

Name of respondent:	Matthew Brazier
Role of respondent:	Her Majesty's Inspector and Specialist adviser, children in care
Organisation, if relevant:	Ofsted
Region:	National

**1. What do you think are the main challenges faced by kinship care households (including challenges faced by the child, carers and other family members)?**

We are aware of the recent findings indicating that only a small minority of kinship carers are happy with the level of information and support, including financial help, that they receive.<sup>1</sup>

Local authorities (LAs) have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area who are 'in need' by providing support services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. However, there is no support specifically available for kinship carers who are caring for children who are not in local authority care, but who are likely to have had similar experiences to children who are in care.<sup>2</sup>

Ofsted's inspections have found that in a small number of local authorities kinship carers are not given sufficient support and appropriate status. We have seen an increased use of special guardianship orders to enable children to remain within their family network and some good work to support carers and provide good outcomes for children. But overall (and broadly in line with recent research<sup>3</sup>) we have found that the effectiveness of support, for special guardians, - including the level of financial support - remains patchy.

**2. As a practitioner or organisation working with children, kinship carers and/or families involved with the child welfare/family justice system, what are the main challenges that you face in enabling more children**

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<sup>1</sup> State of the nation survey, Grandparents Plus 2018

<sup>2</sup> Growing up in Kinship care – experiences as adolescents and outcomes in young adulthood, Wellards et al, Grandparents Plus/Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2017

<sup>3</sup> [The contribution of supervision orders and special guardianship to children's lives and family justice](#), Centre for Child and Family Justice Research/Lancaster University, 2019

**to be safely cared for, and effectively supported, within their family network?**

Recent inspections of local authority children's services (carried out under the ILACS system for inspection, implemented in January 2018) identify several factors that contribute to good outcomes for children, including:

- Ensuring that professionals have the right skills to engage with families and to focus proportionately on the strengths of parents and wider family networks; the best performing LAs have embedded that approach
- The effective use of family group conferences to explore and identify, realistic options for children to live with their extended family at an early stage; in weaker authorities, failures during pre-proceedings to fully explore placement options in the wider family lead to family members 'coming to light' late in the process, contributing to further delay for children
- Developing and maintaining a stable, skilled workforce holding manageable caseloads that allow them to develop positive, trusting relationships with families and the wider family network
- Strong management oversight of the quality of practice.

However, the current financial climate presents serious pressures on LAs. Many LAs have been able to protect budgets for statutory children's services work, but most face considerable challenges to provide preventative or discretionary services.

**3. Are you aware of any effective ways of working, policies or services (either where you work or elsewhere) that enhance the chances of children remaining safely within their family network?**

**Please give details and/or enclose any relevant research evaluation or background information.**

Examples of good practice from recent ILACS inspections include:

- Calderdale  
"Senior managers have successfully secured Department for Education (DfE) innovation funding to effectively implement multi-agency edge of care services in order to prevent children entering care. The 'sleep on it' project delivers outstanding help and support...as a result, the number of adolescents coming into care has reduced substantially. The innovative 'positive choices' programme provides effective support to vulnerable parents, including care leavers, enabling them to provide safe and nurturing

care for their children. This is supporting younger children and babies to safely live with their families.”

■ Portsmouth

“The local authority’s well-embedded restorative model of practice draws on families’ strengths, focusing on maintaining children in their families wherever possible. The new edge of care service is beginning to reduce harm for children and providing intensive support to enable children to remain at home.”

■ Bexley

“The ethos underpinning the well-embedded social work methodology...is that children should grow up in their own families and other networks when it is safe for them to do so. This approach is underpinned by the belief that families have strengths and can identify solutions to their difficulties alongside relationships with workers who know their children well... Family-based relationship work starts with the whole family network and is supported and underpinned by a clear operating model.”

■ Waltham Forest

“The local authority model of practice draws on families’ strengths, focusing on maintaining children in their families wherever possible. An effective range of edge of care services, such as the intensive adolescent support team and the functional family therapy team, provide effective individualised support to enable children and young people to live safely within their families and communities.”

■ Essex

“The highly effective model of practice is underpinned by a shared understanding across Essex that children should be supported to grow up in their own families when it is safe for them to do so. Inspectors saw the model fully embedded across all services and teams on this inspection.”

**4. Are you aware of any helpful approaches, processes or ways of working that enhance the chances of children remaining safely in their family network during:**

- a. Formal pre-proceedings**
- b. During proceedings**
- c. Post proceedings**

In the best-performing local authorities, we have seen that:

- There is a sharp focus on timely legal permanence - but even in some good LAs, we have seen some children in pre-proceedings for too long, usually in cases of great complexity or in chronic circumstances
- Thorough assessments are undertaken early in the process and early legal planning meetings are held to achieve early escalation to the PLO
- Letters before proceedings clearly spell out what needs to change in a way that is accessible, and are set out with achievable timescales for parents
- Cafcass and the judiciary have high confidence in the expertise of LA social workers
- Plans for children to return home or to be looked after within their wider family network are based on robust but realistic risk assessments – plans are clearly set out for families and support is provided for as long as it is needed

More specifically:

- In Essex, effective pre-proceedings work has seen up to as many as half of proceedings ceased, as sufficient change has been achieved in the family
- In Bexley, inspectors found that many families receive very effective intensive support within pre-proceedings of the public law outline (PLO), contributing to more children being able to remain in the care of their immediate and wider families. Effective work seen by the 'Staying Together' team has helped children on the edge of care remain at home, or children in care return home safely.
- Leeds 'has invested in a range of services, including...family group conferencing to facilitate problem-solving by the family themselves. This is helping to prevent concerns escalating and diverting children away from more formal child protection procedures, ensuring that issues are resolved with the least intrusive intervention.'

**What are the key recommendations that the Taskforce should make (these could be aimed at the government, local authorities or other public bodies) that would:**

- a. Enable more children to safely live within their wider family network?**
  - b. Enable more children to be effectively supported and thrive in kinship care?**
- Local authorities and their partners should ensure that joint strategic needs assessments and sufficiency strategies specifically address the needs of kinship care.

- We suggest that policy makers should explore:
  - how guidance for kinship care can be strengthened to ensure that it is fully explored and properly supported as a permanence option for children (including those subject to a special guardianship order)
  - how to avoid possible disincentives within the system to keeping children safely out of care (e.g. entitlement to leaving care support, greater financial support for kinship carers of looked after children).
- Local authorities should ensure that social workers can recognise and respond to needs of kinship carers and understand the complexities that are often involved in the placements.
- There should be consistent and effective use of family group conferences at the earliest opportunity to explore whether children are able to remain cared for within their wider family network.

**5. Are there any further points that you would like to make, that you think would assist the Taskforce?**

Ofsted will reflect on how we can increase profile of kinship care alongside competing demands. The ongoing review of the implementation of ILACS will consider how we look at support for kinship care and whether the framework needs to be more explicit.

Our plans for joint targeted area inspections (JTAs) for the near future are already in place. We will consider how kinship care can be included within the scope of the JTA in 2020 that will look at prevention and early intervention. (taking place in 2020). Our ongoing research project on making good decisions for children may also look at kinship care.

**6. Would you be willing to be contacted by the Taskforce as part of its evidence gathering?**

Yes/No

If yes, please provide contact details:

Matthew Brazier HMI (Specialist Adviser, Looked After Children), Ofsted

[Matthew.brazier@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:Matthew.brazier@ofsted.gov.uk)

**7. Would you like to receive information and updates about the work of the Kinship Care Taskforce?**

Yes/No

If yes, please provide contact details:

Matthew Brazier HMI (Specialist Adviser, Looked After Children), Ofsted

[Matthew.brazier@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:Matthew.brazier@ofsted.gov.uk)