



# Kinship Care

Version number v2.0

Document owner: Nicola Hope Head of Service Adoption and Kinship.

Responsible officer: Claire Cartwright Head of Children in Care and Care Leavers.

## Table of Contents

1. [Introduction](#)
  - a) Purpose
  - b) Scope
  - c) Supporting Documents
2. [Guiding Principles](#)
3. [Pre-Screening](#)
4. [Viability Assessments](#)
  - a) [Family and Friends Team Viability Assessments.](#)
  - b) [Allocation of Viability Assessments.](#)
5. [Temporary approval of a kinship foster carers \(regulation 24\) and extension of approval \(regulation 25\)](#)
  - a) Setting Up and Payments to kinship carers under regulation 24.
6. [Further Assessment](#)
  - a) [Referral](#)
  - b) [Allocation and Closure](#)
  - c) [Allocation ISW/Sessional worker](#)
7. [Assessment and Allocation Timescales](#)
8. [Foster Panel](#)
9. [Training](#)
10. [Special Guardianship Report for Court – Public and Private applications.](#)
  - a) [Special Guardianship support planning](#)
  - b) [Welfare benefits and Financial Assessment](#)

- c) [Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship Resource Panel](#)
  - d) [Resource Panel Process](#)
- 11. [Loans](#)
- 12. [Annual Review of SGO/CAO Support \(including financial support\)](#)
- 13. [Front Door – Special Guardianship Pathway](#)
- 14. [Quality assurance](#)
- 15. [Appendices](#)
  - a) [Appendix 1](#)
  - b) [Appendix 2](#)
  - c) [Appendix 3](#)
- 16. [Superseded documents:](#)
- 17. [Revision History](#)

## 1. Introduction

### a. Purpose

Kinship carers in England are also known as family and friends carers and/or connected persons carers. There are different means by which a child may be living with a kinship carer, depending on the relationship between them and their carer, the level of involvement with the local authority, and, where applicable, the nature of the court order granted.

The purpose of this procedure is to provide a step-by-step guide for practitioners, business support colleagues, managers, and families who use our service when progressing kinship arrangements for a child/ren when they enter our care in Staffordshire including their progression to Special Guardianship where applicable.

### b. Scope

This procedure will cover the following,

- Pre-screening
- Viability Assessment
- Temporary Fostering approval (reg 24)
- Extension to temporary fostering approval (reg 25)
- Connected Person's Assessment - kinship carers
- Connected Persons Assessment and Special Guardianship Report for Court.
- Foster Panel
- Post Fostering Approval
- Special Guardianship Report for Court – private and public applications
- Post Special Guardianship Order

### c. Supporting documentation

There are five main ways in which children come to live with connected people. Please find the following links to be read in conjunction with this policy:

- [informal arrangements between close family members](#)
- [private fostering](#)
- [family and friends foster care](#)
- [special guardianship](#)
- [child arrangements orders](#).

There is a useful summary table of the different options in Annexe A of the [Family and Friends Care statutory guidance](#).

The key legislation, regulation, guidance, and research relating to kinship care are found below,

- [The Children Act 1989](#)
- [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations \(2010 as amended\)](#)
- [The Fostering \(England\) Regulations \(2011 as amended\)](#)
- [The Children Act 1989 Statutory guidance and regulations: Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review](#)
- [The Children Act 1989 Statutory guidance and regulations: Volume 4: Fostering Services](#)
- [Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for local authorities](#)
- [Initial Family and Friends Care Assessments: a good practice guide \(2017\)](#)
- [Staying Put: good practice guidance](#)

*This procedure should also be read in conjunction with Staffordshire's Special Guardianship Support Policy.*

## 2. Guiding Principles

- 2.1 Staffordshire Children's Services are committed to restorative strengths-based approaches to practice with families. Restorative Practices are underpinned by a set of values, these include:

Empowerment, Honesty, Respect, Engagement, Voluntarism, Healing, Restoration, Personal Accountability, Inclusiveness, Collaboration, and Problem-solving.

Social Workers practice is also guided by their professional standards,

- Promote the rights, strengths, and wellbeing of people, families and communities.
- Establish and maintain the trust and confidence of people
- Be accountable for the quality of my practice and the decisions I make.
- Maintain my continuing professional development.
- Act safely, respectfully and with professional integrity.
- Promote ethical practice and report concerns

[https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/1640/1227\\_socialworkengland\\_standards\\_prof\\_standards\\_final-aw.pdf](https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/1640/1227_socialworkengland_standards_prof_standards_final-aw.pdf)

These principles apply throughout our work with children and young people and their families including our kinship families. The key is to work with people and

in collaboration with others to establish meaningful relationships to effect positive change for children and families.

### 3. Pre Screening

- 3.1 The Child's Social Worker prior to pre-screening should ensure that they utilise the support of Family Group Conference to determine the most appropriate connected persons to progress for further consideration, including consideration of any support within the kinship network for the parents and/or connected person/s. It is good practice to complete a genogram and ecomap to consider wider family support and those who are putting themselves forward to provide care. Where a Family Group Conference is declined by the family then a family meeting should be considered as an alternative to formulate a family plan of support and any alternative options for care arrangements.
- 3.2 Pre-Screening is undertaken by the children's social worker on the pre-screening tool.
- 3.3 Pre- Screening is to be completed on all prospective kinship carers put forward to be assessed.
- 3.4 This should be completed as part of early care planning – often after a Family Group Conference or Legal Gateway Meeting.
- 3.5 Although this is the start of a lengthy process, please ensure the whole process of kinship assessment and kinship care responsibilities are discussed with prospective kinship carer/s putting themselves forward to be assessed. This is so they can make an informed decision about progression based on an understanding of the expectations on them if they were to be assessed and approved as a kinship carer.
- 3.6 The Pre-Screening tool **must** conclude with a recommendation on whether the prospective kinship carer/s is suitable to progress for further assessment.
- 3.7 The Pre-Screening tool **must** be signed off by a Children's Team Manager before referral for or completing a Viability Assessment.
- 3.8 If Pre-Screening has a negative recommendation if you are in or initiating care proceedings this should be filed with legal with the view that the prospective kinship carer/s should not progress to a Viability Assessment.
- 3.9 Please ensure at this stage that the prospective kinship carer/s understand the areas of vulnerability/risk in relation to the current care of the child they are applying to have care of. Please identify any vulnerabilities/risks at this stage in the pre-screening tool.

### 4. Viability Assessment

- 4.1 If we are involved in placing a child/ren with a prospective kinship carer/s and/or if we are saying that a parent should not remove the child/ren from the prospective kinship carer/s we should at this stage be considering whether, we need to regulate this arrangement and take legal advice. This is outside of any family arrangements that parents or Guardians with parental responsibility may make.

- 4.2 To consider regulating a kinship arrangement the child/ren must be in the care of the Local Authority either on a section 20 basis with the consent of parents/or legal Guardian with permission to consent, or via an Interim Care Order or Care Order (S38) with parental responsibility being shared by the Local Authority.
- 4.3 Where we are placing a child/ren in kinship arrangements (outside of family arrangements) we will need a viability assessment to be completed by the child's social worker to assess their suitability as temporary foster carers under regulation 24 of the 'Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations' (2010). Please follow this procedure to obtain regulation of a kinship arrangement.
- 4.4 Where the children's team have agreement to issue proceedings or have issued proceedings and they are not planning to progress a regulation 24 arrangement a referral can be made to kinship services to complete a viability assessment.
- 4.5 If the children's team are in pre proceedings or have had opportunities to complete the viability assessment prior to agreement to issue proceedings the viability assessment will be completed by the Children's team.
- 4.6 If the outcome of the viability assessment is positive and you are not making a regulation 24 arrangement and wish to progress further assessment of the prospective kinship carer/s person, please refer to kinship for an all-order assessment, Fostering Assessment only or request a Special Guardianship Report for Court.
- 4.7 If the outcome of the viability is negative if you are in or initiating care proceedings this should be sent to the allocated legal representative and filed with the Court and the kinship applicant/s should not progress for further assessment at this stage unless subsequently ordered by the Court. Court may order further assessment in the context of the wider care planning considerations for the child despite a negative viability. Legal representatives will request in the Court order that a recital is made confirming the outcome of the viability as negative ensuring the professional integrity of the assessing social worker is maintained.
- 4.8 Whether the child's social worker completes the viability assessment, or kinship services complete the viability assessment, the viability assessment **must** consider Schedule 4: The Care Planning and Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

#### A) Kinship (Family and Friends Team) Viability Assessments

- 4.9 For any referral to kinship services for completion of a viability assessment a pre-screening tool (also known as critical questions) is required to accompany the referral form. This is found in forms in Care Director. The form is to be raised with the completing social worker as the key person and their team as the key team.
- 4.10 This pre-screening tool will ascertain which prospective kinship carer/s are suitable to progress to a viability assessment and ensure that the applicant/s understand the processes and the expectations of them in the short and long term.

- 4.11 If the pre-screening outcome is a negative recommendation for further assessment, then the applicant will not progress to a viability assessment and the reasons for this should be clearly set out within the pre-screening tool.
- 4.12 If the Court have ordered a viability assessment despite a negative pre-screening recommendation this **should** be referred within 1 working day to the kinship service who will require 2 weeks within any care proceedings to be timetabled for completion of the viability, and to allow time for quality assurance processes including consideration and sign off by the prospective kinship carer/s and kinship service team manager before this can be filed with legal colleagues and subsequently the Court.
- 4.13 Where this timescale cannot be given then the viability assessment should be completed by the child's social worker in liaison with the Family and Friends Team given their knowledge of the child and circumstances. There may be occasions where the kinship service can complete a viability assessment in a shorter timeframe than 2 weeks (for example a family previously assessed for another child) and this should be discussed between the children's Team Manager and the Manager of the Family and Friends Team before a different timescale is agreed in Court.
- 4.14 Business support on the Child Social Work Team **should** create the prospective kinship carer and create any relationships with the child/ren before a referral is completed to the kinship service for assessment. If the prospective kinship carer/s do not already exist on Care Director upon referral to the kinship service, then the kinship service business support is to complete this to avoid delay in allocation.
- 4.15 The Kinship Service Team Manager on receipt of a referral for a Viability Assessment will review the pre-screening tool and referral form and decide on acceptance of the referral.
- 4.16 If the referral is not accepted, then the Kinship Service Team Manager or Senior Practitioner in their absence should within 1 working day discuss this with the Children's Team Manager to consider next steps. One reason for not accepting a referral for example could be that there is insufficient information around risk or family details to allocate to a social worker. The referral request will be sent back to the originating child social work team by the Kinship Service Team Manager or Senior Practitioner.
- 4.17 If there is a subsequent re referral for the same prospective kinship carer/s, the Kinship Service Team Manager **must** review the pre-screening tool and any previous viability assessments and referral form to inform any decision regarding the suitability of the referral for further assessment.
- 4.18 The Child's Social Worker upon referring to Family and Friends for a viability assessment **should** have already requested PNC checks on all members of the applicant's household over 18.



## B) Allocation of Viability Assessments.

- 4.19 The Kinship Service Team Manager (or Senior Practitioner in their absence) should check their dashboard each working day to ascertain if there are any referrals awaiting allocation. They **must** allocate this within 3 working days.
- 4.20 The Kinship Service Team Manager will review the referral, pre-screening tool and where applicable any previous information if this is a repeat referral. They will determine the suitability of the referral before allocation in the team.
- 4.21 The Kinship Service Team Manager/Senior Practitioner **must** send an allocation email as per the process outlined in this procedure to the allocated practitioner on the appropriate team copying in the referring team as a minimum.
- 4.22 The Kinships Service Team Manager/Senior Practitioner will then set the status to allocated in care Director, the responsible team as Family and Friends and the responsible person as the allocated social worker on the team.
- 4.23 Once the viability assessment is completed the kinship social worker will set the viability assessment to complete in Care director.
- 4.24 The Kinship Service Team Manager should check their dashboard daily for any forms awaiting sign off.
- 4.25 When quality assuring a viability assessment the Kinship Service Team Manager will add their comments and sign off the form in Care Director and set to Complete.
- 4.26 The Viability assessment should then be shared with the prospective kinship carer/s by the family and friend's social worker.
- 4.27 Should the viability require additional information or further exploration is needed as indicated by the Team Manager they **should** set this back to in progress and alert the practitioner by email.
- 4.28 Prospective kinship carer/s should always be encouraged to add their comments and sign the viability assessment and consent to share the assessment with the Court.
- 4.29 Any factual inaccuracies can be corrected following the prospective kinship carer/s feedback but any areas of disagreement or difference of opinion on content are to be noted on the viability assessment only.
- 4.30 The signed viability assessment and consent to file with Court should be provided by the Kinship Service Social Worker to the Child's Social Worker one working day prior to the Court filing date. This will enable the child's social worker to review and share this with the legal representatives who will file this with Court by the directed filing date.
- 4.31 If the viability Assessment is positive and further assessment is required, please follow **section 6** of this procedure.

*Please note a re referral is required in all circumstances it should not be assumed that a positive viability will be allocated and progressed to full assessment. The purpose of this is to track the timescales for completion and note any new risks which may have occurred from the original referral.*

## 5. Temporary approval of a prospective kinship carer/s (regulation 24) and extension of this approval (regulation 25).

- 5.1 Once the Child's Social Worker has completed a viability assessment, they will set the assessment to complete for their Team Manager to approve.
- 5.2 The Children's Team Manager will quality assure and add any comments to the viability, including their signature to enable the social worker to share the viability with the prospective kinship carer/s for their comments.
- 5.3 Prospective kinship carer/s should always be encouraged to add their comments and sign the viability assessment and consent to share the assessment with Court.
- 5.4 Any factual inaccuracies can be corrected following the prospective kinship carer/s feedback, but any areas of disagreement are to be noted on the viability assessment only.
- 5.5 Should the Children's Team Manager upon quality assurance of the viability consider further work is required this should be set back to in progress and the practitioner alerted by email. On receipt of the amended assessment please follow steps from 5.1 onwards of this procedure.
- 5.6 On receipt by the Children's Team Manager of the final version of the viability they should review this and send the signed copy with their comments and the prospective kinship carer/s comments to their District Lead via email requesting that they wish for this to be considered under Regulation 24 stating that they wish for the child/ren to remain with the prospective kinship carer/s or they wish to place the child/ren with the kinship carer/s.
- 5.7 The District Lead will consider the viability assessment in line with schedule 4 of the Care planning and Placement Regulations 2010 and the regulation 24 temporary approval policy in Staffordshire and request a '**critical friend discussion**' with one of the '**Fostering Agency Decision Makers**'. The Fostering Agency Decision Maker will then provide any advice after reading the assessment and liaising with the District Lead in an email setting out their advice as to their suitability to be temporarily approved as a kinship carer/s for the specific child/ren.
- 5.8 This email advice will be copied into the Kinship Service Team and the [fosteringpaneladministration@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringpaneladministration@staffordshire.gov.uk) as an early alert to the potential placement of a child with a temporarily approved kinship foster carer.
- 5.9 The decision to agree a placement under regulation 24 is the responsibility of the relevant District Lead for the child and the information contained within the advice from the Fostering Agency Decision Maker **must** be saved to the child's file and included within their key decision agreeing the arrangement.

- 5.10 If the fostering agency decision makers advice is that the applicants are not suitable to foster, then the email advice sent will not be copied to include foster panel administration.
- 5.11 If the decision is to temporarily approve the prospective kinship carer/s and place the child/ren this should be recorded by the District Lead as a Key Decision on the viability assessment and saved to the Child and Carer's file along with the email advice from the Fostering Agency Decision Maker as noted in point 5.9.
- 5.12 The District Lead following completion of the key decision should reply to all from the Fostering Agency Decision Makers email informing Fostering Panel Administration [fosteringpaneladministration@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringpaneladministration@staffordshire.gov.uk) that the placement has commenced (confirming that we have parental responsibility) and the date of such including a link to the key decision and ensure a copy of the viability assessment agreeing such is attached to the email. This is to ensure the kinship carer/s are set up and payments can commence.
- 5.13 If the District Lead does not agree to the placement of the child/ren the key decision should still be recorded on the child's file outlining the reasons for their decision.
- 5.14 If the District Lead agrees to the placement of the child/ren but not under Regulation 24 then the Unregulated Placement policy and process should be followed, and the Head of District Strategy and Delivery should be notified of an unregulated arrangement and in their absence the Head of Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 5.15 From the date a regulation 24 arrangement is agreed if the child/ren are already in our care via an Interim Care Order/Care Order or section 20 the Local Authority has 16-weeks from this date to complete a Connected Persons Assessment **however local arrangements are that connected persons assessment are filed to Court at week 15.** If a regulation 24 decision is agreed prior to the child being in our care the date for the 16 weeks starts on the date the child enters our care not the date the decision was agreed.

***N.B the referral for further assessment should be completed within 1 working day of the reg 24 start date to ensure the week 15 timescale for Court can be met.***

- 5.16 Following the key decision for a regulation 24 arrangement the kinship carers **should** be immediately referred by the Child's Social Worker to the Kinship Service Team for a Connected Persons Assessment and a Special Guardianship Report for Court if applicable.
- 5.17 Should the connected person's assessment be incomplete at the end of the 16 weeks **(please note: often Court timescales dictate a shorter assessment period)** an additional 8 weeks can be requested in exceptional circumstances under regulation 25.

- 5.18 The additional 8 weeks should be requested by the Kinship Service Social Worker via their Team Manager in liaison with the child's social worker and the views of the Independent Reviewing Officer sought. The District Lead for the child should discuss this extension with the Fostering Agency Decision Maker who will provide email advice as to the continued suitability of the kinship carer to continue to foster whilst the additional 8 weeks are taken to assess.
- 5.19 This advice email should be sent by the Fostering Agency Decision Maker to the District Lead copying in Fostering Panel administration, the Independent Reviewing Officer and the Kinship Service Team Manager.
- 5.20 The District Lead remains responsible for the completion of a Key Decision agreeing to an 8-week extension under regulation 25 and this should be saved to the carer and child/ren's file in Care Director including or alongside the Fostering Agency Decision Makers advice email.
- 5.21 Foster Panel administration should be notified by return email from the District Lead to the Fostering Agency Decision Maker copying in the Kinship Service Social Worker of the agreed extension including dates if there is any change to the proposed foster panel date and filing to Court.
- 5.22 Exceptional circumstances to consider an extension under Regulation 25 could be that the assessment is unusually complex or the non-return of Statutory Checks within the 16-weeks i.e., medical.
- 5.23 Please note that a regulation 24 arrangement should only be considered when child/children are subject to section 20 or an ICO. The date we obtain parental responsibility for a child/ren should be the start date of the regulation 24 arrangement. The District Lead and Fostering Agency Decision Maker should determine if the regulation 24 can be backdated if the placement was made in an emergency under section 20 whereby the viability was completed shortly after placement and then progressed to the District Lead.
- 5.24 See point 5.25 for setting up of fostering payments under regulation 24.

#### a) Setting up and payments to kinship carer's under regulation 24 arrangements.

- 5.25 Foster panel administration on receipt of confirmation from the District Lead via email confirming the start date of the arrangement will set up the kinship carer/s (as a provider) and they will send out the fostering agreement via email or post.
- 5.26 If the applicants do not already exist on Care Director, the Child/ren's Social Worker Business support **should** raise a referral creating them as people and then create relationships with the children.
- 5.27 The child/ren's social worker needs to complete the form Fostering Allowances Placement and Discharges to set up the fostering payments as soon as a child is placed and provide and ask the kinship carers to complete the BACS form in Care Director to enable the kinship carer to be paid into their bank.

- 5.28 The Fostering Allowances Placement and Discharges form **should not** be cloned to any siblings as this will not workflow correctly in Care Director to Adults and Children's Financial Service (ACFS) to pay the carers. If the form is cloned this will result in delay to their payments. Separate forms should be completed for each child. This form needs to be signed by the team manager but not set to closed and remains in progress. An alert is automatically generated to ACFS once the children's Team Manager completes the signature section within the form.
- 5.29 If the fostering allowances placement and discharge form is completed before the kinship carers are set up by foster panel administration, they will not be able to create a service provision to pay fostering allowances. ACFS in these circumstances will then have to request fostering panel admin to set up the carers. Therefore, delays at this stage should be avoided and it is essential that foster panel administration set up the kinship carers without delay and prior to the completion of the fostering placement and discharges form.
- 5.30 The Child Social Worker should ensure that any start-up costs and equipment needs are explored and agreed before the child/ren are placed and that a signed Placement Plan including Delegated Authority (inclusive of medical consent) is provided to the kinship carer/s.

## 6. Further Assessment

### a) Referral.

- 6.1 If the Viability Assessment has been completed by a Child Social Worker or Kinship Service Social Worker, the decision to progress to further assessment of a connected carer lies with the Child's social worker care planning for the child/ren. Therefore, if the Viability Assessment is positive and further assessment is required then the child's social worker should make a referral to the Kinship Service Team. They should select one of the below options for further assessment.
- All order assessment (this includes SGO).
  - Fostering only assessment
  - Special Guardianship report for Court.
- 6.2 The Children's Social Worker completes the Kinship Referral Form and the Children's Business Support are to set up the applicants in Care Director including any relationship with the child/ren if they are not known.
- 6.3 If the prospective kinship carers are a couple, then a referral can be raised on either applicant, but the partner should be added as a referral member, so the Care Director files are linked.
- 6.4 In the instances where the child/ren have been placed with the kinship carer/s under regulation 24 temporary approval a Connected Person's Assessment is

**required** and **should** be referred immediately following the regulation 24 key decision being made.

- 6.5 Where the child/ren have not been placed under regulation 24 or indeed placed in an unregulated arrangement and further assessment is required or Court directed then, the referrer **should** ensure they are clear about this in the request for further assessment.
- 6.6 The Kinship Service Team Manager on receipt of a referral for further assessment will review the referral alongside the viability assessment and decide on suitability of the referral.
- 6.7 If it is considered that the referral for further assessment is not suitable or requires further information, then the Children's Team Manager and Kinship Service Team Manager should discuss the reasons for this **within 1 working day** so that the children's Team Manager can make appropriate decisions, and the Kinship Service Team Manager will send the request back asking either for the additional information or declining the referral.

#### b) Allocation and Closure.

- 6.8 The Kinship Service Team manager/Senior Practitioner or the Fostering Permanency and Special Guardianship Support Team (FP & SGO) Manager will identify any allocations from their work list each working day and provide an allocation email to the practitioner/referring social worker and their Team Manager, including any legal colleagues allocated to the child/ren **within 3 working days**. This email will include an overview of timescales for completion of work and any foster panel dates/Court dates if relevant that have been arranged.
- 6.9 Kinship Service Team Manager/Senior Practitioner will as part of the allocation process request a date for Foster Panel within 16-weeks of the child being placed.
- 6.10 This email will also note a date the documents are to be submitted to Panel (3 weeks prior to Panel Date)
- 6.11 Panel Business Support will follow their processes and add the prospective kinship carer/s or existing kinship carers to the Event Module at this stage.
- 6.12 Once the Referral has been allocated by the Team Manager an automatic alert will be sent to Kinship Service Business support/Fostering Permanency and SGO Support Team (FP & SGO Team) business support for them to initiate any necessary checks and references. The allocation email will act as further alert to start this process by copying in business support colleagues in Kinship Service or FP & SGO.
- 6.13 On receipt of the allocation email – business support **should** send out the relevant checks **within 5 working days** – these include local authority checks, papers for the applicants to complete DBS and Medicals, in addition to the form to complete providing their information to enable references and stat checks to be completed.
- 6.14 All Checks are recorded at a Person Level in CareDirector – Person – Other Information – Checks.
- 6.15 For Connected Persons Assessments a Kinship Service/or Fostering Practitioner will undertake the assessment including completion of the Safer Caring Plan, Health

and Safety Checklist and Foster Care - Pet Questionnaire, references and submits them to Foster Panel three weeks prior to the panel date.

- 6.16 If the referral is also for a Special Guardianship Report for Court this will also be completed together. Panel will only consider the Assessment of Connected Persons they do not have oversight of the Special Guardianship Report for Court so this should not be sent to the panel team.
- 6.17 If the referral is for a Special Guardianship Report for Court, the allocated kinship social worker will complete the support plan process and referral to the children's financial assessment officers team within 1 working day of being allocated to the family.
- 6.18 For both types of further assessment connected persons and SGO, the Child Social Worker will complete their sections of the report on the child, siblings, and parents. The Kinship Service/ Fostering or SGO Social Worker will complete their sections of the report related to the applicants.
- 6.19 Once the assessment is completed the respective allocated worker will set the assessment to complete in Care Director for the Kinship Service/Fostering or FP and SGO Team Manager to quality assure and add any comments. They will complete the managers checklist and save this to the prospective or existing carer/s file.
- 6.20 Should further work be required the respective Team Manager will add any comments and request further work, setting this back to in progress for the practitioner to update, or
- 6.21 Add comments, sign the form, and set to closed to enable the practitioner to share this with the applicants.
- 6.22 The respective social worker **must** then share the assessment with prospective or existing kinship carers and encourage them to add comments and sign the assessment and consent to share the assessment with the Court.
- 6.23 Any factual inaccuracies will be corrected within the report, but any areas of disagreement are to be noted on the assessment only.
- 6.24 The signed assessment and consent to file is sent by the respective practitioner to the children's social worker where applicable **one day** prior to the filing date via email to review and share with the legal representative to file to Court by the Court ordered deadline.
- 6.25 The Connected Persons' Assessment if a child is placed and this is regulated the relevant accompanying papers are to be provided alongside their assessment to foster panel as per this process for this matter to be heard at foster panel whether it is a positive or negative outcome.
- 6.26 If the outcome of the Connected Person's Assessment is however negative and the Fostering Agency Decision Maker does not deem them suitable to become a kinship foster carer, and the child/ren are not placed and the prospective kinship carers are not seeking to challenge this decision then the Kinship Service/Fostering Team and the prospective kinship carer/s will close the connected carers file within **28 working days** of the letter informing the applicants of this decision.

- 6.27 If the outcome of the Connected Person's Assessment is however negative and the Fostering Agency Decision Maker does not deem them suitable to become a kinship foster carer, and the child/ren are placed and the arrangement is regulated and the prospective kinship carers are seeking to challenge this decision through the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) then the Kinship Service/Fostering Team and the prospective kinship carer/s will remain open until this process has concluded.
- 6.28 If the outcome of the Special Guardianship Report for Court is positive and a subsequent order is made by the Court, the Special Guardian should remain open to the respective team for the duration as set out in the Special Guardianship Support Plan before closure is completed. Should any extension to this period be needed this should be agreed between the allocated social worker and their Team Manager.
- 6.29 If the outcome of the Special Guardianship Report for Court is positive and an order is made the Special Guardian/s should remain open for the period agreed in the support plan and informed of closure prior to this occurring. Should any extension to this period be needed this should be agreed between the allocated social worker and their Team Manager.
- 6.30 To close any file the respective Social Worker will complete the Regulated Service closure record, update the chronology, and send out a closure letter to the applicants alerting any professionals involved either via letter or email confirming the closure/and seeking any views on such. These emails/letters and any views on closure should be saved the respective kinship carer/Guardian's file.
- 6.31 The respective Team Manager **should** then complete an audit of the file prior to closure and complete a key decision outlining that an audit has been completed and agree closure confirming that all key documents including notifications to all involved have been completed and are on the file before closing the file.
- 6.32 File closed. Should the file be closed following the granting of a Special Guardianship Order where financial support has been agreed as an ongoing arrangement this should be reviewed annually. The file status is therefore to be closed under review by the respective Team Manager and a date for review inputted into Care Director on the appropriate screen so that a list of Special Guardians due for review can be obtained monthly by the FP and SGO Team business support and process for annual review followed through Resource Panel.
- 6.33 All SGO files closed whether financial support is in place or not can access an annual review of their support needs and therefore the respective Team Manager upon closure should also input an annual review date on the relevant Care Director screen upon closure of the file.

### c) Allocation Independent/Sessional Social Worker.

- 6.34 When demand is such that a connected persons assessment or Special Guardianship Report for Court cannot be allocated to a Kinship Service Social Worker that can meet the timescales of Court, or to prevent the use of an unknown



Independent assessor by the Court consideration should be given by the Team Manager as to the appropriateness of allocation to a sessional social worker from the pool or an Independent Social Worker (ISW)–please note however that allocation of the carers in Care Director will show as allocated to the Team Manager. Regular supervision at a minimum of 4 weekly in line with Staffordshire's Supervision Policy should be completed with the Sessional or ISW and recorded and any key decision recorded on Care Director where they are actively completing work for Staffordshire.

- 6.35 Where an ISW has been Court ordered to complete a Full Connected Persons Assessment, it is the responsibility of the Children's Social Worker to complete a referral to Kinship Service and stipulate within this the details of the Independent Social Worker and request that the statutory checks such as references, DBS paperwork, medical, LA checks etc (sw16) are processed by Kinship Service business support. These checks will be forwarded to the Independent Social Worker when returned, and it is their responsibility to follow these up for the purpose of the assessment.
- 6.36 Upon receipt of the referral there will be a Family Practitioner allocated on the FP and SGO Team **within 3 working days** for all assessments to be completed by an ISW to support in the completion of stat checks. If this is a Special Guardianship Report for Court the family practitioner will also complete the support planning process, and referrals for financial assessment and the Resource Panel process.

## 7. Assessment and Allocation Timescales.

- 7.1 Upon receipt of the referral within the Kinship Service or FP and SGO Team (for SGO only) the following timescales **should** be adhered to for completion of any allocated work and filing dates being set for Court,
- 7.1.1 Viability Assessment (**2 weeks from referral required for completion of viability assessments**)
- 7.1.2 Fostering Only Assessment (**12 weeks from referral required for completion**) this includes panel and Agency Decision Maker process.
- 7.1.3 All order assessment (**13 weeks from referral required for completion**) this includes panel and Agency Decision Maker process.
- 7.1.4 For Special Guardianship Report for Court – (**9 weeks from the date of the referral**).
- 7.1.5 Special Guardianship Report for Court (Part 3) where the applicant was approved with the last 12 months as an approved kinship foster carer – (**4 weeks from the date of the referral**) if the previous assessment is over 12 months old then (**8 weeks from the date of the referral**).
- 7.2 All referrals should be allocated by the F and F /Fostering/ or FP and SGO Lead or Senior Practitioner within **three working days**.
- 7.3 Following allocation by the respective Team Manager in Care Director an allocation email **should** be completed **the same day** by the Team Manager or Senior Practitioner and this should include the date that the assessment is to be completed

by the practitioner and sent to the Team Manager for quality assurance and comments.

- 7.4 As a minimum the allocation email should be sent to the allocated Kinship Service/SGO Social Worker and their respective business support and the referring Child Social Worker, their Team Manager and if available the legal representative linked to any Court proceedings.
- 7.5 If the allocation of a Family Practitioner is required during or at the commencement of any kinship assessment this should be completed by the Fostering Permanency and Special Guardianship Support Team Manager in receipt of an allocation email or email request within **three working days**. The FP and SGO team duty box should also be copied into this allocation email to ensure in the absence of the FP and SGO Team Manager the covering fostering manager can allocate this work in a timely way.
- 7.6 [fosteringpaneladministration@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringpaneladministration@staffordshire.gov.uk) should also be copied into the allocation email for all Connected Person's Assessments.
- 7.7 The allocation dates should be copied by the respective Team Manager or Senior practitioner into details screen on the referral page and the allocation email saved in a task note on the applicants Care Director file.
- 7.8 Kinship Service business support on receipt of the allocation email for Connected Person's Assessment will send out the SW16 within **2 working days** of referral being allocated to a Social Worker.
- 7.9 Statutory checks will also be started by the allocated Social Worker or with agreement by the respective teams Business Support for DBS/References/Medicals **within 2 working days**.
- 7.10 The allocated Social Worker **should** make first contact with kinship applicants within **5 working days** of the allocation and they **should** visit **within 7 days** of allocation. The date of the visit **should** be communicated to any Family Practitioner allocated. An exception to go outside of these timescales should be via a key decision with the respective Team Manager and saved on the prospective kinship/Special Guardian's file.
- 7.11 During the first visit if allocation is for Connected Person's Assessment only the Kinship Service Social Worker is to establish if Special Guardianship has been discussed with the applicants and whether this is something they wish to progress to avoid delays in progressing permanency for children later in the process.
- 7.12 If after the first visit the applicants indicate that they would wish to be considered and assessed for Special Guardianship, there should be a care planning discussion with the Child Social Worker as to the appropriateness of such at this stage and the referral updated if the work allocated is to change.
- 7.13 For part 3 Special Guardianship Report for Court for existing kinship carer/s or standalone Special Guardianship Reports for Court the allocated Social Worker **should** complete the referral for financial assessment within **one working days** of allocation to them.

## 8. Foster Panel

- 8.1 Kinship Service/Fostering Practitioner **must** submit all appropriate documents to Foster Panel Coordinator 3 weeks prior to the agreed foster panel date (this date will be on the allocation email).
- 8.2 If papers are not provided in timescales the matter may be deferred for a later panel risking delays in care planning for children.
- 8.3 The day foster panel takes place they will have considered the Connected Persons Assessment, and all accompanying documents. Attendance at panel by the allocated children's and fostering social workers is essential in addition to the prospective or kinship carer/s. Foster Panel will make a recommendation on the day and communicate this to the applicants on their suitability to foster.
- 8.4 The consideration of suitability to foster also includes those kinship carer/s for whom are already temporarily approved under regulation 24 and the child/ren are already placed with them.
- 8.5 Following foster panel, the minutes and recommendations are then sent by fostering panel administration to the Agency Decision Maker for fostering.
- 8.6 Where additional information is required, Panel will have set up a date for the information to be submitted.
- 8.7 If Panel do not recommend approval, then then the Children's Practitioner **should** ensure that they consider alternative legal or placement routes.
- 8.8 The Agency Decision Maker will consider the panel's recommendation and any appropriate paperwork from the panel pack before deciding on a kinship carer/s suitability. The Agency Decision Maker for Fostering can choose to make a different decision from the recommendation of panel and the allocated worker in their assessment. The Fostering ADM decides within 7 working days of receipt of the final recommendation and panel minutes on the suitability and sets out their decision and reasons in writing at the end of the panel minutes.
- 8.9 The decision and date of the decision is recorded by the Fostering Agency Decision Maker and the applicants **should** be advised by their allocated social worker verbally within **two days** and in writing **within 10 working days** of the panel date.
- 8.10 If the Fostering Agency Decision Maker has assessed the applicants as unsuitable to foster, they will set out their reasons for this in a Qualifying Determination letter which will be sent out to the applicants by panel administration.

- 8.11 This letter will set out the options for the applicants to challenge the decision via foster panel or the Independent Reviewing Mechanism. They have 28 days from the date of the letter to make this appeal.

*Please note: during this process between panel, ADM decision, and 28 day appeal period any carers already approved as kinship carer/s including temporarily approved carer/s, remain approved.*

- 8.12 If the applicants subsequently challenge the ADM decision through panel or the IRM their approval remains in place throughout the duration of these processes.
- 8.13 The Fostering ADM may defer any decision should there be any cause to do so until such a time any issues have been resolved or further information has been received. The Fostering ADM can request that any deferral of a decision return to them for the decision or return to foster panel for consideration again prior to them making their decision.

## 9. Training

- 9.1 For those kinship carer/s who are approved including those temporarily approved the following mandatory training and work must be completed,
- 9.2 Kinship Service/ Fostering Practitioner guides the applicants through completing their TSD Portfolio; Carers have **18-months** from the date of their approval to complete this. A CWDC TSD Fostering Service Verification Form is created by the Fostering Recruitment Team Business Support in Care Director (Form) with a due date of **18-months** from approval.
- 9.3 Where the placement is deemed to be short term kinship carer/s do not undertake TSD; there is a need to review the situation though every **3-months** to ensure those who should be undertaking this are.
- 9.4 Standardisation Panel may request further information prior to approval of the Portfolio in relation to TSD standards,
- 9.5 Once Carers have completed their Portfolio the allocated Fostering Practitioner sends the pass document to the respective Team Manager to request an increase in fostering allowances appropriate to the level, they are eligible to be considered for.
- 9.6 The respective Team Manager is responsible for notifying our finance partner Adult and Children's Financial Services (ACFS).
- 9.7 Please note there is the option for Kinship Carer/s to progress beyond Level 2 should the criteria be met to do so.

## 10. Special Guardianship Report for Court – Public and Private applications.

- 10.1 When a Special Guardianship Order application is made, prospective Special Guardians are asked to submit a Notification of intent in writing to the Court. They then have **3 months** from the date of the notification to submit their application to Court.
- 10.2 If this is a private application and the children are not known - This notification should also be passed to Access to Services and Family Support who will follow their processes for allocation within the children's services system.
- 10.3 The allocated children's practitioner will then undertake a Child and Family Assessment under Child in Need processes.
- 10.4 If the prospective Special Guardians are **NOT** current kinship carers and are not known on CareDirector they will also need to be created by Children's Business Support.
- 10.5 Children's business support will then create a referral on one of the prospective Special Guardians and link the Care Director file to the other applicant if they are a couple and on the respective applicant only if they are a single applicant. Relationships to the child/ren they are being assessed for are also to be created at this stage where possible.
- 10.6 If a Special Guardianship Report for Court is being requested either as a private application or as part of care proceedings then the Child/ren's social worker should follow the points within this procedure to refer the prospective Special Guardian for completion of the Special Guardianship Report for Court.
- 10.7 Allocation, completion, and progression of the Special Guardianship Report for Court will be made as per the **further assessment process** within this procedure.
- 10.8 During the allocation process the relevant Team Manager may also use discretion in any decision to allocate a Special Guardianship Report for Court with the children's team manager when considering the length of any private arrangement the children's team were already aware of, and any orders already in place i.e. Child Arrangement Order, or concerns already known and this will determine whether the children's team and parents are supporting this arrangement to determine if a pre-screening viability assessment or viability assessment is required before progressing allocation of further assessment to complete a Special Guardianship Report to Court.
- 10.9 The allocation and timescales for a Social Worker within the Kinship Service to start and progress the Special Guardianship Support Planning process is set out in this procedure and should be followed.

- 10.10 In addition, the allocated Social Worker on their first visit **should** provide the applicants in person or if agreed by email with the '**what to expect**' financial form to ensure they are aware of what is required of them with regards to the financial assessment process and the evidence that they will need to provide and the importance to avoid delay in agreeing any financial support under Special Guardianship.
- 10.11 For private applications any application for financial support from Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship Resource Panel as part of the Special Guardianship Support Planning process is discretionary under the Special Guardianship policy and this should be made clear to the applicants upon commencement of the report by the allocated social worker or family practitioner. The applicants should be asked if they wish to request financial support from the Local Authority before a referral is completed to request a financial assessment.
- 10.12 The Special Guardianship Support Plan should also be raised by the respective social worker **within 1 working day** once allocated to them – see guidance below and overview of timescales within this procedure.
- 10.13 It is **essential** that the child/ren's social worker complete their parts of the Special Guardianship Report for Court within the required timescale set out in the allocation email.
- 10.14 Once the Special Guardianship Report for Court is completed the allocated Social Worker for the prospective Special Guardians **will** set the assessment to complete for the team manager to quality assure and add any comments.
- 10.15 The team manager **may** request further work, setting this back to in progress for the practitioner to update, or
- 10.16 Add comments, sign the form and set to closed to enable the practitioner to share this with the applicants.
- 10.17 The allocated Social Worker for the prospective Special Guardians is to share the assessment with applicant and they are to be encouraged to add comments and sign the assessment and consent to share assessment with court.
- 10.18 Any factual inaccuracies can be amended however any other areas of disagreement are to be noted with the assessment only.
- 10.19 Upon receipt of the signed assessment and consent to file with Court this should be provided by the allocated Social Worker for the prospective Special Guardians to the children's social worker **one working day** prior to the Court filing date to review and share with the legal representatives to enable the assessment to be filed to court in time.
- 10.20 In the period following completion of the Special Guardianship Report for Court when the application for the order is pending and there is no action required with the Prospective Special Guardian, please ensure the allocated social worker maintain regular contact **at least every two weeks** with the child's social worker to request updates on the care plan and the final evidence and hearing dates.

- 10.21 If the prospective Special Guardians are already approved as kinship carers or general foster carers, please ensure the allocated fostering practitioner maintains regulatory requirements.
- 10.22 Once the allocated social worker for the prospective Special Guardians becomes aware of the date for the final hearing, please put this in your calendar to keep track and chase the outcome with the child/ren's social worker.
- 10.23 For the duration of the order pending prospective Special Guardians are to remain open until any order is made, unless it is confirmed that an order is no longer being sought by the applicants or the local authority.
- 10.24 If the prospective Special Guardians are challenging the outcome of a negative Special Guardianship Report for Court, the matter must remain open until the Court process is concluded with the prospective Special Guardians.
- 10.25 If the Special Guardianship Order is granted the child's social worker **should** inform the allocated Social Worker for Special Guardians by email within **1 working day** of the final Court date copying in the relevant team business support, [orders.payments@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:orders.payments@staffordshire.gov.uk), and [fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk)
- The child/ren's social worker **should** complete a task note in Care Director **within one working day** of the final hearing date as to the outcome of Court and notify by email including a link to the task note to the relevant allocated professionals for the Special Guardian including business support, orders payment, foster panel admin (where they are already approved kinship or general foster carers) and Resource Panel. This email and task note referred to above should include the date the order was granted if granted.

The following suggested text could be used to alert those involved as to the outcome of Court,

- Following the Special Guardianship Order being made **DATE** I am advising Order Payments of the need to provide any agreed financial support as per the resource Panel key decision and business support, children's colleagues, and Special Guardians allocated worker copied into this email to complete any relevant processes including a task note. The child movement form, and the Court Screen to be completed by the children's team.
- 10.26 If the order is granted on receipt of this email business support colleagues for the Special Guardians will set up Care Type as Special Guardianship and the Carer Approval decision on Care Director. An email **should** then be sent by business support informing orders payments of the change in Care type and date this commenced.
- 10.27 Order Payments will then upon receipt of this email commence payments as per the key decision on the Special Guardians file as set out by Resource Panel.

***Please note if this part of the process (email notifications and child movement form to change the child's legal status) are not completed by the child/ren's***

***social worker or completed in a timely way there will be a delay in setting up and paying the Special Guardian any financial support they are eligible for putting the Special Guardian under financial pressure in meeting the needs of the child/ren living or being placed with them.***

- 10.28 The allocated Social Worker for the Special Guardians on receipt of this email should update the guardians file to include a task note to record the outcome of Court.
- 10.29 Within **two working days** of the final hearing date, the allocated worker for the Special Guardian **should** chase if not already notified by the Child Social Worker and prospective Special Guardians if the order was made. Please record the outcome on the Special Guardians file.
- 10.30 If the Special Guardianship Order is not granted, the child's social worker **should** inform the allocated Social Worker for the prospective Special Guardians **within 1 working day** of the final Court date that this has occurred. Then the casefile should be closed, and the allocated social worker **should** follow the further assessment closure process set out in this procedure **within 5 working days**.
- 10.31 If the Special Guardianship Report for Court has been completed either by a children's team practitioner or fostering practitioner on behalf of the FP and SGO Team, then the allocated worker should complete the appropriate transfer form for any post order support to transfer to the FP and SGO team prior to closure.
- 10.32 If the child's file is to close following the SGO being granted, then children's workers follow their procedures for closure and are to notify the allocated worker for the Special Guardians of this.
- 10.33 Should the child remain open post order for a period of child in need support any plans to close should be discussed with the FP and SGO team post order.
- 10.34 When the allocated worker for the Special Guardian is closing the Care Director file the Team Manager is to set this to closed under review and a review with a referral reason either Kinship Service – Special Guardianship – Private Application or Placement Team. They **should** also input the Court screen to ensure any financial support can continue and the appropriate annual review can be completed. The date of review to input will be within 12 months from the date of the SGO being granted and the subsequent annual review date thereafter. Any change in circumstances for the family should be notified to the FP and SGO Team and this **will** prompt an earlier or additional review of financial or practical support post order with the agreement of the FP and SGO Team Manager.

*Following the steps of the procedure will ensure that any payments as per the Resource panel key decision can be set up and commence without delay for the Special Guardian.*



#### a) Special Guardianship Support Planning.

- 10.35 After successful allocation of the Special Guardianship Support Plan to a Social Worker within the Kinship Service the Special Guardianship Support Plan should be raised within **3 working days** of allocation.
- 10.36 The completion of the Support plan is a joint responsibility between the child/s social worker and the kinship social worker.
- 10.37 The Kinship Social Worker is responsible for the referral for the collation of financial information which informs the financial assessment process and for the progression to and the outcome (SW744) of Resource Panel for financial support packages. This includes relaying the outcome of Resource Panel to the applicants.
- 10.38 The completed Special Guardianship Support plan should be signed by both the child and allocated Special Guardians Social Worker and their respective team managers following a quality assurance process and managers checklist. The practitioner completing the Special Guardianship Report for Court's Team Manager should receive this finalised document at the end of the process to enable them to confirm and sign off that the contents of the support plan assuring this is in line with Staffordshire's Special Guardianship Policy.
- 10.39 The status of the support plan however is to be returned to in progress if amendments are required by the respective team manager, with above steps then being repeated for quality assurance and sign off.
- 10.40 If no further changes are needed however then the plan can be set to closed and shared with the prospective Special Guardian for their comments and where appropriate discussion with their legal representative.
- 10.41 Any changes to the Special Guardianship Support Plan after the initial management sign off including any information from any subsequent key decisions from Resource Panel should be added to a newly dated support plan and this should be saved to Care Director indicating this is an updated plan and this will then workflow through for Team Manager quality assurance and sign off. This updated plan should include updated signatures and comments from the practitioners, Team Manager, and prospective Special Guardians. This is to ensure that there is evidence of the differing versions of the plan and any updates to ensure the most up to date plan on file can be located and reflects the actual support to be offered to the Special Guardian if the order is granted. Please do not keep all of the history from the preceding versions of the support plan – the most up to date plan should reflect what is in place at that time only.
- 10.42 Should an amended plan be agreed and completed the Child/ren's social worker should have an updated copy to file with legal and the Court before the final hearing date to ensure that the Court are aware of any changes.
- 10.43 The finalised signed copy including carers signature and comments **must** be saved and sent in an email to the child social worker **one working day** prior to any Court filing date.

- 10.44 This is to be filed to legal via the child social worker for legal to file with the Court by the due date.
- 10.45 A copy of the finalised Special Guardianship Support Plan and any updated plans **must** be provided to the Special Guardians upon submission to Court.
- 10.46 There are occasions when Special Guardians required a copy in advance to obtain legal advice, we **should** ensure this is a finalised plan and that any changes to this after such legal advice are put onto a new plan and that this follows the quality assurance processes highlighted in this section of the procedure.

#### b) Welfare Benefits and Financial Assessment.

- 10.47 Following allocation of the support planning process to the kinship social worker a referral to welfare benefits/finance officers is required. This referral should request 'full collation of financial details' **within two working days** of 1st Social Work visit and confirmation that Special Guardianship Report for Court is progressing.
- 10.48 There are 40 days allowed for full collation of financial details therefore it is essential this process and the gathering of information are followed and clearly explained to the prospective Special Guardians at the beginning of the process to avoid delay and the prevention of filing a finalised Special Guardianship Support plan by the court filing date.
- 10.49 The referral is then allocated to Financial Assessment Officer.
- 10.50 For welfare benefits check only – Financial Assessment Officer identifies how to maximise income and completes form, recording on care director, then records a task note recording action/information.
- 10.51 For full collation of financial details – information collated – including physical evidence, sw744 completed and saved in Care Director and Adult Children Financial Services will receive an automatic alert informing them of the outcome.
- 10.52 To complete this they will send out an initial contact via email and can send a letter if requested. If evidence is not provided within timescales the financial assessment officer will escalate this to the appropriate Team Manager of Kinship or SGO.
- 10.53 Adult and Children's Financial Services then complete the financial assessment which is then emailed to the Resource Panel Coordinator and the practitioner who made the original referral, and the Resource Panel Coordinator will add this onto the appropriate Resource Panel agenda when receipt of full Resource Panel application paperwork arrives.
- 10.54 This financial assessment enables decisions to be made at Resource Panel about the level of financial support the carers/applicants can receive under the Special Guardianship Policy.

**Commented [NH1]:** Add in pragrah re financial assessment process

#### c) Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship Resource Panel.

- 10.55 The role of the Resource Panel is to ensure that financial support arrangements to Foster Carers / loans / exceptional and discretionary payments / childcare costs/ payments to adopters / Special Guardians / holders of residence orders are reviewed in accordance with legal requirements. It also clarifies the legal, policy and procedural framework governing the work of the Review Panel. Resource Panel is usually held weekly. Please see Terms of Reference for this panel in the children and families document library.
- 10.56 All Panel bookings should be forwarded to [fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk) and should include a Resource Panel Booking Form and supporting documents which can include SGO Support Plan for each child, Financial Assessments, loan applications, invoices etc. Approval from SGO lead or Team Manager is required to progress a booking.
- 10.57 If the matter has been to Resource Panel previously the previous key decisions are to be added to the agenda by the person referring to Resource Panel or Panel coordinator – this is to be agreed with coordinator via email when request is being made to add to the next panel.
- 10.58 Resource Panel Booking Form is a word document template which can be obtained from the email address in 10.56 or in the Children and Families document library, this will need to be saved on both the Child and Carers File as an attachment by the Resource Panel Coordinator if not already saved.
- 10.59 Booking form is required 3 working days before the panel date for this to be booked onto the next panel or will go onto the subsequent panel.
- 10.60 Once the matter has been allocated a slot on Resource Panel Practitioner will be sent an email to advise them of the date.
- 10.61 The documents to be considered at Resource Panel will be embedded in the agenda for the panel.
- 10.62 There are occasions when Practitioners will need an urgent decision from Resource Panel; they should discuss this with their Team Manager and if the Team Manager agrees that this requires an urgent decision the Team Manager should send over the information required in these instances to [fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk) requesting this.
- 10.63 Resource Panel Coordinator will then forward the request to the Head of Service or Fostering Lead chairing the next available Panel who will make the out of panel decision and then respond to the Team Manager copying in [fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk)
- 10.64 Resource Panel Coordinator will then add the matter to the next Panel Agenda as an Out of Panel Decision, embedding the decision in the agenda and carry out any necessary actions.
- 10.65 The Resource Panel Coordinator will make a record of the panel discussion and the decision that is made. The decision will also be recorded by the Resource Panel Coordinator on a Key Decision template. The Resource Panel Coordinator will ensure that all parts of the key decision template are completed.

- 10.66 The Panel chair will clearly detail any financial decision that the panel has agreed. The Resource Panel Coordinator will make a record of the sterling amount agreed on the key decision template to include a start and end date for agreed financial support. The chair will outline any reason why the final agreed sterling figure may differ from the financial outcome assessment. The panel coordinator will make a clear record of this on the key decision template.
- 10.67 Any loans for kinship carers are to follow the loans policy/process for loans for foster carers.
- 10.68 Any actions that have been requested by Resource Panel are undertaken by the Resource Panel coordinator; this may be that an application needs to be heard at a future Panel – this should be added to the appropriate Agenda.
- 10.69 When the Resource Panel Minutes are approved then a Key Decision sheet needs to be completed for each case; this should be added to CareDirector via attachments and then a link is emailed to the respective practitioners.
- 10.70 Copies also need to be sent to Orders Payments. This will enable exceptional payments to be made if coming via Order Payments.
- 10.71 The order payments team should only have the amount to be paid information including dates-the remainder of the personal information on the key decision is confidential and therefore not to be shared
- 10.72 The Decision sheet will need to be saved to both the Carers and Young Person and is not to be sent to the Carers directly. This content of the key decision should be discussed with the applicants in person or over the phone by the allocated social worker.
- 10.73 Where there is joint application, the Key Decision must be saved to the CareDirector case with an open Referral.
- 10.74 All Carers records should be saved using file path - Document Type – (c) Foster Carer – Financial Support Document Sub-Type – (c) Financial Support
- 10.75 The document should be saved to the young person's record using one of the following three file paths, as appropriate.
- 10.76 Special Guardianship – Document Type – (c) Child – Special Guardianship - Document Sub-Type – (c) Special Guardianship
- 10.77 Fostering – Document Type – (c) Child – Looked After Children – Financial Support - Document Sub-Type (c) Financial Support
- 10.78 Adoption – Document Type – (c) Child – Adoption – Financial Support – Document Sub-Type (c) Financial Support
- 10.79 Where Special Guardianship Financial Support has been agreed or declined the Resource Panel coordinator will send the appropriate letter template and save to the carers file and the letter and key decision are also sent to the child's social worker and Team Manager.

#### d) Resource Panel process.

- 10.80 If following a financial assessment there is a need to progress to Resource Panel for financial support this should be progressed as per the Resource Panel procedure whether this is a private or public application and this should be made clear in the referral as this impacts on how the request is considered under the Special Guardianship Policy.
- 10.81 If Resource Panel agree a package of financial support the key decision link when saved to Care Director should be emailed by the Resource Panel coordinator to the allocated child and prospective Special Guardians Social Worker, Family Practitioner, and their respective Team Managers including [orders.payments@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:orders.payments@staffordshire.gov.uk) in the email.
- 10.82 Upon receipt of the email key decision Order Payments will send out a letter and Special Guardianship agreement confirming the amount of financial support agreed and the need to sign and return the agreement form within **5 working days** and a BACS form will be included and will need to be returned. If financial support has been agreed until a child is 18 (if in the key decision) then a further Head of Service letter is to be sent from Business Support on the Fostering Permanency and SGO Team confirming this in writing following receipt of the key decision email from the Resource Panel or kinship social worker.

**Please note - Order Payments should only have the amount to be paid information from the key decision including dates when the key decision is sent to them from Resource Panel -the remainder of the personal information on the key decision is confidential and therefore not to be shared wider.**

## 11.Loans

- 11.1 Please refer to new process for full details – in overview.
- 11.2 There are two loan types agreed for Special Guardians either secured or unsecured
- 11.3 Resource Panel has oversight of this process and decision making.
- 11.4 Allocated Social Workers will complete the application with Special Guardians and ensure there are three quotations for any building work or for a car ensuring for a car there are the car details including car registration / price/ mileage etc; this will be reviewed by the respective Team Manager.
- 11.5 The allocated social worker then sends this information to [fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringandadoptionresourcepanel@staffordshire.gov.uk)
- 11.6 The Resource Panel Coordinator checks all information and if satisfied adds to Agenda for the next available Resource Panel; Loan applications then following the normal Resource Panel process outlines within this Kinship Procedure and a Key Decision produced and saved to the Carers record only.
- 11.7 The decisions of Resource Panel will be either deferred – further information required / not approved / approved.

- 11.8 Loans that are outside the scheme of delegation of Panel over £10,000 will require a positive recommendation from the Resource Panel and the agreement of the Assistant Director, Children Services.
- 11.9 If this is required, the Resource Panel coordinator on notice from the panel chair will send all of the appropriate documentation and the finalised key decision of panel making the recommendation via email asking that a decision is made within 5 working days of receipt of the email.
- 11.10 Once the Assistant Director has responded the Key Decision is added to and dated outlining their authority to progress.
- 11.11 Once fully agreed and the decision is approved then Resource Panel Coordinator will send the full loan application and Key Decision to Legal Property Services
- 11.12 For secured loan applications [propertyallocations@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:propertyallocations@staffordshire.gov.uk)
- 11.13 For unsecured loan applications [ContractsTeam@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ContractsTeam@staffordshire.gov.uk)
- 11.14 Legal Property Services will liaise with Resource Panel Coordinator and Practitioner if further information is required.
- 11.15 Resource Panel Chairs will be required to sign the legal contracts once completed.
- 11.16 Resource Panel Coordinator will save all information and final email to Carer's record
- 11.17 The full Foster Carer Loan's Policy can be found at Staffordshire County Council - Looked After Children.

## **12 Annual Review of Special Guardianship Support/Child Arrangement Support (including financial support).**

- 12.1 Please see Annual Review Process flowchart.
- 12.2 The business support on the SGO Team will keep a central list of all annual reviews being completed on the team to inform performance reports and data.
- 12.3 If any support requires a new application to Resource Panel the process within these procedures is to be followed – please also see appendices within this policy. If the support plan is over 12 months or there is a change in circumstances for the family a review assessment of need should be completed in all situations including the support plan.
- 12.4 The Business Support on the SGO team is responsible to provide quarterly reports to Resource Panel and Head of Service Adoption and Kinship on the progress of reviews as an agenda item in Any Other Business to highlight any themes or issues to be considered.

## **13. Access to Services and Family Support – Special Guardianship Pathway.**

- 13.1 If a referral is made to Access to Services and Family Support, they will determine if a child is residing with a Special Guardian as the Legal Status on the file will reflect a Legal Status of SGO granted.
- 13.2 They will determine following their processes whether allocation within the children's system is required for support or signposting to Universal services. In addition, they will consider in conjunction with the FP and SG Support Team Manager whether this should be progressed for allocation to the duty worker on call the day the referral is received and whether this also require children's social worker involvement at this stage.
- 13.3 It is **essential** to note that the FP and SG Support Team do not perform statutory children's social work functions such as Child in Need planning or Child Protection of section 47 investigations of Care Proceedings processes, not are they instead of the family accessing Universal Services as to which they are eligible to request support as any other family is. The FP and SG Support Team function is to provide support in line with the Special Guardianship Regulations as per the SGO Policy and is there to provide support to Special Guardians on a voluntary basis as per their assessed needs. This can include direct support or signposting including access to therapeutic support via the Adoption Support Fund and Support Groups.
- 13.4 If the referral does not meet the threshold for allocation to a child social work team, but is deemed the responsibility of the FP and SG Support Team following consultation with the Team Manager and/or Duty worker the referral is to be sent to the Fostering Permanency and SGO Support Team for allocation.
- 13.5 If the referral is sent to be considered for allocation to a child social work team the caller should also be asked if they wish to also access the support of the Fostering Permanency and SGO Support Team and if they consent to being contacted by them. Access to Services and Family Support will then make contact by phone or email to the SGO team duty line [FPandSGO@Staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:FPandSGO@Staffordshire.gov.uk) and provide an overview of the concerns and request for support.
- 13.6 On receipt of the referral the FP and SG Team duty will contact the Special Guardian the **same day** if the support needs are deemed urgent or **within 1 working day** for all other queries. This is to determine what support is required and whether allocation of a worker on the team is needed. This should be discussed and agreed with their Team Manager who will complete a key decision within 5 working days.
- 13.7 If the Special Guardian does not want support of the FP and SG Support Team alongside the Child social work team the Access to Services and Family Support worker should still, make the FP and SG Team aware via email to the duty box who will record a task note outlining child social work involvement with the child and that the applicant/s have declined support.
- 13.8 The FP and SG Support team are in contact with Special Guardians annually to review support and therefore this review would still occur.

- 13.9 If upon receipt of a referral to Access to Services and Family Support the Special Guardian/s are already open to the FP and SG Support Team and they are requesting support for themselves i.e., with behaviour management, financial support, difficulties in maintaining the arrangement, then the information is to be sent the Social Worker or Family Practitioner with the SGO team duty [FPandSGO@Staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:FPandSGO@Staffordshire.gov.uk) copied in to avoid this being missed in their absence.
- 13.10 If the family are closed under review to the Resource Panel or FP and SG Support team then this information is to be sent via email/telephone call only to the FP and SG Team duty mailbox [FPandSGO@Staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:FPandSGO@Staffordshire.gov.uk)
- 13.11 If the Special Guardian is requesting support and the concerns raised would meet the threshold for the child to be considered for statutory social work involvement – any steps relevant from point 13 of this procedure are to be followed by members of the FP & SGO team involved to involve Access to Services and Family Support in the decision making process.



## 14 Quality Assurance

- 14.1 Practitioners who implement this procedure receive monthly supervision as per Staffordshire's supervision policy. In addition, Staffordshire's Quality Assurance Framework support the regular auditing and observation of practitioner's practice.
- 14.2 As an additional measure where this procedure relates to Resource Panel functions Key Decisions will outline any areas of practice to be improved where standards have not been met or procedure followed correctly.
- 14.3 Practice relating to Children's Social Workers and the elements of this procedure that are relevant are covered by District Learning Hubs where practice is reviewed.
- 14.4 All assessments referred to in this procedure should be signed and quality assured by the practitioners line manager.
- 14.5 As Head of Service, I also attend Team Meetings where practice is discussed and reviewed.

## 15 Appendices

### Appendix 2

#### **Levels and criteria for financial support for prospective carers in respect of SGO and CAO applications:**

The information below sets out the levels and criteria for financial support available to prospective carers in respect of SGO and CAO applications where they are supported by the Local Authority.

This follows the principles set out by the Lawyers in Local Government Child Care Lawyers Group (September 2016). While it is common practice for Local Authorities to support with these legal costs, there is no legal obligation upon them to do so.

1. Any solicitor whose costs are to be paid should be a member of the Law Society's Children Law Accreditation Scheme.
2. Before approval is given, individuals seeking payment of their legal costs (or solicitors acting on their behalf) must satisfy the LA that they are unable to meet the legal costs themselves, cannot meet these costs from any other source and are ineligible for legal aid. They should also check to see if they are eligible for any fee remissions.
3. Where approval is given to payment of legal costs, it will be subject to the following ceilings (exclusive of VAT): -
  - a) Initial legal advice - Special Guardianship Order within care proceedings  
Financial support will be limited to a maximum of £150 (plus VAT) at Legal Aid rates. Funding is only agreed for Law Society Children Law Accredited solicitors.
  - b) Initial legal advice - Special Guardianship Order in relation to a private law application.  
Financial support will be limited to a maximum of £150 (plus VAT) at Legal Aid rates. Funding is only agreed for Law Society Children Law Accredited solicitors.
  - c) Application for uncontested Special Guardianship Order (within care proceedings) or Child Arrangement Order. Financial support will be limited to £500 (plus VAT and Court fee). Funding is only agreed for Children Panel solicitors. No additional disbursements are agreed. Instruction of Counsel is counted as an additional disbursement and is not agreed without prior authority in writing.
  - d) Application for contested Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order. Financial Support will be limited to £1500 (plus VAT and Court fee). Funding is only agreed for Law Society Children Law Accredited solicitors. No additional disbursements are agreed. Instruction of Counsel is counted as an additional disbursement and is not agreed without prior authority in writing.
  - e) Private law application for a standalone Special Guardianship Order.  
  
Financial support will be limited to £1000 (plus VAT and Court fee) for the application. No additional disbursements, including Counsel's fees should be incurred without specific prior agreement from the Local Authority.
4. Prior approval of the LA is required if costs appear likely to exceed the relevant ceiling otherwise any additional costs incurred will not be paid. Approval must be obtained from the relevant Children's Social Work/Regulated Services County Manager. Solicitors should set out in writing their reasons for believing that the costs ceiling is likely to be breached.

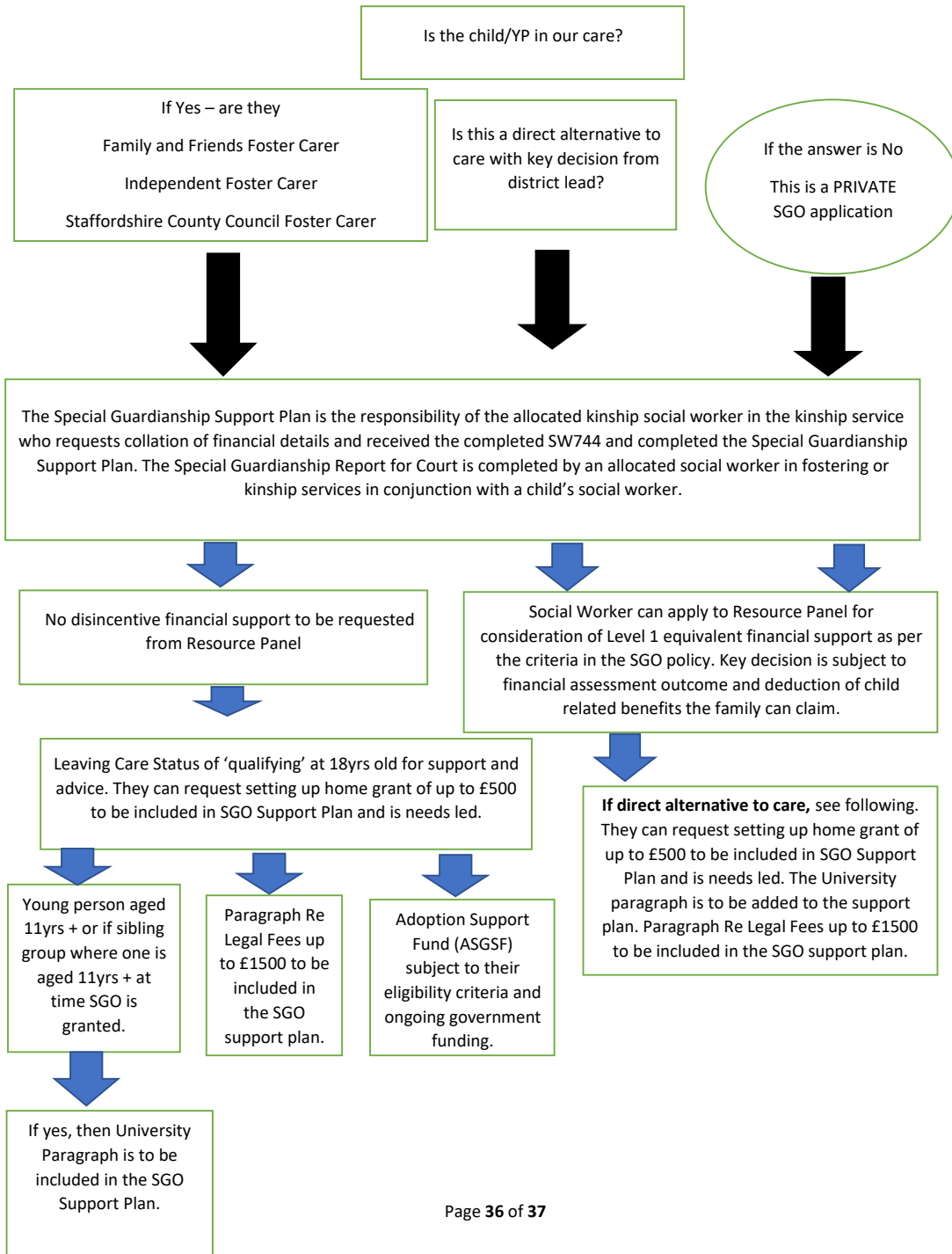
5. Solicitors must obtain authority from their client to send their client care letter including cost estimate to the LA. The letter must clearly state that the client will be personally responsible for any additional costs incurred by their:
- Failure to respond to reasonable requests for information
  - Failure to attend an appointment
  - Or, as a result of acting in a way contrary to the best interests of the children or in what the solicitor deems to be an unreasonable manner.

The LA will not fund any additional legal costs that are incurred contrary to the matters set out above and the client will be liable in full for any costs, disbursements and VAT incurred as a result.

Prior approval from the relevant Children's Social Work/Regulated Services HoS is required for the instruction of counsel or an expert.

6. The ceilings referred to above are maximum amounts and solicitors should be advised to make every effort to minimise costs. All costs should be clearly accounted for when submitting invoices for payment.
7. All invoices will be scrutinised the approving manager and solicitors will be made aware that any costs judged to be excessive or unwarranted will not be paid.
8. All invoices for payment of legal costs should be submitted promptly to the allocated social worker. (Please note that Legal Services are not instructed in relation to private law matters and payment of these invoices will be authorised by the relevant Team Manager.
9. If the Local Authority does not support the prospective SGO applicants, it will not fund the seeking of legal advice or their application.

### Appendix 3 Support Plan content depending on circumstances



16.Superseded documents:

- 16.1 Special Guardianship Financial Support Policy V1
- 16.2 Special Guardianship Applications Guidance
- 16.3 Special Guardianship Policy

17. Revision history:

Version	Approved by	Approval date	Effective date	Sections modified
1	Liz Kelay	Dec 2022	Jan 2023	N/A
2	Claire Cartwright	Sept 2024	Oct 2024	All

Further Information	
This section is not published on the final PDF document. It is for website purposes only	
Search terms (words/acronyms that people may type in the search bar when trying to locate this document)	SGO/kinship/kinship care/ welfare benefits/financial assessment/SGO support/family and friends/connected persons/viability assessment/connected person assessment/Special Guardianship Report/Special Guardianship/Special Guardianship Order.
Review date	October 2025
Pages that this document needs to be visible on	Special Guardianship and Fostering/Kinship care
Other documents that this procedure will be referenced in	Special Guardianship Policy. Fostering Adoption and Special Guardianship Resource Panel policy and processes including Terms of Reference.