Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee – 11 November 2026
Service Achievements

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1. Family Based Care Service

The Family Based Care Service approved two new fostering household during September 2026, with both fostering assessments completed within national timescales. This represents a significant achievement for the service and supports the wider Shifting the Balance of Care agenda by increasing local family-based care capacity for Highland children. Timely approval of foster carers remains a key challenge nationally, and this reflects the team's continued focus on delivering high-quality assessments efficiently while maintaining practice standards.

Highland Continues to Strengthen Family-Based Care for Children

Children and young people across Highland are increasingly benefiting from stable, caring family environments, with new data highlighting significant progress in both foster care recruitment activity and kinship care provision during 2026.

Kinship care continues to grow, with children being supported to remain within their wider family networks wherever possible. Total kinship placements increased from 226 at the beginning of the year to 243 by October, reflecting a sustained commitment to keeping children connected to family, community and culture. Children specifically living in kinship care also rose by 11%, increasing from 99 to 110 placements over the reporting period.

This positive growth demonstrates the dedication of families across Highland who have stepped forward to provide loving homes for children and young people who require support, helping them maintain important family relationships and a sense of belonging.

Alongside the growth in kinship care, Highland's fostering service has continued to strengthen its recruitment and support activity. A new digital recruitment campaign launched during the summer generated strong public interest, with a significant number of enquiries from people considering becoming foster carers. Operational teams successfully responded to all genuine enquiries received, demonstrating the service's commitment to welcoming and supporting prospective carers.

Particularly encouraging has been the involvement of foster carers themselves in helping shape the future of the service. More than 11 foster carers contributed almost 400 pieces of feedback to inform future improvements, ensuring that the voice of carers remains central to service development.

The service is also exploring new peer-support opportunities, recognising the invaluable role experienced carers can play in supporting those considering fostering for the first time. Ideas such as informal coffee sessions and carer-to-carer mentoring aim to help

prospective carers gain a realistic understanding of fostering and build strong support networks from the outset.

Children's Services leaders have emphasised that these developments reflect Highland's ongoing commitment to "The Promise" by ensuring more children can grow up in nurturing family settings, surrounded by people who know and care for them. The continued growth in kinship care, alongside stable fostering provision and strengthening recruitment activity, provides a strong foundation for future placement sufficiency across Highland.

Together, foster carers and kinship carers are making a lasting difference to the lives of Highland's children and young people. Their dedication is helping more children grow up in safe, nurturing family environments where they can thrive, build relationships and achieve their potential.



(**Fiona Duncan, Chief Social Work Officer & Chief Officer**)