

Special Guardianship Support

Our Offer of Support to you and your family

Office Hours Telephone Support

We understand that many families care for the children they look after very well and they only ask for support when they really need it. We also understand that you may come across situations whereby you want to ask a question about something in particular to reassure yourself.

Whether you need support or have a question we have a dedicated phone number that Special Guardians can contact and speak to an experienced member of staff.

Duty Number for Special Guardians

01785 895950

Mon-Thur 8:30am - 5pm

Fri 8:30am - 4.30pm

Email:

SGOPod@staffordshire.gov.uk

Support with Family Time

It's important that children see their parent/s but at times this can be challenging and you may need support. We will equip you leading up to the SGO with workers from the children's team showing you how to supervise family time. We can also provide you with training and give you advice about venues that can offer a safe place for family time to take place. Family time may go well for a period of time but then it may become challenging; during these times we can help to come alongside you to support you to progress this. We will also be able to support you by organising a family meeting to see who in your family can support you as well.

On rare occasions children are unable to see their parents. In these instances we will support you and the child/ren to write letters and show you what to write and how to manage this. We offer a confidential postbox service if there are risks associated with a parent knowing where you live.

Financial Support Commitment

Staffordshire County Council acknowledge that caring for somebody else's children is often not a planned event and therefore few families would have budgeted for these unexpected life events. Many families find that they have fixed income and often have financial commitments to other dependents as well.

Staffordshire County Council provide an approach to financial support which means that there is no disincentive for you to care for the child/ren in your care.

What this means in real terms is the following:

- We will undertake a financial assessment and calculate your income and expenditure
- We do this so we can see if there are any other welfare benefits that you could be claiming and if so how much this is likely to be
- Once we have done this we will show you the financial outcome in simple terms

If you meet the criteria we are committed to providing financial support until the young person is 18 years of age and you will receive a letter stating this.

You have access to a Welfare Benefits Officer who can provide financial advice around many areas, including allowances, benefits and wills.

Educational Support – Pupil Premium

Education is very important for the child/ren you care for. Our offer in relation to education is set out in a standalone document but in summary consists of the following:

- Access to a virtual school where you can seek advice and support
- Pupil Premium Plus £2300 per year of the school to use (Reception to year 11)
- One identified place for you to seek advice for children, young people and adults aged 0-25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) this is a local offer within Staffordshire.
- Think2 funding is an entitlement for 15 hours nursery funding from the term date following the child's 2nd birthday.
- From September 2017 eligible 3 and 4-year-old children could receive an additional 15 hours of funded early education a week, on top of the current entitlement of 15 hours for all 3/ 4 year olds. (term following 3rd birthday)
- Priority for the child/ren you care for with school admissions

Legal Support

We understand that it is important for you to be able to seek independent legal advice from a qualified solicitor who will be able to answer any questions that you have before you progress with a Special Guardianship order.

We also acknowledge that parents may in the future not be happy with decisions that you make and in response they may make an application to the court to challenge your care or the contact arrangements.

In response to the above we will provide the following:

- Financial support for you to speak with a qualified solicitor to answer any questions you may have
- With agreement by Staffordshire County Council £1500 for occasions when parents seek to challenge you. We have a separate policy that we can show you which details the criteria for this.
- Our duty line to answer any additional questions that you may have that you are unsure about.

Ongoing training

Staffordshire County Council offer an excellent training team, which is extended to all of our Special Guardians.

The training that you are able to access can be done in person and/or online and is the same training that is offered to Staffordshire Foster carers. There is never any charge for the training and you can continue to develop your skills and expand your knowledge by attending courses which are offered at various locations across the county.

You will have access to the training team number and the special Guardianship duty line where you can speak to a member of staff about your training needs. We will also be able to offer advice regarding specific courses which we consider you may benefit from.

Support can also be provided with behaviour management. This may be via telephone advice or a home visit if required. We may also refer onto relevant agencies or recommend training courses to assist you with this. We will identify if your support plan needs updating at this time.

Review of support plans

Staffordshire County Council are committed to reviewing the plan of support that we implemented every year.

It may be that the support plan that you have continues to meet yours and child/ren's needs, however, we will look to review this annually by contacting you to see if there are any significant changes.

Support Groups

Within Staffordshire there are a number of support groups that you can attend. These take place at various locations throughout the county. Your social worker or family support worker will be able to advise you on the locations, dates and times that they meet.

Support groups are an excellent place for you to meet other Special Guardians, who may have similar experiences to yours and who can share some advice to you.

The support groups have members of staff that you can speak to, who will be able to provide you with advice. There are often guest speakers who will speak about important topics such as internet safety, drugs or education to name a few. It's a great place to meet new people and share your experiences and seek advice.

Assessment for Therapeutic services

In many instances support can be accessed via your GP who will make referrals to CAMHS and other services in your local area, however at times the child/ren that you care for may require specialist support from a qualified clinician.

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) provides funds to Local Authorities to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible Special Guardianship Order families where the child has been looked after by the Local Authority immediately before the Special Guardianship Order was made, or they were looked after prior to a Child Arrangement Order being made, to enable the Special Guardianship assessment to be completed.

The current maximum funding allocation for each child is:

- £2500 per child per year for a specialist assessment
- £5000 per child per year for therapy

Your social worker and/or Family Support Worker will be able to provide further advice regarding this or you can visit www.gov.uk where more detailed information can be found.

Leaving Care Support

On reaching the age of 16 years (and up to the age of 21 years) children subject to Special Guardianship Orders are entitled to Leaving Care provisions under Section 24(2) of the Children Act 1989; where the following criteria are met:

- They were looked after by the Local Authority **immediately** before the making of a Special Guardianship Order, and;
- The Special Guardianship Order remains in force when they reach the age of 16 years.

These children are *qualifying* under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and there is a duty upon the Local Authority that last looked after them to provide advice and assistance in relation to employment, education and training.

On reaching the age of 18 years, where the young person goes onto to higher education, they will be entitled to a bursary of £2000 per year for up to 3 years of study if the child is 11 years or over at the time that the Special Guardianship Order is applied for (or part of a sibling group placed together where Special Guardianship is the plan and the oldest child is 11 years or older). The leaving care protocol will be followed to apply for the relevant benefits.