

together for
children

ADOPTION SUNDERLAND



Information for Special Guardians and Kinship Carers

Together for Children Sunderland

Together for Children has been set up by Sunderland City Council to build on the improvements it has made since an Ofsted inspection report in July 2015.

The company provides integrated children's services covering education, children's social care and early help to the city's 57,630 children and young people and their families.

Plans for the new company were developed by the City Council in partnership with Nick Whitfield, the Government's Commissioner for Children's Services and the Department for Education (DfE).

Duties of Together for Children in respect of Looked After Children

Together for Children has a duty to consider placing a child with an appropriate relative, friend or other person connected with the child (i.e. someone who would not fit the term 'relative or friend' but who has a pre-existing relationship with the child), before considering a placement with unrelated foster carers.

If a relative, friend or other connected person is able and willing to care for the child, the individual must then be approved as a foster carer.

Whilst the full assessment takes place, the child may be placed on an interim placement following a starter assessment called a connected carer assessment.

Together for Children has a number of responsibilities towards Looked After Children (either by care order or voluntarily accommodation).

Together for Children must ensure that:

- The child or young person is allocated a social worker
- The child or young person is provided with accommodation which meets his/her needs
- The child or young person receives the best possible education – this includes making sure that young children access high quality nursery provision and that children and young people are supported to do as well as they possibly can in education
- When making any decision about the child, Together for Children consults the child, the parents or others with parental responsibility, and anyone else whose wishes and feelings are considered to be relevant, unless declared otherwise by the court
- A care plan is drawn up for the child which sets out the placement plan, how the child's health, education and welfare will be supported, how contact with family and friends will be maintained, and the long term 'permanent' plan for the child (which might be returning to the family home, being permanently cared for by a family member or friend, being looked after by foster carers or adoption). Wherever possible, plans must be drawn up in agreement with the child and key family members
- The care plan is reviewed every six months by an Independent Reviewing Officer
- A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is put in place if the child is of school age. The PEP is part of a Looked After Child's official school record; it's a shared document which includes the information that everyone needs to promote dialogue, planning and the delivery of strategies required to make sure the child receives the support and provision needed to succeed
- All Looked After Children must have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) as part of their overall Care Plan. It is an effective tool to help the school do everything possible to support the educational progress of each Looked After Child
- The child receives regular medical assessments
- Contact is promoted between the child, parents, relatives, friends and any other person connected with the child unless such contact is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's welfare
- Together for Children assesses and meets the needs of children and young people aged 16 and 17 who are in care or are care leavers, and keeps in touch with care leavers until they are at least 21 years of age.

Glossary of Terms

- **Adoption:** A legal process by which a child becomes a permanent and full member of a new family. The biological parents lose Parental Responsibility and the new parents obtain Parental Responsibility for the child.
- **Applicant:** This term applies to a person who files a petition or makes an application; the petitioner; or the person who is applying for a legal remedy to a problem.
- **Child in Need:** Under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, Local Authorities and those operating on their behalf have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area if they are in need. A child is in need when they are disabled or they are unlikely to achieve a reasonable standard of health or development, or if a child's health or development is likely to be significantly impaired if services are not offered to him or her.
- **Child Protection:** Child protection is the process of protecting individual children identified as either suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect. It involves measures and structures designed to prevent and respond to abuse and neglect.
- **Child Protection Case Conference:** A conference used to establish whether the child should be referred to as a 'child subject to a Child Protection Plan' and to decide whether future action is required to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. It should include relevant family members, the child (where appropriate) and supporters, advocates and relevant professionals.
- **Child Protection Plan:** For all those children who have been identified at a Child Protection Conference as being at a continuing risk of significant harm, a Child Protection Plan will be created. This is a plan setting out what steps and provisions are needed to safeguard a child's welfare and minimize all risks of harm to a child.
- **Child Protection Register:** In April 2008, the Child Protection Register (CPR) ceased to exist. The term now used is 'children subject to a Child Protection Plan'.
- **CAFCASS:** CAFCASS is the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. They are an organisation which provides specialist social workers who are experienced at dealing with family problems. They carry out safeguarding checks and can prepare a report dealing with the best interests of the child(ren) involved in court proceedings.
- **Contact centre:** A child contact centre is a safe environment where children of separated families can spend time with one or both parents and sometimes other family members. If there are concerns about the non-resident parent having unsupervised contact with a child, contact centres can be used for supported contact, supervised contact, escorted contact and in some circumstances handover.

Glossary of Terms

- **Education Health and Care Plan:** These plans replace the previous Statements of Special Educational Needs. This is a legally binding document which details a child's Special Educational Needs and outlines what provision should be put in place relating to a child's educational, health and care needs.
- **Family Court Adviser:** A member of CAFCASS who works directly with vulnerable children and families. Their duty is to advise the family courts on the best course of action for the child.
- **Family Mediation:** An alternative way to try to resolve a dispute. Parties would meet and talk through their issues in the presence of an independent third party. Parties are required by law to attempt mediation before any application can be made to the court for any private family law applications.
- **Fostering:** A form of care provided to a child who is not related to the carer legally or by a blood relative.
- **Guardian:** A Guardian can be appointed in Court proceedings to act on behalf of the child who is the subject of the proceedings. A Guardian is usually a CAFCASS officer who is appointed to ascertain the child's views and to conduct proceedings on the child's behalf. The Court will only appoint a Guardian in particular circumstances, for example, when parents cannot represent the child's wishes, a report is insufficient or a child opposes a proposed course of action. A Guardian may also be appointed if there are serious allegations of harm.
- **High Court Judges:** High Court Judges and Deputy High Court Judges hear the most complex cases in the Family Court, they also hear appeals of decisions made by Circuit Judges. You should address them as 'My Lord' or 'My Lady'.
- **Independent Reviewing Officer:** A person employed by Children's Services who chairs reviews for children living in care. Their duty is to ensure that the care plan meets the child's needs.
- **Interim contact:** Temporary arrangements for contact issued during proceedings before a final decision is made.
- **Judgement:** Decision issued by a Court in legal proceedings.
- **Kinship care:** Kinship care is an arrangement where a child who cannot be cared for by their parents goes to live with a relative or a family friend.
- **Legal Aid:** A form of funding from the government for legal representation. This is means tested in most areas, with the exception of when a child is subject to care proceedings, where legal aid is available to a parent regardless of a person's income.
- **Looked After Children:** Children in Local Authority care who are provided with somewhere to live by Children's Services. Parents can either agree to this, or a Court can order children to be 'looked after'.

Glossary of Terms

- **MIAM:** Prior to applying for some private family law orders from the Court, an applicant will be required by law to attend a Mediation Information and Assessment Meeting (MIAM) with the respondent to see whether the matter can be resolved without going to court. A person can be exempt from attending this in some circumstances.
- **Private fostering:** Private fostering is an arrangement that is made privately, without the involvement of the Local Authority, when a child under the age of 16, (or 18 if the child has a disability) is placed for 28 days or more in the care of someone who is not the child's guardian, a close relative, or by private arrangement between parent and carer. The Local Authority, or organisation operating on their behalf, will need to be made aware of the situation to check everything is satisfactory. It is a criminal offence if the local authority is not notified.
- **Public Law Outline:** This sets out streamlined case management procedures for dealing with public law children's cases. It requires all care, supervision and other proceedings to be completed within a maximum of 26 weeks.
- **Pupil premium:** The pupil premium is additional funding for publicly funded schools (maintained schools, academies, voluntary sector and special schools) in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers.
- **Respondent:** The party who is required to answer a petition for a Court Order or writ requiring the respondent to take some action, halt an activity or obey a Court's direction.
- **Special Educational Needs:** A term used to describe a child who has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him/her.
- **Special Educational Needs Support:** This is the support a school should provide if a child is struggling with their school work and this is caused by a child's underlying Special Educational Needs. This should support the child to enable them to benefit fully from the education provided.
- **Special educational provision:** Educational support different from or additional to that normally available to pupils or students of the same age, which is designed to help children and young people with SEN or disabilities to access the National Curriculum at school or to study at college.

Glossary of Terms

- **Special Guardianship Order:** Special Guardianship Order is a Court Order that places a child or a young person to live with someone other than their parents. The Special Guardian will get higher parental responsibility than other persons with parental responsibility for the child. It offers more security than a residence order because a parent cannot request for it to be removed unless the court has given permission to do so. Parental responsibility is shared between birth parents and the family and friends carer.

However, a special guardian can exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of others who share it, which means they can make all the major decisions about a child's upbringing without consulting the birth parents.

Family and friends carers can apply for a Special Guardianship Order if the child or young person has lived with them for three out of the last five years, or for one year immediately preceding the application in the case of a close relative or an approved foster carer.

A Special Guardian can appoint a Testamentary Guardian (i.e. name a person in their will who they want to care for the child when they die). The Testamentary Guardian would obtain Parental Responsibility should the Special Guardian die.

This Testamentary Guardian may still need to seek a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order if a dispute arises as to where the child should live.

- **Welfare Checklist:** A checklist all Judges must have when deciding to make an Order under the Children Act 1989: the wishes and feelings of the child, the child's physical, emotional and educational needs, the likely effect on the child of any change in circumstances, the child's age, sex, background and any other of his or her characteristics which the Court considers relevant, any harm which the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering, how capable each parent (and any other relevant person) is of meeting the child's needs.



Glossary of Terms – Court Orders

- **Adoption Order:** This is an Order giving full parental responsibility for a child to the approved adopters, made on their application to the Court. An Adoption Order severs the legal ties between a birth parent and the child so that the adoptive parent(s) become the child's legal parent(s) throughout life. An Adoption Order does not end when a child turns 18 – the child/adult remains a legal member of his/her new family permanently.
- **Child Arrangements Order:** An Order governing: a) Whom a child is to live with, and b) Whom the child should have contact with and when this should occur. This replaces Orders previously known as 'Contact' and 'Residence' Orders.
- **Contact Order:** A legally binding Order requiring the resident party/parent to make the child available for contact with the person named in the Order.
- **Emergency Protection Order:** A short term Order to remove a child from immediate risk of harm and allow the Local Authority to investigate. It lasts 8 days and can be extended for a further 7 days with the permission of the Court. The holder of this Order would temporarily get Parental Responsibility for the child.
- **First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment:** The first Court hearing after an application has been made to the Court in private family law cases. It is used to assist the Court in identifying issues between the parties at an early stage and to see if it is possible for the parties to reach an agreement. Directions are likely to be given to inform the parties what next steps should be taken before the final hearing.
- **Final Hearing:** The Final Hearing is the last hearing in your case. If an agreement cannot be reached, a Judge may need to make a decision in your case. This will involve hearing evidence from the parties and sometimes the CAFCASS officer, the Judge will then make a decision based on what they consider to be in the children's best interests.
- **Interim Care Order:** An Interim Care Order, like a Care Order, grants Together for Children Parental Responsibility, however this Order will only be in place for a certain period of time agreed by the Court. This means they are able to make decisions about the child's living arrangements and do not need the parents' permission to do so. This is an Order that is made at the first hearing after Care Proceedings have been issued. This Order can last for up to 8 weeks and can be renewed every 4 weeks after that. The Order can only be granted if the Court feels there is good reason to believe that a child may be at serious risk of harm.
- **Care Order:** A Care Order is a permanent Order and grants Together for Children Parental Responsibility for a child or young person. Again like an Interim Care Order, this means that Together for Children is able to make decisions about the child's living arrangements and does not need the parents' permission to do so.

Glossary of Terms – Court Orders

- **Placement Order:** The Court can make an Order under Section 21 Adoption and Children Act 2002 authorising a Local Authority to place a looked after child for adoption with any prospective adopters chosen by the Local Authority. Parental responsibility is shared between the Local Authority and the birth parents and the prospective adopters if the child is living with them.
- **Residence Order:** An Order stating where and with whom a child shall live. Any Order made after 22 April 2014 will be a Child Arrangements Order.
- **Special Guardianship Order:** Special Guardianship Order is a Court Order that places a child or a young person to live with someone other than their parents. The Special Guardian will get higher parental responsibility than other persons with parental responsibility for the child. It offers more security than a Residence Order or Child Arrangements Order because a parent cannot request for it to be removed unless the court has given permission to do so.

Parental responsibility is shared between birth parents and the Special Guardian.

However, a Special Guardian can exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of others who share it, which means they can make all the major decisions about a child's upbringing without consulting the birth parents. Family and friends carers can apply for a Special Guardianship Order if the child or young person has lived with them for three out of the last five years, or for one year immediately preceding the application in the case of a close relative or an approved Local Authority foster carer.

A Special Guardian can appoint a Testamentary Guardian (i.e. name a person in their will who they want to care for the child when they die). The Testamentary Guardian would obtain Parental Responsibility should the Special Guardian die.

This Testamentary Guardian may still need to seek a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order if a dispute arises as to where the child should live.

Connected Carers Assessment

Connected Person(s) are defined as: an individual who is a relative, friend or other person connected with the child. Before any placement with a relative or friend who is not already approved as a foster carer is made, the approval of the Together for Children appropriate Service Manager is required.

Where families are identified as potential carers for a particular child, the social work team may need to determine the likelihood of that family being a suitable carer for the child by undertaking a viability assessment.

Consideration must be given to any established relationship and the quality of the relationship between child and potential carer; their age and health; whether there have been previous concerns about their parenting and whether there are any significant criminal convictions or concerns which would preclude them from being suitable to parent a Looked After Child.

Essential checks must be completed immediately. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks should be completed by requesting the applicants to complete DBS Enhanced Disclosure forms.

It is important to look at any social care records which may be held on the prospective carer in order to check historical information as well as any current issues which may preclude a person from being suitable.

The temporary approval of carers under the provisions set out in the 2010 Regulations are intended to be used exceptionally.

There must be clearly identified reasons why the full assessment process as required by Regulations 25 & 26 of the 2011 Regulations cannot be undertaken before a placement is made.

If a child is placed before the full approval of the carer as a Together for Children foster carer, there is a possibility that the connected person may not be approved at the end of the assessment process.

The risk of a child being moved from a placement in which s/he has become settled must be minimised by careful consideration of the appropriateness of a placement before full approval.

In some circumstances it may be preferable to use a short term placement with an alternative foster carer, which includes appropriate contact between the child and the prospective carer pending the completion of the full foster carer approval process.

The child's wishes and feelings about the proposed arrangements must be ascertained, understood and recorded. Wherever possible, an opportunity must be provided for the child to visit the connected person's home before the decision is finalised. The views of the child's parents and others with parental responsibility must also be obtained before a decision is made.

Any such approval can only be given for 16 weeks from the date of the placement. After that period of time, a full kinship carer assessment must have been carried out by a supervising social worker and further approval sought at the fostering panel.

Connected Carers Assessment

Before approval for any placement with family or friends as carers is made, the child's social worker must undertake an assessment of the suitability of the placement including the level of support likely to be required and the effect of the proposed placement upon the child's contact with parents, siblings and other relatives and friends who are significant to the child.

The 2010 Regulations specify the assessment requirements before the child may be placed under these temporary approval arrangements. See Care Planning, Placement & Review Regulations 2010: Schedule 4 - Matters to be taken into account when assessing the suitability of connected person(s) to care for the child.

These are the minimum requirements for assessing the connected person's suitability within what may be a short time frame.

Further information regarding Family and Friends care is available at:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Family%20and%20Friends%20Care.pdf>



Family and Friends Care

Many children and young people who are unable to live with their birth parents, for whatever reason, are brought up by family members, friends or other people who are connected to them, with whom they have an existing relationship.

This is known as 'family and friends care'.

Sometimes this is an alternative to children and young people going in to care, and sometimes they are in care, but live with a family member or friend. Family and friends care enables children and young people to remain with people they trust and are comfortable with, instead of being placed with foster carers who they do not know, or within children's homes.

WHAT IS FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE?

Children and young people are described as living in family and friends care when they are:

- In informal arrangements with a relative
- In informal arrangements with other family members or friends which last for a period of less than 28 days
- In private fostering arrangements, if not a close relation
- A Looked After Child placed with family or friends who have been approved as foster carers
- Under a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order
- Placed for adoption with family or friends

A 'family and friends carer' refers to a relative, friend or other person known to the child or young person, who is caring for that child full time. A child who is cared for by a family and friends carer may or may not be looked after by Together for Children on behalf of the Local Authority.

Family and friends carers play a unique role in providing a stable environment for the children and young people they care for, and many children and young people who live in family and friends care do well in life. However, it must be acknowledged that others remain vulnerable and at risk of failing to achieve good outcomes, and many family and friends carers both want and need support to enable them to help the children and young people they care for.

It is important to recognise that many family and friends care arrangements are private and informal, and occur without Local Authority involvement. This does not, however, mean that those carers do not need help and support and one of the key aims of this policy is to publicise where that support can be obtained.

Family and Friends Care

Together for Children is very clear that children and young people who are brought up by their birth parents can often achieve the best outcomes in life.

However, this is not always the case. Some children and young people are not able to live with their parents, for a number of reasons. In these cases, Children's Social Work Services will always promote that they should, where it is possible and appropriate, live in the care of extended family members or friends. Family members or friends, who children and young people trust and are comfortable with, will often be able to provide the most stable environment in which the child can grow up.

The following universal services are available to all family and friends carers, regardless of the legal status of the care arrangement:

- Parenting programmes
- After-school and holiday care or activities for school age children
- Day care facilities for children under 5 and not yet at school
- Leisure Centre services
- Children's Centre services
- Family health and wellness services
- Social, cultural and recreational activities provided by Children's Services
- Advice on claiming benefits
- Support with school placements

For information on the full range of services available to families in Sunderland, please contact the Family Information Service:

Families Information Service

Together for Children, Civic Centre
Sunderland, SR2 7DN

Tel: 0191 520 5553

Email: fis@togetherforchildren.org.uk

Training Opportunities

Together for Children Adoption Team are able to organise training which can be available for Special Guardians in order to support with:

- Therapeutic Parenting
- Life Story Work
- Theraplay
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

If you would like to discuss possible training opportunities further, please contact the Adoption Duty line on [0191 561 2221](tel:01915612221)

Assessments for Support

If you contact the Adoption Team requesting support, an assessment of support is completed with the Special Guardians and their family.

This can focus on a number issues including contact, life story work, finance, training and educational issues. The allocated worker completes the assessment and works with the family to identify an appropriate plan.

[Currently, the Adoption Support Fund also covers meeting the therapeutic needs of children subject to Special Guardianship Orders.](#)

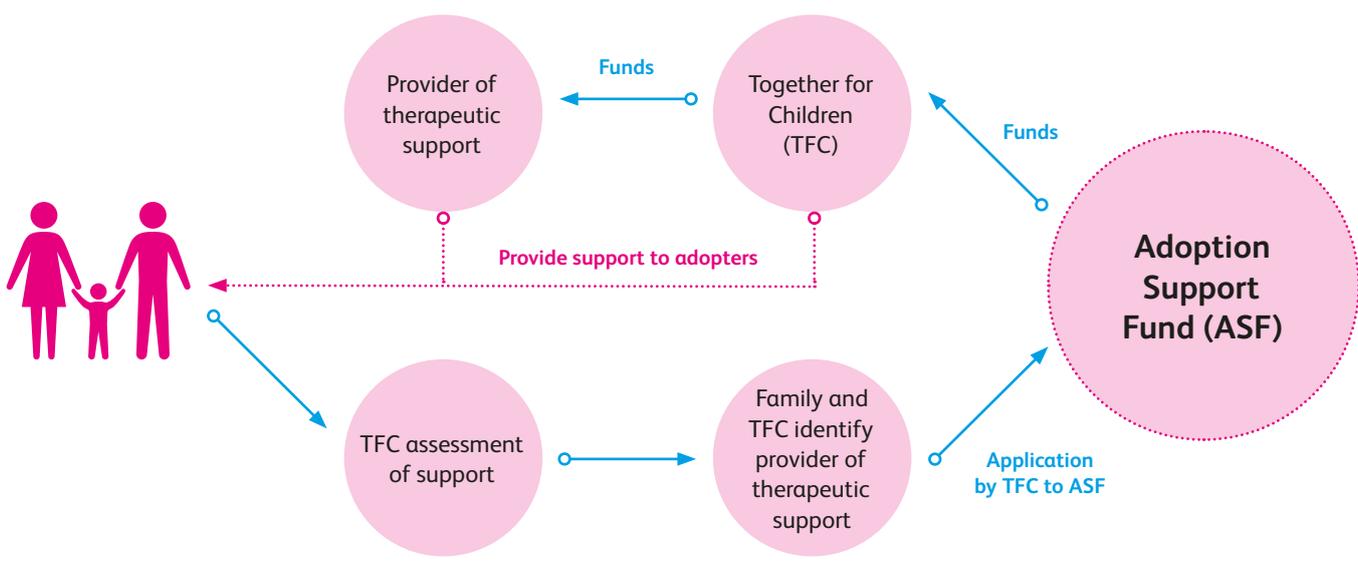
The Adoption Support Fund (ASF)

On 1 May 2015 the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) became available to adopters throughout England. From the 1st April 2016 the ASF became available for Special Guardians.

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) will pay for therapeutic services that are not currently provided by Local Authorities.

The Process to access the Adoption Support Fund (ASF)

1. Approach Together for Children for an assessment of adoption and special guardianship support needs.
2. Together for Children considers if therapeutic support is needed, the type required and if it is eligible to make an application to the fund.
3. The adopter/Special Guardian and Together for Children look at what therapeutic intervention is available.
4. Together for Children applies directly to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of the adopter/Special Guardian.
5. The Adoption Support Fund considers the application for funding.



Who is eligible?

The Adoption Support Fund is available for children living in England up to and including the age of 21 (or 25 with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education Health & Care Plan) who:

- Are adopted and were previously in Local Authority care in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.
- Are adopted from overseas.
- Are subject to a Special Guardianship Order.

There are limits within the eligibility criteria. For more information please contact Together for Children Sunderland Adoption Duty Line [0191 561 2221](tel:01915612221)

Further information is also available at:

www.togetherforchildren.org.uk/families/adoption

www.adoptionuk.org



Court Processes

When making a Special Guardianship Order the Courts must be satisfied that it is the most appropriate Order for the child.

The emphasis is on the rights and wellbeing of the child. When determining an application, the Court's primary consideration is the welfare of the child.

This is known as the Welfare Principle. The court has to pay particular attention to several factors when it is applying the Welfare principle; these factors are as follows:

- (i) The ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned (considered in light of their age and understanding);
- (ii) The child's physical, emotional and educational needs;
- (iii) The likely effect on the child of any change of circumstances;
- (iv) The child's age, sex, background and any characteristics of the child which the court considers relevant;
- (v) Any harm that the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering;
- (vi) How capable each of the child's parents (and any other person in relation to whom the Court considers the question relative), is of meeting the child's needs;
- (vii) The range of powers available to the Court under the Children Act 1989 in the proceedings in question.

In addition there is a policy that the Court will not intervene and make an Order unless it can be shown that there is a positive need and benefit to the child in doing so. This is known as the No Order Principle.

Court Processes

It may be that a Guardian is appointed to act on behalf of the children. The Guardian is an independent person, who has experience in child care protection and is employed by CAFCASS.

A solicitor takes his/her instructions from the Guardian, who acts in the child's best interests. Consequently, due to the impartial position of the Guardian, the Court listens carefully to recommendations that the Guardian makes.

A Special Guardianship Report is a document completed by the Together for Children. It will inform the Court all about the child, the parents and the carers making the application. It will inform the Court as to whether they agree with the Special Guardianship Order being made or not.

It should also be accompanied by a Special Guardianship support plan which will set out what support Together for Children think will be needed in order to care for the child.

This support can include emotional support and help with contact between the child and his or her parents and also financial support by way of a Special Guardianship Allowance.

Contact can be at the discretion of the Special Guardians unless the Court has made a specific Order setting out what contact should take place with the parents/siblings. In the Special Guardianship report Together for Children can make recommendations about contact.

Unfortunately as of the 1st April 2013, Legal Aid is very rarely available for Special Guardianship applications.

If the child has been placed by Together for Children then there is the possibility that Together for Children will agree to pay the legal fees. This is something which should be discussed with the Social Worker, if one is allocated, before making the application to Court.

Financial Support

It is important to ensure that Special Guardians are helped to access benefits to which they are entitled. Together for Children has a responsibility to endeavour to ensure that the Special Guardian or Prospective Special Guardian is aware of all benefits and tax credits available to them.

Financial support paid to Special Guardians cannot duplicate any other payment available to the Special Guardian or Prospective Special Guardian. Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 financial support and other services may be available for the Special Guardian, the child and the parent(s).

However, if a child is not (or was not) Looked After by Together for Children or a Local Authority, then there is no automatic entitlement to an assessment for Special Guardianship Support Services. It is possible to request an assessment for support in this situation. When considering providing financial support, Together for Children will normally consider the Special Guardian or Prospective Special Guardian's means and consider the following:

- (a) The Special Guardian or Prospective Special Guardian's financial resources (which should include significant income from any investments, but not their home) including any tax credit or benefit, which would be available to them if the child lived with them. This is consistent with the fact that financial support for Special Guardians is disregarded for the purpose of calculating income related benefits and tax credits
- (b) The amount required by the Special Guardian or Prospective Special Guardian in respect of their reasonable outgoings and commitments, e.g. housing and transport costs, and daily living expenses (but not outgoings in respect of the child)
- (c) The financial needs that relate to the child (e.g. because of special diet or need for replacement bedding) and the resources of the child (e.g. a trust fund).

Special Guardianship Allowance

A Special Guardian may be entitled to a Special Guardianship Allowance provided by Together for Children, to contribute towards special care or help with accommodation and maintenance costs.

The allowance is means tested but guidance is given in the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005; this directs Local Authorities and organisations working on their behalf to have regard to how much fostering allowance would have been paid had the child been fostered rather than cared for under a Special Guardianship Order.

Recent case law confirms that the rate for Special Guardianship Allowances should be calculated in line with fostering allowances. Deductions may be made, to take into account Child Benefit and Tax Credits.

Social Security Benefits

Special Guardians may be entitled to a range of Universal Benefits. It is advisable that independent financial advice about individual rights to benefits is obtained.

Possible benefits which could be accessed include:

- Working Tax Credits
- Child Benefit
- Child Tax Credits
- Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
- Carer's Allowance
- Guardian's Allowance

Further advice and information regarding benefits available to Special Guardians can be found at:

www.gov.uk/browse/childcare-parenting/financial-help-children

Sunderland City Council funds two local advice providers - Shiney Advice and Resource Project and Sunderland West Advice Project - to ensure individuals can access advice and guidance on welfare benefit issues, debt and prevention of homelessness.

Their services are provided free of charge.

These advice providers can also put individuals in touch with a range of specialists, including council services such as Sunderland Welfare Rights Service, should queries be more complex.

Shiney Advice and Resource Project: The Advice Triage Service is available Monday - Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm. The Triage Worker will take all information and book either a telephone or face to face appointment with an Advice Worker. They will also signpost to relevant Agencies where necessary.

ShARP, 17 Beatrice Terrace, Shiney Row,
Houghton Le Spring, Tyne & Wear, DH4 4QW
Tel: 0191 385 6687 or
Email: general@shineyadvice.org.uk

Social Security Benefits

Sunderland West Advice Project: Pallion Action Group is a local community-based charity providing support services and centre based activities to the people of Sunderland in general and Pallion and Sunderland West in particular.

For information on projects and services please call: (0191) 514 2011, fax (0191) 565 5384 or e-mail: admin@pallionactiongroup.co.uk

FISCUS: Can provide help with benefits and debt. They can be contacted on:

Telephone: 0191 447 0920 or Email at: www.fiscus.org

Citizens Advice Sunderland: Citizens Advice Sunderland serves all residents of Sunderland and offers advice on debt, housing and some benefit issues. Various Citizens Advice Bureaus are located at-

Sunderland

5A Waterloo Place, Sunderland
Tyne & Wear, SR1 3HT

www.citizensadvicesunderland.co.uk

0191 416 6848

County Durham (Seaham)

Shakespeare House Shakespeare Street
Seaham, SR7 7JB

www.cdcab.org.uk

03444 111 444 AdviceLine - Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm

0300 323 2000 - Debt Advice Line Monday to Friday 9am to 12 noon

0300 323 1000 - To cancel or rearrange appointments

Social Security Benefits

County Durham (Chester le Street)

15 Church Chare
CHESTER-LE-STREET
County Durham, DH3 3PZ

www.cdcab.org.uk

03444 111 444 AdviceLine - Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm
0300 323 2000 - Debt Advice Line Monday to Friday 9am to 12 noon
0300 323 1000 - To cancel or rearrange appointments

South Tyneside

Edinburgh Buildings 2 Station Approach
SOUTH SHIELDS
Tyne & Wear, NE33 1HR

admin@southtynecab.net

0191 4557958
0344 4994715



Early Education Nursery Provision

All family and friend carers can access universal services such as day care facilities for children under 5, after-school and holiday activities for school age children, support with securing a school place, and anti-bullying support.

All 3 to 4-year-olds in England can get 570 hours of free early education or childcare per year. It's usually taken as 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year.

From September 2017, some children are able to get 30 hours a week of free early education and childcare.

Parents of three and four year olds will need to meet the following criteria in order to be eligible for 30 hours free childcare:

- They earn or expect to earn the equivalent to 16 hours at National Minimum or Living Wage over the coming three months.
- This equates to £120 a week (or c.£6,000 a year) for each parent over 25 years old or £112.80 a week (or c.£5,800 a year) for each parent between 21 and 24 years old.
- This applies whether you are in paid employment, self-employed or on a zero hours contract.
- The parent (and their partner where applicable) should be seeking the free childcare to enable them to work.
- Where one or both parents are on maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave, or if they are on statutory sick leave.
- Where one parent meets the income criteria and the other is unable to work because they are disabled, have caring responsibilities or have been assessed as having limited capability to work.
- Where a parent is in a 'start-up period' (i.e. they are newly self-employed) they do not need to demonstrate that they meet the income criteria for 12 months.
- If a non-EEA national, the parent must have recourse to public funds.

Early Education Nursery Provision

Many families across Sunderland can benefit from free childcare places for **two year olds**.

Families must be in receipt of one of the following benefits to be eligible for a place:

- Income Support
- Income-based Employment and Support Allowance
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Child Tax Credit (including Working Tax Credit) and have an income below £16,190
- Have a child that receives Disability Living Allowance for Children
- Current statement for Special Educational Needs or Education Health Care Plan
- Have a child that is in the care of the Local Authority
- An adopted child

If eligible, children aged two can receive 15 hours a week during term time only or 12 hours for 48 weeks of the year.

Children can take up their place in the term after their second birthday.

Their place is available until they start their nursery education at age three.

For more information contact the Family Information Service:

Tel: 0191 520 5553

Contact Information of Other Children's Services

Neighbouring Authorities include:

Durham

First Contact/ Social Care direct 03000 267 979

First Contact brings together children's services staff with partners, such as Durham Constabulary and health services. First Contact is open from 8.30am until 5.00pm, Monday to Thursday and from 8.30am until 4.30pm on a Friday.

In an emergency situation, a duty officer is available outside of normal office hours on the telephone number above. If faxing or emailing outside of normal working office hours, please be aware that these enquiries will be dealt with on the next working day.

When you contact First Contact you will speak to a trained officer. They will work with you to decide the level of response needed. Providing early help to children, young people and their families is their priority. They will start an Early Help Assessment to inform what happens next, which may be:

- giving appropriate advice and guidance
- a referral to preventative services such as One Point, with a 'Team Around the Family' and a named lead professional
- a statutory referral to the Assessment and Interventions Team due to safeguarding concerns, with a 'Team Around the Family' and a named lead professional

Newcastle Upon Tyne Initial Response Service

Children's Social Care Wellbeing, Care and Learning
Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8QH

Phone: 0191 277 2500

Fax: 0191 277 2477

For emergencies that occur outside of normal office hours contact the Emergency Duty Team.
For social work emergencies outside office hours

Phone: 0191 278 78 78

Fax: 0191 211 4947

Email: edt@newcastle.gov.uk

Deaf community: 18001

Contact Information of Other Children's Services

Gateshead

If you have a concern about the safety of a child then you should talk to someone immediately.

You can phone Gateshead Council's Children's Social Care
(in confidence) on: (0191) 433 2653

(Office hours, Mon-Fri 8:30am-5:00pm) or (0191) 477 0844
(out of office hours at night, at weekends and bank holidays)

Members of the public can also contact the NSPCC by text message on 88858 to report concerns about a child. This service is free and anonymous. The NSPCC aim to respond within three hours.

In an emergency you should always contact the Police (on 999) and/or Children's Services.
For non-emergencies you can contact Northumbria Police on 101.

Complaints Procedure

Information and advice on making compliments and complaints about Children's Services is available by contacting:

Together for Children Complaints and Feedback Team
Sunderland City Council
Room 4.4, Civic Centre
Sunderland, SR2 7DN
Tel: 0191 561 7977

Email: complaints.children@sunderland.gov.uk
Website: www.togetherforchildren.org.uk

Advocacy

Advocates can assist you in making a complaint. An advocate will help you to make your complaint but they do not investigate it.

There is also an Independent Advocacy Service for children and young people who wish to make a complaint. This can be accessed by contacting Together for Children Complaints and Feedback Team or the Advocacy Service directly at:

Action for Children

North East Children's Rights Services
Third Floor, Mea House
Ellison Place
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8XS
Tel: 0191 261 9212

Email: necrs@actionforchildren.org.uk
Web: www.actionforchildren.org.uk

Support Groups for Special Guardianship Carers

Support groups for Special Guardianship Carers within the North East:

- **More than Grandparents Sunderland** – is an independent charitable incorporated organisation led by and for kinship carers. The group meets every Thursday from 12.30pm-2.30pm at 53 St Lukes Terrace, Sunderland, SR4 6NF. For more information email morethangrandparents@gmail.com or contact Mel Nichols on 07501191338.
- **Bridges Stockton on Tees** – provides group and individual support, counselling and respite breaks for grandparent and family carers affected by drug or alcohol misuse. For more information email advice@bridgessupport.org or call 01642 605222 or 07957224486. Further information can be found at www.bridgessupport.org.
- **ESCAPE Family Support, Blyth** – provides support to all kinship carers with one to one counselling, Court support and advocacy, helpline, respite breaks, benefits and debt advice etc. Group meets bi-monthly – contact Lyndsey at lyndsey.hedley@escapefamilysupport.co.uk or call 01670 352700 for more information.
- **Grandparents Group, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria**. Support group for all grandparents raising grandchildren. Meets every Tuesday 10am to 11.30am At Newbarns Children’s Centre. Contact Clair Wilson on 01229 827323 or email clair.wilson@actionforchildren.org.uk for further details.
- **Kinship Care Support Gateshead – Grandparents Plus Group**. Meetings take place on the last Thursday of the month from 10am to 12pm (meetings do not take place during school holidays). For more information contact Yvonne at the Relative Experience Project on 0191 2005034 or email Yvonne.brown@grandparentsplus.org.uk
- **Kinship Support Groups Easterside, Middlesbrough – Grandparents Plus Group**. Meets at the Easterside Community Hub every Monday at 11am-12.45pm. Group and one to one support available, for further information contact Mari at mari.dilworth@grandparentsplus.org.uk or call 07931158313.
- **Kinship Support Group Middlesbrough – Grandparents Plus Group**. Meets every second Wednesday of the month at Trinity Church, Stainby Road, Middlesbrough. Group and one to one support available, for further information contact Mari at mari.dilworth@grandparentsplus.org.uk or call 07931158313.

Support Groups for Special Guardianship Carers

- **Kinship Carer Support Newcastle – Grandparents Plus Group.** Meetings take place 10am-12pm fortnightly. For more information contact Yvonne at the Relative Experience Project on 0191 2005034 or email yvonne.brown@grandparentsplus.org.uk. You can also contact Margi at Props on 0191 226 3440 or email margi@newcastleprops.org.uk.
- **Kinship Carer Support Group Wallsend – Grandparents Plus Group.** Meetings take place 10am-12pm fortnightly on a Friday at St. Luke's Church, Frank Street, Wallsend. For more information contact Yvonne at the Relative Experience Project on 0191 2005034 or email yvonne.brown@grandparentsplus.org.uk.
- **Patch Family Support Hartlepool** – Runs a kinship carer group on Tuesdays 3.45pm-5pm. It's held at 81 Stranton, Hartlepool. TS24 7QT. Email info@patchfamilysupport.co.uk for more details.
- **Newcastle Props** – provides support to partners, carers and families affected by someone else's drug use. Visit www.newcastleprops.org.uk or call 0191 226 3440.

Further information and guidance regarding Special Guardianship Regulations can be found at-

Special Guardianship Guidance

Statutory guidance for Local Authorities on the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 (as amended by the Special Guardianship (Amendment) Regulations 2016)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/586406/Special_Guardianship_Statutory_Guidance_20_January_2017.pdf



together for
children
ADOPTION SUNDERLAND