

Information leaflet

Support services

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 states that local authorities are required to make arrangements for provision of special guardianship support services.

What these support services should look like is set out in the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and includes:

- financial support
- services to allow all people involved in the child's life to discuss matters relating to the order
- assistance with contact arrangements
- services to meet the child's therapeutic needs
- respite care
- counselling, advice and information

Access to these support services is not automatic but is dependent on an assessment of a special guardian's support needs. The level and type of support that a special guardian receives can be influenced by a number of factors as discussed in the following sections.

Previously 'looked after' children

In some cases children who are the subject of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) may have been previously 'looked after' by the local authority. If this was the case, and the young person is now aged between 16 and 21 they may qualify for advice and assistance under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

The 2017 Special Guardianship Guidance to local authorities states that parents, children and special guardians must receive an assessment for special guardianship support services if the child has been previously 'looked after'.

The guidance suggests that young people made subject to SGOs who were not previously 'looked after' should not be disadvantaged. In many cases the only reason that the child was not 'looked after' is because a relative stepped in quickly to take on the responsibility for the child. For this reason children who were not 'looked after' should be offered an assessment. If a local authority cannot offer a special guardian an assessment they must write to explain why. An assessment does not automatically mean support will be provided to the special guardian.

The Special Guardianship Support Plan

If an assessment finds that support is required, a plan should be drafted detailing what support the local authority will provide. It should include:

- What services are to be provided
- How the local authority will know if the support has been successful
- When the support is to be provided and for how long
- How the local authority will make decisions regarding whether the support should continue and
- The person responsible for looking after and helping to arrange the support

The plan must be written in a way that everyone involved understands what it means.

It should also be reviewed at least once a year and again when circumstances change. The criteria for the review should be the same as the initial assessment – meaning that essentially the special guardian should be re-assessed.

If the local authority wants to change or remove anything in the plan they have to inform the special guardian first and give them the opportunity to make a formal statement and share their opinion.

Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund was set up to help pay for essential therapy services for adoptive families and has since been extended to special guardianship families where the child was previously 'looked after'. The fund is available to children and young people up to and including the age of 18 (or 25 if the young person has an Education, Health and Care plan (EHC)).

Social workers can make applications to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of special guardians. For three years after the SGO was made this is the responsibility of the local authority which placed the child and after three years it falls to the local authority where they live now. Support available through the fund varies across local authorities but examples of what may be available include:

- Theraplay
- creative therapy
- parenting training
- Non-Violent Resistance (NVR)
- sensory integration therapy
- psychotherapy
- life story work

Key points



- If a young person was previously 'looked after' and is aged between 16 and 21 they may qualify for advice and assistance under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
- Parents, children and special guardians must receive an assessment for special guardianship support services if the child has been previously 'looked after'.
- If the child was not previously 'looked after' an assessment should still be offered.
- If an assessment finds that support is required a plan should be drafted detailing what support the local authority will provide.
- The Adoption Support Fund is now available to special guardianship families where the child was previously 'looked after'. Social workers can make applications on behalf of a special guardian and their child.

Useful links

Family Rights Group (FRG)

www.frg.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 801 0366

FRG works with parents in England and Wales whose children are in need, at risk or are in the care system and with members of the wider family who are raising children who are unable to remain at home. FRG can provide legal advice where a child was 'previously looked after'.

Young Minds

<https://youngminds.org.uk>

Hotline: 0808 802 5544

Young Minds is a leading charity that provides information, advice and support for young people about their mental health and wellbeing.

Family Action Head Office 24 Angel Gate, City Road, London, EC1V 2PT

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