer, and is not a personal budget for an individual child. The school decides how to use it to improve educational outcomes and should discuss the child's needs with the carer. Further information is available from the Milton Keynes Virtual School and the Milton Keynes Pupil Premium Plus leaflet.

Information about admissions is available on the school admissions page; however, the Virtual School can be contacted for case-specific advice on admissions and a range of other education matters, including SEND support, attendance, and post-16 education and training.

We will also signpost kinship carers to information and services that support training, employment and financial stability, including flexible working arrangements, kinship care leave where available, childcare support, careers advice, skills development and employability programmes. Approved kinship foster carers will receive training and development appropriate to their role. Other kinship carers will be offered or signposted to relevant learning opportunities, support groups and peer networks.

Accommodation and Practical Support

Housing difficulties should not prevent a safe family arrangement from being explored or sustained. Where a home is overcrowded, unsuitable or at risk, we will help the family access

housing advice and consider a coordinated response between Children's Services and Housing.

Depending on eligibility and assessed need, support may include advice about homelessness prevention, social housing, private renting, Discretionary Housing Payments, Council Tax Reduction, adaptations for disability, local welfare support and essential furniture or equipment. Children's Services may consider support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 where housing or practical pressures affect a child assessed as being in need.

Practical support may also include equipment, transport, childcare, short breaks, holiday activities, digital access, interpretation, help to attend appointments and links to community services. The form and duration of support will be based on assessment and recorded in writing.

Moving into or out of Milton Keynes

Support responsibilities can depend on where the child lives, which authority placed or previously looked after the child, and the legal arrangement. Where a child was looked after immediately before a Special Guardianship Order, the authority that last looked after the child is normally responsible for prescribed special guardianship support services for three years after the order, even if the family moves.

After that period, responsibility for non-financial support will normally rest with the authority where the family lives. Responsibility for financial support agreed before the move or order can remain with the authority that originally agreed it. For a child placed with a kinship foster carer by another local authority, the placing authority retains its looked-after child and fostering responsibilities. Families moving into or out of Milton Keynes should contact us before the move where possible so that responsibilities, records and support can be agreed in writing and there is no avoidable interruption.

Financial Support

We recognise that caring for a child can significantly affect household finances. We will provide clear written information as early as possible and, wherever practicable, before a carer accepts a placement or applies for a legal order. Information will explain eligibility, the assessment or means test, the calculation, payment start date, duration, review arrangements and challenge rights.

Informal Kinship Care and Private Fostering

Parents usually remain responsible for maintaining their child. Carers may claim benefits and access universal or local welfare support where eligible. If financial hardship or unmet needs may affect the child's welfare or the stability of the arrangement, the carer can request an assessment.

Where the child is assessed as a Child in Need, the Council will consider appropriate support in accordance with section 17 Children Act 1989. This may be one-off, short-term, periodic or ongoing where the assessed need justifies it. Support will not be refused solely because the arrangement is informal.

Special Guardianship Orders and Kinship Child Arrangements Orders

Financial support will be considered under the Council's Policy on Financial Support to Families Post Order and if required a means tested financial assessment will be completed.

Eligibility and calculation depend on the legal arrangement and the terms of that policy. For Special Guardianship allowances, Milton Keynes uses the Southeast fostering maintenance allowance as the starting benchmark for a means-tested assessment. The same benchmark must not be assumed to apply to a kinship Child Arrangements Order unless the post-order policy and the written decision expressly confirm this.

For 6 April 2026 to 5 April 2027, the weekly benchmark rates are

- £203 for ages 0–4
- £223 for ages 5–10
- £255 for ages 11–15
- £298 for ages 16–17

The financial assessment will explain which household resources, essential expenditure and child-related benefits are included, deducted or disregarded; whether any element of former fostering remuneration is protected; how the allowance is uprated and reviewed; and the circumstances in which it may change or end.

The amount paid may be lower than the benchmark following assessment.

The written decision will set out the amount, payment frequency, expected duration, review date, conditions and circumstances in which support may change or end. It will also explain how to seek reconsideration, complain or challenge the decision.

Carers must be told about the financial implications of a proposed order before it is made wherever practicable. The Council reviews special guardianship support plans yearly.

Kinship Foster Carers

Approved kinship foster carers, including those with temporary connected-person approval, receive the age-related fostering maintenance allowance from the date the child is placed or approval takes effect.

For 6 April 2026 to 5 April 2027, Milton Keynes uses the Southeast weekly maintenance rates:

- £203 for ages 0–4
- £223 for ages 5–10

- £255 for ages 11–15
- £298 for ages 16–17

**The above rates include £10 savings which are deducted prior to the allowance being issued to carer.*

These figures are the child-maintenance element, not necessarily the carer's total payment package. Kinship status alone does not justify a lower maintenance allowance.

The Milton Keynes Kinship Foster Carer Payments Scheme 2026/27 explains any fees or skills payments, birthday, festival and holiday allowances, mileage, equipment, clothing, savings, respite, exceptional expenses, approval arrangements and payment administration. The scheme is reviewed annually, normally with changes taking effect in April.

For Kinship Carers who have been approved at panel will receive a Professional fee (see Kinship Foster Carer Payment Scheme for details).

Benefits and Independent Advice

Benefit entitlement depends on the legal arrangement, who is responsible for the child, competing claims and whether fostering payments are made. Carers should obtain an individual benefits check before and after a legal order.

Depending on circumstances, support may include Child Benefit, Universal Credit, help with housing or childcare, Council Tax Reduction, Disability Living Allowance for a child under 16 or Personal Independence Payment from age 16.

Approved foster carers should seek advice before changing a claim because different rules apply to looked-after children. Current national minimum fostering allowance rates are also published in the government's help with the cost of fostering guidance.

Accessibility, Information and Records

We will make the Local Offer easy to find and understand. Information can be provided in alternative formats, including large print and Easy Read where required, with interpretation or translation and through different communication methods.

We will make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and carers and consider barriers relating to transport, finance, language, culture, digital access and caring responsibilities. Before publication, the electronic document and any PDF version will be checked for heading order, reading order, table headers, descriptive link text, document language and screen-reader accessibility.

Families will be told how their information is used and shared. A carer may request access to records about themselves and, where legally entitled, information about the child. Some information may be withheld for legal, confidentiality or safeguarding reasons; where possible, the reason and review route will be explained.

We will respect family privacy. Identifying an informal kinship arrangement does not in itself mean that statutory assessment or intervention is required.

Feedback, Complaints and Review

Kinship carers, children, parents and wider family members can give feedback about what is working, what is missing and how access could improve. Feedback will be used alongside service data, partner feedback and changes in law or guidance.

If you are unhappy with a service or decision, first speak to the professional or service involved where appropriate. You can then use the Council's complaints and compliments process. The Council will explain any separate review or appeal route that applies to a financial, fostering or statutory decision. Advocacy or independent advice will be offered or signposted where appropriate. Making a complaint will not affect access to services.

This Local Offer will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where legislation, statutory guidance, local services or financial arrangements change. Review activity will include the views of children, kinship carers, parents and partner organisations. The published version identifies the document owner, effective date, review date and links to current payment schedules and supporting policies.

Key Contacts

- Post-SGO Support Service, for Special Guardians and kinship Child Arrangements Order carers: 01908 253652; PostSGOSupport@milton-keynes.gov.uk
- Fostering Assessment Duty Team, for prospective and approved kinship foster carers: Fosteringassessmentduty@milton-keynes.gov.uk
- Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), including informal kinship and private fostering enquiries: 01908 253169 or 01908 253170; children@milton-keynes.gov.uk
- Emergency Social Work Team, outside normal office hours: 01908 265545
- Citizens Advice Milton Keynes: 0808 278 7991
- Independent kinship information and advice: Kinship

Related Milton Keynes information: The Council's Kinship Care webpage provides access to the Kinship Policy, support information, Virtual School material and the current kinship finance scheme. The Foster Carer Handbook and finance page contains the 2026/27 payment schemes, travel and exceptional expense forms and the post-order financial support policy.

Family Help is accessed through the MASH referral route; further information is available on the Family Help Teams page.

