



To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 15 January 2026

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together – Annual Report

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Renfrewshire *Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together* policy was approved by the Board in May 2021. It was developed in response to the Independent Care Review, which highlighted concerns about siblings being separated when placed in care by local authorities. To address this, Children's Services worked in partnership with the Children's Champions Board to produce the report *Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together*, recommending practice improvements to help more siblings remain together when in local authority care. Renfrewshire remains the only Council in Scotland with a formal policy statement in relation to Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together.
- 1.2 The policy is ambitious and includes the following pledge: "*When children come into care, Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together.*" It also commits to an annual report being produced to show how the policy is being implemented and providing an explanation where the service has been unable to keep brothers and sisters together.
- 1.3 The first annual progress report, covering June 2021 to May 2022, was presented to the Board on 27 October 2022. This is the fourth annual report presented to Board on the implementation and impact of the Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together Policy.
- 1.4 The policy requires that any decision to place brothers and sisters in separate care arrangements must be approved by the Head of Children and Justice Social Work. The policy recognises there are circumstances which mean that brothers and sisters cannot be cared for together there is a clear, documented decision-making process and robust arrangements to maintain family relationship, alongside regular care reviews.
- 1.5 This report covers our activity to keep brothers and sisters together between June 2024 and May 2025. Of the 70 children and young people who were newly accommodated during the period, 44 had a sibling aged under 16 years. Of these 44 children, 24 were placed with at least one sibling. 13 children had a sibling who remained at home with birth parents. 7 children who had at least one sibling under the age of 16 years were placed separately from their siblings.

- 1.6 A review of cases where siblings were placed separately confirmed that separation was both necessary and appropriate. The primary reasons included differing individual needs and care plans, significant support requirements for some children, complex family dynamics, a high number of half-sibling relationships, and limitations in the capacity of kinship carers to care for multiple children.
 - 1.7 In situations where siblings were separated, comprehensive family time plans have been implemented to maintain relationships. These arrangements are tailored to the individual needs and wishes of the children, ensuring ongoing support for sibling connections.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members of the Board are asked to:
 - a) note the content of this report detailing the progress implementing the Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together Policy.
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3. Background

- 3.1 The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 became law in January 2021 and placed new duties for local authorities in relation to ensuring that brothers and sisters in care are supported to be together and where this is not possible, to have their relationship supported on an ongoing basis. Our Brothers and Sisters policy is compliant with the requirements of this piece of legislation and has been highlighted as national best practice.
- 3.2 The policy opens with a pledge "*When children come into care, Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together.*". It is recognised, however, that there are circumstances in which this will not be possible, or indeed in the best interests of the individual children and young people. Moreover, there are times when siblings' individual needs are not compatible with each other, and difficult decisions require to be made by the team of professionals responsible for their care that they should be placed separately.
- 3.3 In circumstances where the separate placement of brothers or sisters is due to the unavailability of kinship or foster carers, or residential service able to take a family group, or for significant safeguarding reasons, there is a requirement that a robust family time contact plan is in place and the possibility of the children being reunited in placement is regularly reviewed via the established Looked After Reviews process. This review process has been strengthened following the social work service re-design and the implementation of the role of Independent Decision Makers (IDMs). IDMs are independent of the management of children's care plans and their role is to critically evaluate the appropriateness and progress of plans, as well as to provide a wider quality assurance function.
- 3.4 When a care plan proposes separating a family group for reasons other than care plan necessity or child safety, the policy requires explicit approval from the Head of Childcare and Justice Services. The rationale for separation must be clearly documented in each child's file, and a family time contact plan must be created. To ensure accountability, an annual report on progress against the pledge is presented to the Board.
- 3.5 A range of practice tools are in use to support staff in assessing the needs of children in

Renfrewshire, including tools to be used where brothers and sisters cannot be cared for together to ensure that important relationships are maintained irrespective of where they are living. The Promise Ambassador developed child friendly documentation to ensure children are aware of and understand their family time plans.

- 3.6 This is the fourth year of reporting to Board on the implementation of the Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together Policy. During the period June 2024 and May 2025, 70 children and young people were newly accommodated by children's services. 44 of the children had a sibling aged under 16 years when they were accommodated. Of these 44 children, 24 were placed with at least one sibling. 13 children had a sibling who remained at home with birth parents. 7 children who had at least one sibling under the age of 16 years were placed separately from their siblings.
- 3.7 The group of 7 children who were accommodated separately from their siblings, includes those children whose siblings were brought into care at different times, or who remained at home with at least one birth parent, and others who had an older sibling or siblings already in care.
- 3.8 The reasons for children not being placed with their brothers and sisters were:
- placed with kinship carer who couldn't accommodate a sibling (1 child)
 - child's father was not the same person for the brothers and sisters and the kinship carer was from the parental side of the family (4 children)
 - placed separately from siblings because of a protection plan (1 child)
 - complex care needs meant that separation was necessary (1 children).
- 3.9 Renfrewshire has made considerable progress in recent years towards shifting our balance of care away from foster care towards kinship care. Well over half of our accommodated children and young people are now in kinship placements. Kinship carers tend to have less capacity to provide placements for multiple children. Review of our placement of children with siblings highlights that while many kinship carers are managing very well with one or two children, they are unable to take on new siblings as they come into care. The complexities of family composition and relationships also mean that some kinship carers do not feel able to offer care to the half-siblings of children already in their care. There is a very high frequency of half-sibling relationships amongst our population of accommodated children.
- 3.10 In line with the requirements of the policy, all children accommodated separately from their siblings have a 'family time' contact plan which specifically addresses their contact with siblings. This is reinforced by the statutory duties imposed by the children's hearings system which requires that all reports submitted about children who have siblings includes a specific assessment of their relationship and each child's individual views and wishes about sibling contact.

Implications of this report

1. Financial

The support costs for all children accommodated in the reporting period were contained within the children's social work budget.

2. HR and Organisational Development

All staff in children's social work have been trained in the operation of

the Policy.

3. Community/Council Planning

Our Renfrewshire is thriving - Providing good quality care is central to ensuring that the most vulnerable children in Renfrewshire are provided with an opportunity to thrive in a safe and nurturing environment.

4. Legal

The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 placed a new duty on local authorities in relation to how they support and promote contact between brothers and sisters. The current policy satisfies the authority's duty in this area.

5. Property/Assets

None.

6. Information Technology

None.

7. Legal

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations. Our approach locally is compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

8. Health and Safety

None.

9. Procurement

None.

10. Risk

None.

11. Privacy Impact

None.

12. Cosla Policy Position

None.

13. Climate Risk

None.

14. Children's Rights

The report demonstrates the council is compliant with and actively promoting Article 3 (best interest of child), Article 9 (keeping families together), Article 12 (respect for children's views), Article 19 (protection from

violence), Article 22 (refugee children) and Article 25 (review of a child's placement) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

List of Background Papers

Keeping Brother and Sisters Together - Report to Education and Children's Services Policy Board on 20 May 2021

Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together – Progress Report – Report to Education and Children's Services Policy Board on 27 October 2022

Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together – Annual Report – Report to Education and Children's Services Policy Board on 15 January 2025

Children's Services

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