

DfE updates and changes – November to January

Kinship care: framework for local authorities – Statutory guidance

1. How local authorities should support children who are cared for by extended family, friends, or connected individuals [Kinship care: framework for local authorities - GOV.UK](#) published 11/10/24
2. Wiltshire's position:

Where children are unable to remain in the care of their parents we always ensure that family members and connected adults are fully explored with the child and their families at the earliest opportunity and utilise Family Group Conferences within child in need as well as child protection and pre-proceedings to ensure that potential family members are identified at the earliest opportunity.

Wiltshire have a dedicated Kinship Team within the families and children's service who supports both connected-person foster carers and those who are caring for children through other arrangements such as Special Guardians and Private Fostering. All Kinship carers can access the same level of support, advice, guidance and training which includes financial support as mainstream foster carers.

Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges – Guidance

3. How schools and colleges can meet IT service and digital equipment standards [Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges - Guidance - GOV.UK](#) Updated 22/10/24
4. Wiltshire's position:

This guidance is welcomed for schools as it will support them to effectively manage and plan for IT use and development within curriculum delivery. This information will be shared with schools through Headteacher and School Business Manager briefings.

National Apprenticeship week 2025 website and toolkit launched – Press release

5. New website and toolkit launched ahead of next annual celebration of skills and apprenticeships [National Apprenticeship Week 2025 website and toolkit launched - GOV.UK](#) published 25/10/24
6. Wiltshire's position:

Swindon and Wiltshire Careers Hub, a partnership between Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and the Careers and Enterprise Company, supports schools in Wiltshire with their National Apprenticeship Week events. Before, during and after National Apprenticeship Week, the Careers Hub also works with partners to deliver a series of Appren-T-Fest branded events attended by local schools. The events comprise a careers fair showcasing apprenticeship employers and workshops exploring post-16 and post-18 options. In 2024 events took place in Salisbury, Trowbridge and Swindon. In partnership with Apprenticeships in Salisbury, the Salisbury Appren-T-Fest took place on 24th January and was attended by 900 Students from 11 schools/college in the day and by 300 students and parent/carers in the evening. In partnership with Wiltshire College and University Centre, the Trowbridge Appren-T-Fest took place on 2nd

February and was attended by 500 Students from 4 schools/college in the day and by 100 students and parent/carers in the evening. Appren-T-Fest events are taking place in Salisbury, Trowbridge, Chippenham and Swindon in and around National Apprenticeship Week 2025.

Government protects education priorities in face of inherited £22 billion blackhole – News story

7. Chancellor confirms steps to protect education and early years priorities as part of her first Budget
[Government protects education priorities in face of inherited £22 billion blackhole - GOV.UK](#)
published 27/10/24

8. Wiltshire's position:

The Government has reaffirmed their commitment to projects that had already been approved as part of the School Rebuilding Programme. For Wiltshire, there are three approved schemes, one in a maintained school and two academy projects.

We are awaiting confirmation of the actual budget for Early Years Entitlements and the rates will be discussed at the Early Years Reference Group in January. Information on Free Breakfast Clubs and school-based nurseries has been shared with schools.

Senior mental health led training – Guidance

9. Apply for a grant to train a senior mental health lead to develop your school or college's approach to mental health and wellbeing [Senior mental health lead training - GOV.UK](#) updated 29/10/24

10. Wiltshire's position:

From 2021 – 2023 Wiltshire Council delivered a programme of DfE assured Senior Mental Health Lead training to 4 cohorts of schools. Most Wiltshire schools and colleges (232) have now received the training and 213 of those trained have claimed a national grant of £1,200. Not all schools trained were eligible for the grant and some schools have been able to claim more than one grant. For the small number of schools that have not yet received this offer or wish to train a new school lead, the CPD is still available from a range of national providers.

Wiltshire schools, and those from neighbouring LAs, are supported by an ongoing series of local network meetings to help embed this work facilitated by the Healthy Schools leads in B&NES, Swindon and Wiltshire. The DfE report that successful grant applications are significantly higher in Wiltshire compared with the southwest and national. The Wiltshire Healthy Schools Programme, engaging 134 schools provides a framework for schools to implement a whole school approach to mental health.

Children looked after in England including adoption: 2023 to 2024 – Official Statistics

11. Information on looked after children at both national and local authority levels for the financial year 2023 to 2024 [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#) published 14/11/24

12. Wiltshire's position:

The publication of the data set is from the 903 annual census which all Local Authorities submit. The updated national figures for 2023-24 will be reflected in our ChAT and Safeguarding Datasets from Q3.

Biggest overhaul in a generation to children's social care – Press release

13. New powers handed to Ofsted to crack down on exploitative children's care providers and transparency to be increased around their finances [Biggest overhaul in a generation to children's social care - GOV.UK](#) published 18/11/24

14. Wiltshire's position:

We welcome the move by the government to give new powers to OFSTED to crackdown on exploitative children's care providers. It's good to see that the government is taking the next step towards reforming the children's social care market. The move will be positive for Wiltshire as it will help reduce the ever-increasing placement budget.

Keeping children safe, helping families thrive – Policy paper

15. A policy statement setting out the government's commitment to whole system reform of the children's social care system [Keeping children safe, helping families thrive - GOV.UK](#) published 18/11/24

16. Wiltshire's position:

Background

On 18 November 2024, the Department for Education published a policy position statement on children's social care, outlining its commitment to and plans for whole system reform.

The actions will be guided by four key reform principles, which are:

- **Prevent.** Firstly, wherever possible, children should remain with their families and be safely prevented from entering the care system in the first place.
- **Support.** Where children cannot remain at home and it is in their best interests, we should support children to live with kinship carers or in fostering families, rather than in residential care.
- **Fix the Market.** Next, it is vital that we fix the broken care market.
- **Key enablers.** Finally, we need to invest in the key enablers which underpin the children's social care system

The vision set out in the policy paper is built around creating a system which:

- Works with the whole family so more children and young people can thrive in their family
- Prioritises kinship care for children who cannot live safely with their parents
- Supports children in care and care leavers to live healthy and happy lives
- Provides a high quality of care, which all children deserve
- Takes action to end excessive profit-making by care providers
- Works effectively across agencies and empowers professionals working within it.

Main Considerations

We do not yet have the detail behind many of these proposals and will require this before considering what (if any) changes need to be made to current Wiltshire Council services or systems. Currently there is no firm commitment to funding any additional costs for Service or system changes (although this was indicated by DfE officials at the recent National Conference).

Supporting Families

Councils will be mandated to offer family group decision-making to all families at the pre-proceedings stage, except where this is not in the best interests of the child.

Wiltshire position: Wiltshire already offering this in pre-proceedings, and it is discussed at every initial pre-proceedings meeting. We also offer this earlier at Initial Child Protection Conferences and in some cases for children subject to Child in Need Planning.

Multi-agency safeguarding

The government will introduce a Single Unique Identifier (likely to be the NHS number) to enable agencies to link child data. This will be piloted first to identify challenges and ensure that it is delivered proportionately and where it will have impact.

Wiltshire position: We do not record children's NHS number in Liquid Logic as a routine. We are implementing the Integrated Care Record for children subject to Child Protection Plans or Children Looked After which requires the NHS number, and we are exploring ways of doing this for this data cohort. We anticipate that providers of case recording systems will make required changes and will consider potential resource implications when further detail is published.

Enhancing clarity on information sharing, introducing a duty that "provides absolute clarity on the legal basis to share information for the purposes of safeguarding children." This will recognise the challenges that currently exist whereby practitioners are confident to share information where there is clear evidence of harm, but less confident where risk is unknown or unclear.

Wiltshire position: We already have an established professional consultation helpline within our Integrated Front Door where professionals can contact us to discuss concerns anonymously and are advised as to whether to refer in and without consent if needed. Our multi agency threshold guidance has been updated in the last 12 months. We have increased the number of our MASH tours for professionals due to increased requests for the tour. Our SVPP website has clear links to what to do if you are concerned about a child.

Strengthening the role of education within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements- this will include all education settings (including early years) being named as 'relevant agencies' by default in local arrangements and legislating for local safeguarding

arrangements to include representation from education at both operational and strategic decision-making levels. It will not make education the fourth statutory safeguarding partner.

Wiltshire position: Wiltshire has a well-established Education Safeguarding Committee which representation from school leaders across all phases and schools of all status, as well as relevant service leads and partners within Wiltshire council. This provides a forum for sharing and developing safeguarding practice and policy. Although education has not been made a fourth statutory safeguarding partner, we have adopted a 'best practice' approach in Wiltshire, and now have Head Teacher representation at SVPP executive and the Family and Children's System Assurance group in a non-statutory capacity.

Every (upper tier) local authority area must establish a multi-agency child protection unit, integrated local authority-led teams staffed with multi-agency, experienced child protection practitioners from agencies including councils, police, health and education. Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements will have strategic oversight of these units.

Wiltshire position: Wiltshire has an Integrated Front Door with a MASH which has partnership representation. We have a partnership MASH Board that feeds into Families and Children's Assurance group. As to the specifics of this proposal we await the publication of further detail together with the learning from the Pathfinder authorities before considering what (if any) changes to existing arrangements need to be made.

Education

A duty will be placed on councils to have and maintain Children Not In School registers and to provide support to families where it is requested by the parent.

Wiltshire position: Currently there is an established caseload of named learners who are electively home educated with advice/support/signposting already in place. This is not a formal register, but it does include every known EHE Wiltshire resident child. This will form the basis of an EHE register. We welcome the new requirement for a register to strengthen this locally managed approach.

There is an established Children Absent From Education (CAFE) strategic group comprising managers and heads of service from Children and Families teams and Education and Skills teams. There are subgroups that meet with focus on specific service areas (e.g. EHE/CME) to review an action plan for individual cases of children not in school. A dashboard has been developed which captures data for learners who fall within the CAFE remit across different service areas. This would be the basis for the Children not in School register.

Under s19 Education Act 1996 the local authority must make arrangements for children to receive suitable education where they are prevented from attending school by reason of illness, exclusion or for any other reason. The s19 Group meets to consider cases where pupils may not be accessing full-time education to determine whether the local authority has a duty to make education provision available.

If a child in school is subject to a s47 enquiry or is on a child protection plan, their parent will need local authority consent to home educate that child. If a child in those categories is already being home educated, the council will have a power to require them to attend school.

Wiltshire position: All current EHE learners subject to s47 or on CP plans have EWOs who support and attend all relevant strategy discussions, conferences, reviews and core group meetings. The number of EHE learners subject to s47 or on CP plans is consistently very low. Where there is no evidence of suitable education in place, the LA already uses enforcement measures by way of School Attendance Orders to require parents to register their children at a school.

The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 prescribe the grounds on which a pupil can be removed from the school register. These will need to be amended to reflect proposed changes. We await further detail.

Extending the role of the virtual school head to place a statutory duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of children on child in need plans, child protection plans and in kinship arrangements. Consideration will also be given to including children leaving custody in this extension.

Wiltshire position: The Wiltshire Virtual School has utilised the additional funding for children in kinship care arrangements to develop an existing role that provides information and advice to the professional network in support of children in kinship care. The Virtual School Officer role commenced on 1st July 2024 (in advance of the VSH extension from September 2024) and works closely with schools/settings, kinship carers, Social Care, SEND and key stakeholders within kinship care. This mirrors the offer of information and advice to children previously looked after (PCLA) and includes elements of strategic oversight that mirrors the offer for children with a social worker. The Virtual School strategy includes a specific strand for children in kinship care.

The Wiltshire Virtual School has clear expectations in place in support of all the children within its remit. However, where this duty is currently statutory (CLA/PCLA), there are fewer barriers to implementation of strategic priorities as well as greater avenues of funding support (e.g. using pupil premium plus).

We recognise the potential significant challenges facing children who leave custody. Where the child has care status, the Wiltshire Virtual School already provides support for these cases and therefore is well placed to understand the barriers that exist and implement effective plans to improve educational outcomes. We also work closely with colleagues across Social Care including the youth justice service and can therefore utilise existing links to implement any changes to legislation at pace.

Support for children in care and care leavers

Corporate parenting responsibilities will be extended to government departments and relevant public bodies to drive a culture change in which the public sector realises a shared ambition to support children in care and care leavers. Government departments will be expected to produce three-year plans to set out how they will support children in care and care leavers.

Wiltshire position: We welcome the proposal to see Government Departments and other public bodies produce 3-year plans and will consider what (if any) changes and developments we might consider regarding our own corporate parenting strategy when further details are announced.

Placements for children in care.

Work will be carried out to make it easier to open the right kinds of homes which meet children's needs. This includes working with Ofsted on fast-track routes to register selected new children's homes; simplifying the planning process for children's homes; strengthening the location assessment in Ofsted's registration assessment for new provision, to ensure endorsement from the relevant children's services team to confirm that there is local need for the home; consideration of measures to require any new provider to be owned and domiciled in the UK, including corporate owners and majority shareholders.

Wiltshire position: We welcome this proposal and will await the detail in due course.

A new form of community-based provision for children that can be deprived of their liberty will be introduced via primary legislation. This provision will not be explicitly designed in accordance with the current Secure Children's Homes design specification but will instead be able to respond more flexibly to children's changing and fluctuating needs, for example, being able to reduce or increase restrictions according to the lowest level necessary to keep the child safe. DfE will be working with NHS England to pilot a new, community-based approach which provides treatment and care.

Wiltshire position: We welcome this proposal and will await the detail in due course.

Ofsted will be given powers to issue civil penalties against providers of unregistered settings, in particular for those who persistently refuse to register.

Wiltshire position: We await detail but no direct impact on council services anticipated.

Ofsted will also be given powers to hold provider groups to account, including by being able to request improvement plans where there are quality issues across several settings in the same group.

Wiltshire position: We await detail but no direct impact on council services anticipated.

Legislation will enable groups of councils to set up Regional Care Cooperatives, learning from the experience of the RCC pathfinders. Government will have the power to direct councils to establish RCCs if 'necessary', and to intervene if an RCC is not delivering services to a required standard. The legislation will also include powers for Ofsted to inspect RCCs.

Wiltshire position: We currently work closely with regional colleagues in the South West to support with sufficiency challenges and shared learning. However, we are not currently engaged as a regional care co-operative and therefore careful consideration needs to be given to the learning from pilot areas and the options available to us and regional partners once details are announced.

The DfE will work with the sector to bring about greater cost and price transparency in the placements market.

Wiltshire position: We welcome this proposal and will await the detail in due course.

A new financial oversight scheme will be introduced for the most 'difficult to replace' providers. As part of this, the DfE will consider introducing a new requirement for all

providers to give both hosting and placing local authorities sufficient notice if they make a commercial decision to exit the market.

Wiltshire position: We welcome this proposal and will await the detail in due course.

Legislation will include powers for the Secretary of State to cap the level of profit which can be made from children's social care placements via secondary legislation in the future.

Wiltshire position: We welcome this proposal and will await the detail in due course.

Multiplication tables check attainment: 2024

17. Information on the 2024 multiplication tables check, including breakdowns by pupil characteristics, at national and local authority level [Multiplication tables check attainment: 2024 - GOV.UK](#) published 21/11/24

18. Wiltshire's position:

		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Wiltshire	Average attainment score of all pupils	19.6	20.2	20.1
	Percentage of pupils scored 25	24%	28%	29%
South West	Average attainment score of all pupils	19.1	19.7	20.3
	Percentage of pupils scored 25	22%	26%	30%
England	Average attainment score of all pupils	19.8	20.2	20.6
	Percentage of pupils scored 25	27%	29%	34%

The percentage of Year 4 pupils in Wiltshire attaining full marks in the Multiplication Tables Check continues to increase each year. The average score achieved is broadly in line with both the national and the South West figure. Specific training in the teaching of times tables has been provided for Year 3/Year 4 teachers and maths continues to be an area of focus for the School Effectiveness team this academic year.

New specialist places to be created in mainstream schools – Press release

19. Major reforms to SEND system kicked off with £740 million capital investment to create more specialist places in mainstream schools [New specialist places to be created in mainstream schools - GOV.UK](#) published 04/12/24

20. Wiltshire's position:

We welcome this additional investment and await further detail on conditions of funding. Once we have this information, we will allocate spend in line with our specialist place planning strategy.

Improving support for children missing education – Consultation Outcome

21. We are seeking evidence to improve the way children missing education are identified and supported. Change made, added a summary of responses received and the government's response to the call for evidence [Improving support for children missing education - GOV.UK](#) updated 12/12/24

22. Wiltshire's position:

Wiltshire contributed to this call for evidence with our views on how to improve support for children missing education. Some of these steps are set out in the newly proposed 'children not in school' register.