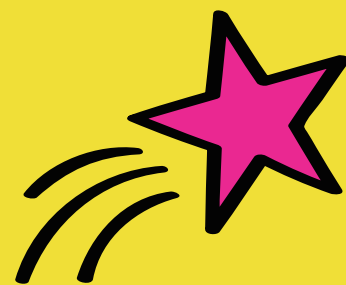


Kinship Care Strategy and Local Offer



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Coventry City Council



Kinship Care Strategy and Local Offer

Supporting the needs of children and young people living in Kinship Care arrangements December 2025

RELATED GUIDANCE:

- **Kinship care: framework for local authorities - GOV.UK:** Kinship Care: Framework for Local Authorities: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities about family and friends providing care for children who cannot live with their parents.
- **Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care Strategy**
- **Family Rights Group, Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment :** Outlines what an Initial assessment for Kinship carers should look like, what should be considered and how to undertake international assessments.
- **Looking After Someone Else's Child :** Government advice on the support and financial help you can get if someone else's child is living with you full time.
- **Promoting the Education of Children with a Social Worker and Children in Kinship Care Arrangements: Virtual School Head Role Extension:** Non statutory guidance for local authorities about the development of Virtual School Head's strategic leadership role in promoting the educational outcomes of children in kinship care arrangements.
- **Practice Guide: Kinship Care - Guidance to Support Local Authorities in Achieving the Outcomes of the Children's Social Care National Framework.**



Contents



1. Introduction	4
2. Values and Principles	5
3. Purpose and scope of the offer	5
4. Legal Framework	6
5. Differing care arrangements:	6
5.1 Informal Family Arrangements with a close relative	6
5.2 Private fostering arrangements	6
5.3 Kinship Foster Carers – ('Connected Persons')	6
5.4 Child Arrangements Order	7
5.5 Special Guardianship Order / Finances	7
6. Provision of Support:	8
6.1 Support Groups and Training	8
6.2 Provision of Financial Support	
including Exceptional Allowance panel and Pathway to Care support	8
6.3 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund	9
6.4 Fostering out of hours	9
6.5 Employment Support	9
6.6 Accommodation	9
6.7 Education	10
6.8 Supporting family time	12
6.9 Health	12
6.10 Mentoring Scheme	13
6.11 Newsletter	13
6.12 Special Guardian Peer Support Groups	13
6.13 Special Guardianship Information Sessions	13
6.14 Skills to Care	14
6.15 Designated Children and Families Workers	14
6.16 Events	14
6.17 Edge of Care	14
6.18 Wellbeing Support for Kinship Foster Carers and Special Guardians	15
7. Family Networks / Family Group Decision Making	15
8. Legal Support	16
9. Complaints Procedure	16
10. Glossary of Terms	16
11. Appendix:	17
11.1 Caring for somebody else's child – Options	17
11.2 Fostering Service training offer	17
11.3 Special Guardianship Financial Support	17

Coventry Family Valued is the practice approach in Children's and Education Services and across the partnership, underpinned by the belief that outcomes are better for most children, if they are living at home, with their family and within their community, wherever safe to do so. When children are not able to live with parents, it is vital that every attempt is made, for them to remain within their wider family and community, with people who are connected with them, who love them, and already want the best for them.

Children may be looked after by members of their extended family, friends or other people who are connected with them for a variety of reasons and in a variety of different ways. This strategy sets out Coventry's approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of children living with wider family and friends full time and covers the assessments which will be undertaken to determine whether services are needed to support these arrangements, and how they may be provided.

This strategy highlights the support needs for Kinship Carers that are covered in the Local Authority Local Offer for Kinship Carers. Please visit coventry.gov.uk/fostering for further information.

Children who live with extended family and friends can be cared for in a variety of different ways outlined below:

- Informal arrangements with close relatives of the child (relative is defined by section 105 of the Children Act 1989 as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership or stepparent))
- Informal arrangements with friends or other family members (not under the legal definition of relatives as above) which last for a period of less than 28 days (if the intention is for the arrangement to last more than 28 days, then this may be private fostering arrangement)

A Private Fostering arrangement:

- As a child in care being cared for by a Kinship Foster Care (previously known as a 'Connected Care placement')
- Subject to a Child Arrangement Order
- Under Special Guardianship Order

For further information regarding these arrangements, who may make decisions for children and young people, and the support applicable, please see Appendix 11.1 'Caring for somebody else's child – Options

Coventry City Council has developed this offer in collaboration with its local partners to ensure that information is readily available regarding the duties and responsibilities for children in differing arrangements, the support and type of services that are available, and how these may be accessed.

Outcomes for children living in Kinship Care, are typically more positive than those living in 'unrelated Foster Care'; with young people more likely to be securely attached to their carers, feel a greater sense of belonging, and to be more confident that they will be staying with their carer as they grow up.

Numerous studies have shown that Kinship Foster Care enhances emotional and behavioural development in children. Young people in Kinship Care typically report feeling more secure, happier, and more integrated within their families compared to those living with Unrelated Foster Carers. Furthermore, research highlights the increased stability of Kinship Care, which offers children greater continuity and the opportunity to maintain meaningful relationships with those who matter most in their lives.

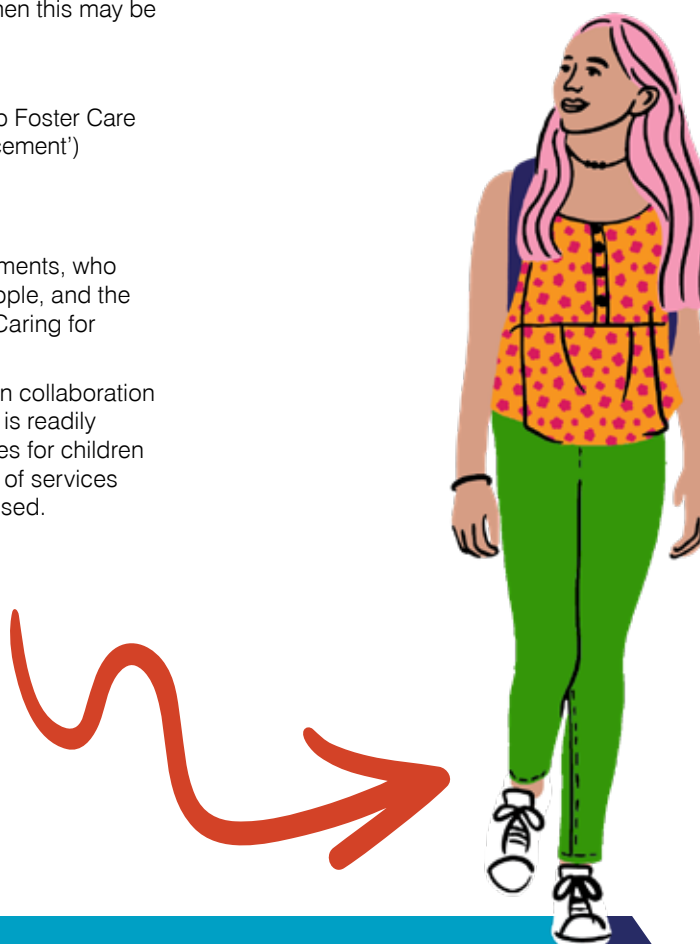
Coventry City Council has developed the local offer in collaboration with partners to ensure information is readily available regarding:

- the duties and responsibilities for children living with extended family and friends in different ways
- the support and type of services that are available
- how support and services may be accessed.

In implementing the local offer, Coventry City Council aims to narrow the gap in outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who live in Kinship Care and to provide their carers with effective and coordinated interagency support.

Management Accountability

The Senior Manager in the Council with responsibility for this Kinship Strategy and Local Offer is Angela Whitrick, Strategic Lead - Corporate Parenting and Sufficiency.



2. Values and Principles

Coventry Family Valued provides our scaffold for practice, keeping children at the heart of everything we do; focussing on the importance of investing in relationships, and empowering families to build their networks of support, to find their own solutions and lead on the decisions which affect their lives and the lives of their children. Child Friendly Cov is our ambition as a whole city, to make Coventry the best city in the UK for children and their families to live and grow up in; a city where all children are loved, safe, healthy, valued and have opportunities.

It is an underlying principle that children should live within their own family and community, wherever it is safe for them to do so. This principle applies to all children, including those who are in the care of the local authority. Therefore, it is imperative for children who cannot live with their parent(s), that we are tenacious in our efforts for them to remain within their wider family, identifying potential carers connected with them, and offering support and services to enable this to happen.

We will provide support for Kinship arrangements based on the assessed needs of the child, not simply on their legal status, and will seek to ensure that Kinship carers are provided with support to prevent children becoming looked after by the local authority, or do not have to remain in the care of the local authority for longer than is needed.

We aim to provide support and training in ways that are appropriate and encouraging for Kinship carers, recognising the life changing commitment that they are making both for the child, and for themselves.

When the local authority does become involved in the arrangements for a child living with or going to live with family or friends, this should be based on a thorough assessment of the child and the family or friend. Children's Services will work in partnership with children and their families in planning and decision making about their future care, empowering family to lead on these decisions wherever possible.

It is essential that the legal basis under which the child is living is clearly stated, confirmed in writing and understood by everyone.

This Offer reflects the 'No Order' principle of the Children Act 1989, 'the aim ... of the Children Act 1989 ... is to ensure that an Order is granted only where it will positively improve the child's welfare', (Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Vol. 1).

Where it is assessed that a child cannot remain with, or return to their birth parents, then care by Kinship Carers will be the care arrangement of first choice to meet these needs, provided this is consistent and in accordance with the child's needs and welfare, which is the paramount consideration.

3. Purpose and Scope of the Offer

The purpose of the Offer is to provide guidance and information on how Coventry City Council, alongside its partners and local services, will support children and young people living with extended family, friends or other people. These arrangements can be made informally by parents, or through the Council in the case of children who are in care.

Coventry City Council will only become involved with such arrangements if there are welfare or protection issues, with which the family needs help or intervention, or if the arrangements fall within the legal definition of private fostering, or if the child becomes cared for by the Council.

This offer is in two parts:

1. Informal or private Kinship arrangements for children where their parents, or the person with parental responsibility for them, has made arrangements for their child or young person to live with relatives and friends when these are for children assessed as 'in need' (as prescribed by section 17 Children Act 1989, detailed in section 4).
2. 'Public' Kinship arrangements for children who are in the care of the local authority; that is the care arrangement of children who are looked after by the Council, but who live with their family or friends.



4. Legal Framework

Coventry City Council has a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of Children in Need* living within its area and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families. The way in which we fulfil this duty is by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's assessed needs (Section 17, Children Act 1989). This can include financial, practical or other support.

It is important to note that the local authority does not have a general duty to assess all arrangements where children are living with their wider family or friends' network rather than their parents, but it does have a duty where it appears that services may be necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a Child in Need:

***A Child in Need is defined in Section 17(10) of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is disabled or who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by the local authority.**

To clarify the children who may come within the definition of Children in Need, the local authority has drawn up a 'Threshold Guidance – Effective Support for Children and Families' document, which is available here in the **Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures Manual**.

Children in Need may live with members of their family or friends in a variety of different legal arrangements, some formal and some informal. Different court orders are available to formalise these arrangements.

Children who are in care will always come within the definition of Children in Need, whether they are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (with parental consent) or in care subject to a Court Order whereby the Local Authority shares parental responsibility for the child. The local authority has a responsibility wherever possible to make arrangements for a child in care to live with a member of the family (Section 22 of the Children Act 1989).

For a detailed summary of the meaning and implications of different legal situations, the rights of carers and parents, and the nature of decisions which Kinship carers will be able to make in relation to the child, please see:

Annex A: Caring for Somebody Else's Child - Options. Section 4, Different Situations whereby Children may be Living with Family and Friend Carers, which sets out the local authority's powers and duties in relation to the various options.



5. Differing Care Arrangements

5.1 Informal Family Arrangements with a close relative

Where a child cannot be cared for within their immediate family, the family may make their own arrangements for a close relative (a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership or stepparent) to care for the child. Parents retain their responsibility for maintenance of their children if they live with informal family arrangements.

The local authority does not have a duty to assess any such informal close family arrangement, unless it appears to the authority that services may be necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a Child in Need. In such cases, the local authority has a responsibility under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to assess the child's needs and provide services to meet any assessed needs of the child. Following an assessment, a Child in Need Plan will be drawn up and a package of support will be identified. This can comprise of a variety of different types of services and support, including financial support.

Parental responsibility remains with the child's birth parents, but the carer may do what is reasonable to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. The parent also remains financially responsible for the care given to their child by the private fostering carer. Private foster carers should also access benefits advice to ensure that they claim all the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled.

5.2 Private Fostering Arrangements

A privately fostered child is a child under 16 (or 18 if disabled), who is cared for by an adult who is not a parent or close relative, where the child is to be cared for in that home for 28 days or more. Close relative is defined as 'a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or stepparent.' It does not include a child who is in the care of the Local Authority. In a private fostering arrangement, the parent still holds parental responsibility and agrees the decision-making arrangements with the private foster carer. The parent also remains financially responsible for the care given to their child by the private fostering carer.

The local authority has a duty to assess and monitor the welfare of all privately fostered children and the way in which they carry out these duties is set out in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. However, the local authority may also become involved with a child in a private fostering arrangement where the child comes within the definition of a Child in Need. In such cases, the local authority has a responsibility to provide services to meet the assessed needs of the child under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Following assessment, a Child in Need Plan will be drawn up and a package of support will be identified. As in 4.1 above, this can comprise a variety of different types of services and support, including financial support. See also Appendix 11.1 **Private Fostering**.

5.3 Kinship foster carers

Where a child is cared for by the local authority (under s20 or 31 Children Act 1989), we have a responsibility wherever possible to make arrangements for the child to live with a member of the family who is approved as a foster carer

(Section 22 of the Children Act 1989). The child can live with the family members prior to such approval, subject to an assessment of this care arrangement, for up to 16 weeks under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. Regulation 24(1) outlines that where the local authority is satisfied that the child going to live with a Connected Person immediately is the most appropriate care arrangement for the child, the carers can have temporary approval for a period of up to 16 weeks provided that an assessment of their suitability under Regulation 24(2) has taken place. Regulation 25 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations gives a possibility of an extension of 8 weeks to the original 16 weeks.

In this context the carer is referred to as a Kinship Foster Carer and the process of obtaining approval for the care arrangement is set out in the **Placement with Connected Persons Procedure**. Where temporary approval is given to such a care arrangement under the procedure, the carers will receive financial support on a regular basis. This is intended to cover care the costs of looking after the child including where arrangements are made at short notice.

In addition, the child will have a care arrangement, which sets out the specific arrangements surrounding the child and the carers, including the expectations of the Kinship foster carers and the support they can expect to receive to enable to fulfil their responsibilities for the child.

The assessment and approval process for family and friends who apply to be Kinship foster carers for a child in care will be similar to any other foster carer and include checks and references. However, the assessment is focussed on meeting the needs of the specific child / children rather than being a generic fostering assessment. Accordingly, the assessment form is different from that used to assess prospective mainstream foster carers. The timescales for the assessment are different where a child is already living with the person connected with them as indicated above. An information pack will be available to potential Kinship foster carers about the process and they will be given the name and contact details of the social worker from the fostering service allocated to carry out the assessment.

Once approved as Kinship foster carers (including where this approval is temporary), they will be allocated a supervising social worker from the fostering service to provide them with support and supervision, and they will receive fostering fees and allowances for as long as they care for the child as a Kinship foster carer and the child remains in care.

While the child remains in care, as a Kinship foster carer, they will be expected to cooperate with all the processes that are in place to ensure that the child receives appropriate care and support. For example, contributing to reviews of the child's Care Plan, working with the child's social worker and promoting the child's education and health needs.

Authority for day-to-day decision making about the child should be delegated to Kinship carer(s), utilising the delegated responsibility process, unless there is a valid reason not to do so.

5.4 Child Arrangements Order

A Child Arrangements Order is a Court Order which sets out the arrangements as to when and with whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact.

These orders replace the previous Contact Orders and Residence Orders.

A Child Arrangements Order may give parental responsibility to the person in whose favour it is made. Parental responsibility is shared with the parents.

Authority for day-to-day decision making about the child should be delegated to the carer(s), unless there is a valid reason not to do so.

Child Arrangements Orders may be made in private family proceedings in which the local authority is not a party nor involved in any way in the arrangements. However, a Child Arrangements Order in favour of a relative or foster carer (who was a Kinship carer) with whom a child may live with, may be an appropriate outcome as part of a permanence plan for a Child in Need or a Child in Care.

The local authority may pay Child Arrangements Order Allowances to relatives or friends, unless they are a spouse or civil partner of a parent, with whom a child is living under a Child Arrangements Order. This is set out in paragraph 15 of Schedule 1 of the Children Act 1989; however, this is discretionary.

Please see the local authority's Child Arrangements Order Allowances Policy, for details of what financial assistance may be available to holders of Child Arrangements Orders, the applicable criteria and who within the local authority will make decisions under the policy. Contact **childrens social care** for details.

5.5 Special Guardianship Order

Special Guardianship offers a further option for children needing permanent care outside their birth family. It can offer greater security without absolute severance from the birth family, as in adoption. The following individuals can apply to be a child's special guardian if they are not their parent and are over 18:

- They are already the child's legal guardian;
- The child lives with the carer because of a child arrangement order;
- The child has lived with the carer for three of the past five years;
- The carer is the child's relative or a foster parent, and the child has been living with them for at least one year;
- The carer has the agreement of anyone named in a child arrangements order as someone who the child will live with;
- The carer has agreement of all the people with parental responsibility for the child;
- The carer has the agreement of the local council, if the child is in care;
- If the carer does not fit one of these descriptions, they will need to ask the court's permission to apply.

A joint application can also be made. For further information and for forms please see: **Becoming a Special Guardian**

See also the **Applications for Special Guardianship Orders**, for details of what financial assistance may be available to holders of Special Guardianship Orders, the applicable criteria and who within the local authority will make decisions under the policy.

Special Guardianship Financial Support

Coventry City Council provides financial support to special guardians under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and in accordance with the Special Guardianship Statutory Guidance 2017.

For further information, please see Appendix 11.3.



6. Provision of Support

Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities sets out a requirement on local authorities to provide a Kinship Local Offer. Kinship Local Offers should be underpinned by the principle that support should be based on the needs of the child rather than merely their legal status. The Kinship Local Offer should provide Kinship families with support to ensure that children enter care, or remain in care, longer than is needed.

See also Table 1: Entitlement to support by Kinship carers and the child/ren in their care, under Children Act 1989 section 17 and for children looked after at pages 33-34 of the statutory guidance.

The following sections summarise the support available to Kinship carers.

6.1 Support Groups and Training

Research has identified that Kinship carers, irrespective of the legal basis of the care arrangement often require a range of support to assist them caring for the child. This increases the likelihood that care arrangement will remain stable.

The Fostering Service will provide information to Kinship carers regarding peer support groups and relevant training; this information will be provided in the Kinship Team newsletter which is distributed on a bi-monthly basis. The Fostering Service will collaborate with partner agencies and the voluntary sector to establish and improve access to this type of support.

Kinship foster carers will receive a copy of Coventry City Council's Fostering Handbook and will be asked to sign the Council's Foster Care Agreement, this details the expectation that carers practice in line with the fostering regulations and the Fostering National Minimum Standards. Carers will also be expected to regularly engage with the training programme provided, and to complete their Training, Skills and Development workbook within 18 months of approval, to evidence their learning and that the required standards have been met. Please see Appendix 11.2 (page 16) for details of the training programme available.

Kinship foster carers can access support, advice and training from the dedicated Kinship Team and from their allocated supervising social worker.

Training can boost the confidence of Kinship foster carers and equip them with skills and knowledge to provide high-quality care. For example, the training can include:

- Information about different types of Kinship care;
- Knowledge about child development and how to manage challenging behaviours; or
- Practical information on how to navigate the children's social care system, register for a new school or how to access a GP.



How to access support

You can contact the Fostering Service via email or telephone. A duty worker will take some information from you, answer any questions that you may have, and support you to access relevant training if appropriate. Our workers are available 9am - 5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am - 4.30pm on Friday.

- Call: **024 7697 5489**
- Email: **PSSFostering@coventry.gov.uk**
- Website: **coventry.gov.uk/fostercarerstraining**

6.2 Provision of Financial Support

There are three categories of payment, which may be considered. One or more of these may be applicable:

1. Subsistence crisis (one-off) payments

These should be used to overcome a crisis, following the best assessment of what support can be provided in the circumstances.

2. Setting Up payments

These are for such items as clothing, furniture, or bedding. The assessing or supervising social worker must be satisfied that the carers' financial position justifies the payment. Assistance may be given subject to conditions, including repayment in certain situations. However, in most situations, it will be inappropriate for the service to recover money provided under these circumstances.

3. Weekly contribution to living expenses

It is possible for the local authority to make regular payments where family members or friends care for a child whether or not the child is in care. Where regular payments are made, Kinship carers should be assisted to maximise their Income and access appropriate universal benefits.

In all cases where regular financial support is agreed, a written agreement will be drawn up detailing the level and duration of the financial support that is to be provided, and the mechanism for review.

The following criteria will be applied to all such payments:

- The purpose of the payments must be to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.
- As part of the assessment, a view should be taken as to whether carers need financial support, based on their reasonable requirements in taking on the care of the child.
- There are no other legitimate sources of finance.
- Payments will be paid to the carer and should not be passed on to the parents.
- The payment would not place any person in a fraudulent position.

4. Exceptional Allowances Panel

- The Exceptional Allowances Panel is held monthly and is responsible for considering ad hoc payments and any other additional financial support needed by Kinship foster carers or prospective Special Guardians.
- The Exceptional Allowances Panel is the forum in which applications to the Pathways to Care Budget are considered. This budget is used to facilitate permanence for children in care, and to fund adaptations to accommodation, where needed to increase capacity. Please see **Pathways to Care Capital Funding Approval Policy**

- Applications to the panel are made by the Social Worker on behalf of the Kinship Foster Carer or prospective Special Guardian(s), and submitted with supporting documentation, where applicable.
- The outcome of the Exceptional Allowances Panel is communicated in writing.
- If the Panel does not approve the application for additional financial support, then the Foster Care or Special Guardian applicant may submit an appeal within 14 days following receipt of the Panel's decision.
- Appeals must be submitted in writing to the applicant's social worker, outlining the reasons for the appeal. This should include a rationale for why the decision should be reconsidered, any additional information or context which support the appeal, and detail of the impact on the child or the care arrangement if the requested support is not provided.
- Appeals are considered by the Strategic Lead and Operational Lead for Fostering Services, within 10 working days following receipt of the appeal.
- The outcome of the appeal will be communicated in writing, outlining the basis on which the decision has been made.

6.3 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

Local authorities and regional adoption agencies (RAAs) can apply for therapeutic funding for eligible adoptive, special guardianship order and child arrangement order families. Local authorities and RAAs must apply to the ASGSF within three months of assessing a family's support needs. The Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) is available to most children being raised under a Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Order.

This also includes children up to and including the age of 21, or 25 with an education, health and care (EHC) plan who:

Were in care before an SGO was made.

- Left care under a special guardianship order that was subsequently changed to an adoption order, or vice versa.
- Are under a residency order or child arrangement order (CAO) and were previously looked after.
- Were previously looked after but where the adoption, special guardianship, residency or CAO care arrangement has broken down, irrespective of any reconciliation plans.

There is a dedicated Children and Families Support Worker within the Fostering Service who coordinates applications to the ASGSF; this will include obtaining a minimum of three quotes for support services that are needed for the family.

These quotes will be shared with the family to consider the most appropriate service to provide the support needed. This Children and Families Support Worker will arrange and chair the planning meeting for this support; they will also review how the services are working for the family and complete the closure meeting once all sessions have taken place. If it is felt that the family requires further therapeutic support or services an application can be made within the following financial year if all funds have been exhausted for the current year.

For more information and how to apply see: **Adoption and special guardianship support fund (ASGSF) Guidance**

6.4 Foster Carers Out of Hours support

The Fostering Service offers a 24-hour telephone out of hours support service, in line with the Fostering National Minimum Standards (Standard 21.3), which is staffed by members of the Fostering Service. The contact number for out of hours fostering is:

Tel: **07958 337681**

This service is used by foster carers (including Kinship foster carers) that require urgent support, for example, they may need some advice and support on how to manage some difficult behaviours.

If a foster carer requires advice and support regarding a child, for example, a child goes missing or requires emergency medical treatment, they must contact the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) on Tel: **024 7683 2222**

During office hours, the Fostering Service is available to all Kinship Carers via PSS Fostering **Monday to Thursday 8.30am – 5pm**, and **Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm** (excluding bank holidays). Tel: **024 7697 548**

Each Kinship foster carer will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker who can be contacted via telephone or email during office hours. The Supervising Social Worker will provide their direct contact details.

6.5 Employment Support

Kinship Carers in the Workplace: Guidance for Employers sets out best practice for supporting Kinship carers at work, including the right to be entitled to leave benefits similar to that of parents and adopters.

6.6 Accommodation

Kinship carers may need support with accommodation, as their home may not have sufficient space to take on the care of a child or possibly a sibling group of children.

Living in cramped conditions may add to the pressures of caring for a child. Housing authorities and registered social landlords should be engaged to ensure that their policies recognise the importance of the role performed by Kinship carers, and that whenever possible Kinship carers living in social housing are given appropriate priority to move to more suitable accommodation, particularly if this will prevent the need for a child to enter care.

Local authorities have a general duty under section 17 of the 1989 Act, to consider providing financial support towards accommodation costs where they assess this as the most appropriate way to safeguard and promote a child's welfare. Such assessment will be based on the child's individual needs.

Coventry Homefinder Policy supports Kinship carers with additional priority, and Band 1 status (the highest band) where there is a need to move to a larger property to accommodate the child(ren) being supported.

Coventry City Council housing support page brings together information that could help if you are worried about rising household costs like rent and mortgage payments, energy costs and more. Below you'll find **advice on benefits, ways to reduce energy bills and organisations you can contact** for support

Coventry Homefinder Policy – Coventry City Council

Pathways to Care Capital Funding Approval Policy at **Pathways to Care Capital Funding Approval Policy.**

6.7 Education

All children who live in Kinship care are now supported by the Virtual School. The Virtual School Head role has been extended to champion the attendance, attainment and progress of all children who live in Kinship care. Kinship families who have a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order will also receive advice and support on request.

Education support for children in Kinship care

Children living in Kinship care can face unique educational challenges. The Virtual School plays an important role in promoting understanding of these needs across the education system and supporting positive educational outcomes.

The nature of the Virtual School's involvement depends on a child's legal status and circumstances.

The role of the Virtual School

The Virtual School Head (VSH) provides strategic leadership to improve educational experiences and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people across the city, including those living in Kinship care.

Our work focuses on:

- championing high expectations for learning, attendance and inclusion
- promoting trauma-informed and attachment-aware practice
- strengthening collaboration between education, families and services
- supporting schools to meet their statutory responsibilities effectively

Children who are previously looked after

For children who were previously looked after and left care through adoption, a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or a Child Arrangements Order (CAO), the Virtual School Head has a statutory duty to promote their educational attainment through the provision of information and advice.

This advice may be provided to:

- parents and guardians
- schools and education providers
- social workers or other professionals

All maintained schools and academies must appoint a Designated Teacher, who has a leadership responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of previously looked after children on the school's roll and for working closely with families.

Previously looked-after children may attract Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding. This funding is:

- allocated to schools through the October school census
- managed by the school
- used to improve educational outcomes, informed by the child's needs and in partnership with parents or guardians

Children living in Kinship care who are not previously looked after

For children living in Kinship care who have not previously been looked after, the Virtual School contributes through city-wide strategic activity designed to strengthen educational practice and understanding.

This includes:

- promoting inclusive practice across all education settings
- supporting schools to recognise and respond to the impact of adversity on learning and behaviour
- improving consistency of expectations and support for vulnerable learners

Trauma-informed and attachment-aware education across the city

The Virtual School leads a city-wide trauma-informed, attachment-aware programme, supporting all schools to better meet the needs of children who have experienced adversity, including those living in Kinship arrangements.

Through this programme:

- schools have access to free CPD delivered or commissioned by the Virtual School
- schools can access bespoke whole-school development to strengthen inclusive practice
- education staff are supported to understand how trauma and attachment impact learning, attendance, behaviour and relationships

This work supports improved educational experiences for children in Kinship care by embedding consistent, informed practice across mainstream education.

Supporting Designated Teachers in schools

The Virtual School works with schools to ensure that all maintained schools and academies appoint a Designated Teacher, in line with statutory guidance.

Designated Teachers have a leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of children who are looked after and previously looked after, and in supporting inclusive practice for other vulnerable learners, including those living in Kinship care.

The Virtual School supports the development of the Designated Teacher role through:

- regular training and professional development, aligned to national guidance and local priorities
- Designated Teacher network events, providing opportunities to share good practice and strengthen partnership working
- guidance and resources to support schools in embedding trauma-informed and attachment-aware approaches
- system leadership that promotes high expectations, consistency and inclusion across the city



School admissions and transitions

Securing and sustaining the right school place is an important part of supporting children living in Kinship care. The Virtual School provides strategic leadership and advice to support positive admissions practice across the city. This includes:

- working with schools and local authority colleagues to promote timely, inclusive admissions
- upporting good planning for school moves and key transition points
- advising schools and professionals on the educational needs of vulnerable children, including those living in Kinship arrangements

For children who are previously looked after, admissions authorities give high priority in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

For other children living in Kinship care, school admissions are managed through the local authority's standard admissions processes. The Virtual School promotes early, collaborative problem-solving to minimise disruption to education during transitions.

Coventry operates a Fair Access Protocol to support children who are without a school place outside the normal admissions round. The protocol is designed to reduce the amount of time vulnerable children spend out of education, while ensuring that responsibility for admissions is shared fairly across schools. Consideration through the Fair Access Protocol is based on individual circumstances and follows attempts to secure a place through the usual in-year admissions process. Where appropriate, this mechanism can support timely placement and smoother transitions for vulnerable learners, including some children living in Kinship care.

Future development of the Virtual School role

At present, the Virtual School's role in relation to children in Kinship care who are not previously looked after is nonstatutory and focused on strategic leadership and system-wide improvement, including the provision of information, advice and signposting where appropriate, rather than individual casework.

The Department for Education has indicated that this aspect of the Virtual School role is expected to become statutory from September 2026, subject to national guidance and local implementation.

Further information will be published as national guidance is confirmed.

How to contact the Virtual School

Kinship carers, schools and professionals can contact the Virtual School for education-related information and advice, or to discuss how the Virtual School's strategic work can support inclusive practice.

Email: virtualschool@coventry.gov.uk
Phone: 024 7697 5535

The **School Admissions Code** provides that children being raised by Kinship carers under a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order, who struggle to get a school place during the year, will be supported in finding one.

In addition, Pupil Premium for children in long-term family care arrangements (also known as Pupil Premium Plus) was introduced in 2014. Pupil Premium Plus is awarded in recognition that many children who have joined permanent families through adoption, Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), or Child Arrangement Orders (CAOs) may need extra support in school due to the

circumstances that led to them becoming looked after and later settling into their permanent family environment. See **Pupil Premium Overview**.

Promoting the Education of Children with a Social Worker and Children in Kinship Care Arrangements: Virtual School Head Role Extension confirms that children in Kinship settings having access to the virtual school head program to continue to support their academic achievement.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Early Years Team

The SEND Early Years team are committed to the principles of early identification and intervention for children with Special Educational Needs. The SEND Early Years Team recognises the diversity of children's experiences and varying rates of progress, however there will be children whose rate of progress determines that early intervention is necessary to support their learning.

The SEND Early Years team aims to:

- take a leading role in securing the educational entitlement of preschool children with individual or special educational needs/disabilities
- work in partnership with parents/carers, professional and voluntary agencies to meet the needs of and improve outcomes for children from birth to four years with a range of SEND and to support inclusion into mainstream Early Years provision.

Services offered:

- Portage home visiting
- Portage supervision and coordination in partnership with family hubs
- support in all schools and settings within early years
- advice to parents on the statutory assessment process
- support and advice on the process of transition to maintained education provision
- training.

The SEND team can be contacted on Tel: **024 7678 8400**

Email: SENDsupportservice@coventrygov.uk

Website: coventry.gov.uk/sendeyt

The following organisations may provide additional support for specific children



Company	Website/link/contact	What they do
Community Autism support service (CASS)	casspartnership.org.uk	• Support groups for parent / carers • Training • Peer mentoring • Community outreach sessions for children and young people
Grapevine/ TeenVine	grapevinecovandwarks.org coventry.gov.uk/teenvineplus	• Young people with autism or learning disabilities 13-18yrs • Support children in developing friendships, confidence and skills. • Also offers TeenVibe plus, that works with children with SEND who are not accessing education (10-18 years)

6.8 Supporting Family Time

The local authority has a duty to promote family time for all Children in Need where they are living apart from their family, although this differs depending on whether or not the child is in care.

Where the child is not in care, the local authority will take such steps as are reasonably practicable to promote family time between the child and their family 'where it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard and promote their welfare'. As part of the support arrangements, it may be identified that specific assistance is required to ensure that any such family time can be managed safely. If necessary, information will be made available to Kinship carers about local family time, contact

centres and family mediation services, and how to make use of their services.

Where a child is in care, the local authority shall allow reasonable family time between the child and their parents (or other legal standing) 'unless it is not practicable or consistent with the child's welfare'. The overall objective of the family time arrangements will be included in the child's Care Plan, and the specific arrangements will be set out in the child's Care Arrangement Plan - see **Contact and Overnight Stays Procedures**.

If the child is subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), the arrangements will be set out in the SGO Support Plan.

Information in relation to family time, contact may be available from the following organisations:

Organisation	Contact details	Other contact
Grandparents Plus	0300 123 7015	grandparentsplus.org.uk
Family Rights Group	0808 801 0366	frg.org.uk
Coventry Family Hubs	0800 887 0545	Or by visiting one of the Local Family Hubs in person

6.9 Health

The local authority, through its Corporate Parenting responsibilities, has a duty to promote the welfare of Children in Care, including those who are eligible and those children living in pre-adoptive care arrangements. This includes promoting the child's physical, emotional and mental health.

Every Child in Care should have an up-to-date health

assessment so that a health care plan can be developed to reflect the child's health needs and be included as part of the child's overall Care Plan.

Health assessments are statutorily required to be carried out a minimum of:

- 6-monthly for babies and children under 5 years of age; and
- Annually for those aged 5 years and over.

Information in relation to health is available from the following organisations:

Organisation	Contact details	Other contact
Children in Care Team	024 7696 1442	LACMedicals@coventry.gov.uk
RISE	0300 200 2021	coventry.gov.uk/childrens-mental-health wbc@cwmind.org.uk
Coventry and Warwickshire Mental Wellbeing Line	0800 616 171	cwmind.org.uk/coventry-wellbeing-hub re- covery.academy@covwarkpt.nhs.uk
Coventry and Warwickshire Mind		wbhub@cwmind.org.uk

6.10 Mentoring Scheme for Kinship Foster Carers

What is a mentor?

- A mentor provides another Foster Carer with informal support.
- A mentor can provide general advice and guidance to others, who are getting to know the fostering role,
- Or if a mentee has identified a specific issue a mentor could provide them with a targeted piece of support.
- A mentor actively listens without judgement and offers reassurance, advice, and guidance.
- A mentor will empower the mentee to problem solve and help the mentee to explore their own needs.
- A mentor provides face-to-face, telephone, and email support.

Mentoring is semi-structured guidance where the mentor shares their knowledge, skills and experience to help the mentee to change something and develop their potential. Mentors need to be readily accessible and prepared to offer help as the need arises - within agreed bounds.

The aims of providing a peer mentor are therefore to:

- provide new foster carers with the support of an experienced foster carer – to offer a listening ear and empathy.
- increase the confidence of new foster carers and help them settle into their role.
- such as fostering children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation or Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- enable and encourage foster carers to develop their skills and confidence – which will help to sustain care arrangements, thereby improving outcomes for children.
- improve the retention of foster carers.

How to access support

You can contact our service via email or telephone. A duty worker will take some information from you and answer any questions that you may have and support you to access the Mentoring Scheme.

Our workers are available **9am - 5pm Monday to Thursday** and **9am - 4.30pm Friday**.

Tel: **024 7697 5489**

or email: **PSSFostering@coventry.gov.uk**

6.11 Newsletter

The Kinship Team distributes a Newsletter to Kinship Foster Carers and Special Guardians every two months. The Newsletter provides up to date news on the service, useful information about local services, latest events information, any staffing updates and service structure updates.

This is sent via email – to be added to the mailing list and to receive a copy, please email:

PSSFostering@coventry.gov.uk and provide your email address.

6.12 Special Guardian Peer Support Groups

Different forms of Special Guardian peer support are available via the Fostering Service. Key objectives of this support are:

1. Emotional support:

To offer a safe space for Special Guardians to share their experiences, feelings, and concerns.

2. Information sharing:

To provide access to relevant information, resources, and guidance on caring for a child as a Special Guardian.

3. Community building:

To foster a sense of community among Special Guardians, helping them feel less isolated and more connected.

4. Empowerment:

To empower Special Guardians to navigate the complexities of their role and make informed decisions about the child's care.

At present the following support is provided:

- Coffee mornings, on the first Friday of every month
- Park walks at War Memorial Park take place monthly
- Virtual sessions with guest speakers are bi-monthly (e.g., Seniass Compass etc)

In addition, there is also a peer support WhatsApp group which can be joined on request.

For further information about peer support and the sessions available, please email: **sgps.coventry@gmail.com**.

6.13 Special Guardianship Information sessions

This aim of this bespoke information session is to help participants understand what being a Special Guardian means and their role in the child's life. It aims to provide clarity about the legal responsibilities involved as a special guardian, as well as examining the impact of trauma and loss on children in relation to their previous experiences.

Additionally, the course seeks to support participants in building and maintaining positive relationships and attachments with the children in their care, while considering the impact on themselves and their families. It also aims to help participants understand the support their child will gain from their education provider and what an SGO support plan may entail.

By the end of the session, participants will have access to information, advice, and signposting to services and support that will enable them to make informed decisions about becoming a Special Guardian and to thrive as a family.

This half-day session is tailored for both Prospective Special Guardians and existing Special Guardians. If you would like to attend, please book a place through JRNI or contact the Kinship Team to book a place. Tel: **024 7697 5489**



6.14 Skills to Care

Skills to Care training is a one-day training session to inform and advise prospective Kinship carers about the assessment and supervision process. The training also explores some key issues carers may experience.

Skills to Care is for applicants undertaking Fostering or Special Guardianship Assessment. The training is delivered by two members of staff from the Kinship Team.

- To gain an overview of the assessment process within fostering and special guardianship.
- To gain a clear understanding of the role of a Foster Carer and what the fostering role entails.
- To understand the Foster Panel process and the Court process.
- To ask any questions to help you understand the assessment process.

This is an interactive course, so you attendees are invited to participate within a group work setting and consider case studies. This is also an opportunity to create links and networks with other applicants undertaking the assessment process.

Skills to Care is offered every two months, from **9.30am - 2.30pm**, at **Coventry Council House**. A place can be booked via your Assessing Social Worker, or alternatively via the Kinship Team. Tel: **024 7697 5489**

6.15 Designated Children and Families Workers

The Kinship Team has two Children and Families Workers who provide bespoke tailored support to Kinship Foster Carers and Special Guardians. Often families within a Special Guardianship arrangement may be eligible for support and services funded by the ASGSF, and the Children and Families Worker will offer support in the interim whilst these services are commissioned.

Children and Families workers will assess and plan the intervention and support that they deliver to families in need. This can include support around routines, emotional and behavioural management strategies, online safety, training around the impact of domestic abuse, alcohol or drugs on children and young people. Other support offered could be around life story work, and experiences of loss and trauma.

Children and Families Workers will routinely work with families for up to six weeks however this can change depending upon the needs of the family. A planning meeting will be arranged with the Social Worker(s) involved to identify what the outcomes

should be. The support offered will be reviewed mid-way, and at conclusion a closure meeting will also be held review the work undertaken and next steps. If it appropriate for referrals to made to other support services, these will be made prior to the Children and Families Worker's involvement ending.

6.16 Events

The Fostering Service host events throughout the year for Kinship Foster carers, Special Guardians and their families. These include the Summer fun day, carers conference, children who foster (groups for birth children whose parents foster), 'Thank You' events, and the Winter events. Event invites are sent to those on the mailing list, which is updated regularly by Social Workers. Social Workers will also share details of forthcoming event during supervision visits with Kinship Foster Carers.

6.17 Edge of Care

Edge of Care Criteria and Threshold

Edge of Care offer a 12-week intervention aimed to prevent children and young people coming into Local authority Care. The service has expanded to include Reunification, Foster care arrangement Stability and Positive Directions. Therapeutic Practitioners and a Fostering Stability Worker who are trauma informed provide bespoke packages of support. Support is also available to special guardianship arrangements which are becoming unstable.

Children and Young people must be aged between 8-17 for the duration of Edge of Care intervention. We prioritise adolescent referrals for young people aged between 11-16. Children and Young People must be considered at imminent risk of coming into care by the Social Worker and overseeing Manager.

How we work with families

We work jointly with social workers, young persons and family to identify the required support. Together, we develop measurable goals and help the whole family acquire the skills necessary to achieve them. We deliver direct work in both parent and family sessions to defuse crisis within the home.

We work alongside the family to identify need, deliver structured and evidence-based intervention tools to support families in crisis. The foundation of our intervention includes signs of safety and the Family Valued approach.

We work to promote independence and create sustainable change for the family, which will we aim to embed in their behaviours after Edge of Care closes. We work directly with the family, providing hands-on and intensive support work for the 12-week period to achieve rapid change.

Workers vary between early (till 5pm) and late shifts (up to 8pm), allowing flexibility to work with families in different circumstances.

Our on-call service provides support outside working hours. On call offers support to families to practice new strategies agreed within their intervention. Edge of Care do not offer an 'emergency response' to incidents that may require relevant emergency services.

Referrals are completed by the allocated Social Worker, following a consultation with their Team Manager. Referrals to be sent to: **edgeofcare-referral@coventry.gov.uk**

All referrals are screened by the Management Team to discuss the suitability of the referral and agree work to be completed with the family.



6.18 Wellbeing Support for Kinship Foster Carers and Special Guardians

A comprehensive Wellbeing Support offer is available to Kinship Foster Carers and Special Guardians via the Local Authority's partnership with Health Assured.

The wellbeing offer provided by Health Assured and commissioned by Coventry City Council, is designed to support all carers, including Special Guardians, by addressing their mental, emotional, and financial wellbeing. This comprehensive support package includes access to a confidential helpline, structured counselling sessions, and life coaching. Kinship carers and Special Guardians can benefit from up to 12 sessions of structured counselling per person, per issue, per year, ensuring they receive the right care through a triage process conducted by qualified counsellors. Additionally, the offer extends to immediate family members, providing support for partners and dependent children aged 16 to 24 who are in full-time education and living in the same household.

In addition, the wellbeing offer includes financial coaching, legal advice, and medical support. Kinship carers and special guardians can access personalised financial guidance to help with household budgeting, debt management, and pension advice, with up to three sessions per person, per issue, per year. The legal team is available 24/7 to provide consultations on various issues, including family and matrimonial law, civil litigation, and immigration. For medical support, qualified nurses can offer advice on musculoskeletal conditions, viruses, and other health concerns, although they cannot diagnose or prescribe treatment. This holistic approach ensures that special guardians have the resources they need to manage their wellbeing effectively.

In addition, online CBT is available for over 30 different areas and specific CBT linked to the Menopause.

7. Family Networks and Family Group Decision Making

The Children's Social Care National Framework: Statutory Guidance on the Purpose, Principles for Practice and Expected Outcomes of Children's Social Care provides that this is the umbrella term for family-led decision-making fora, where a family network has all the resources, adequate preparation, relevant information, a safe and appropriate environment, and private family time to make a plan to response to concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing. At pre-proceedings stage, successful family group decision making also includes having an independent coordinator. Family group decision making can take different forms; a 'family group conference' is one model, alongside Family network meetings or discussions which include family members and the 'Team around the child'.

A family network is described as a group of people close to a child, made up of relatives and also non-related connected people (where connected people has the same definition used in The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, in addition to close family friends who have a connection with the child). A family network could include stepparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, or close family friends.

These meetings can be especially helpful to Kinship carers in identifying areas of caring for a child for which additional support from the wider family network may be helpful.

See also **Family Networks and Family Group Decision Making Procedure.**

Contact Family Group Conferencing in Coventry at:
FGC@Coventry.gov.uk



8. Legal Support

In public family proceedings, legal aid is available to prospective Kinship carers, or Kinship carers in public family law children's cases under the Children Act 1989 and in related proceedings, where they have been joined as a party to proceedings by the court. This includes where prospective Kinship Carers wish to make more permanent arrangements, for example, through a Special Guardianship Order. This is subject to means and merits eligibility assessments.

In private family proceedings, legal aid is available for prospective Kinship Carers and Kinship carers for Special Guardianship Orders. This is also subject to means and merits eligibility assessments.

If a Kinship carer wishes to discuss their matter with a legal aid provider and explore their eligibility further, they can use the 'Find a legal aid adviser or family mediator' tool which will assist them to find a provider in the area.

It is important to know that birth families can legally apply to the court for permission to discharge a Special Guardianship Order. The court will look at any new evidence and make a decision based on the child's best interest.

The Family Rights Group, 'Helping families Helping children' has more information on this.

It can be useful to seek legal advice in relation to family time if there are challenges surrounding this that are not being resolved.

The organisation 'Kinship' offers advice and support on obtaining legal advice, including information about legal aid and signposting to other helpful organizations: <https://Kinship.org.uk/support-and-advice/advice-and-information/legal-helpfor-Kinship-carers/>

The Law Society has a find a solicitor service: Find a Solicitor - The Law Society. **Find a Solicitor - The Law Society**

The Kinship Team can advise and signpost you to the organisations that can offer support with legal enquiries. The team can also advise on requests for financial support in relation to legal costs.



9. Complaints Procedure

Where a Kinship carer or Special Guardian is not satisfied with the level of support provided to enable them to care for the child, they have access to the local authority's complaints process. Our aim would be to resolve any such dissatisfaction without the need for a formal investigation, but where an informal resolution is not possible, then a formal investigation will be arranged.

The timescales and process are set out in the **Complaints Procedure**

10. Glossary of terms

Kinship/ connected person is a relative, friend, or other person connected with a child, who has a pre-existing relationship with the child.

Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative'. This is a private arrangement made between a parent and a carer, for 28 days or more. Close relatives are defined as stepparents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, or aunts (whether of full blood, half blood or marriage/affinity).

Children in need are defined in law as children who are aged under 18 and: -

- need Local Authority services to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development
- need Local Authority services to prevent significant or further harm to health or development
- are disabled

The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families provides a systematic basis for collecting and analysing information to support professional judgements about how to help children and families in the best interests of the child

Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (s17) defines the duties of a Local Authority in safeguarding and promoting the general welfare of a child in need and her/his family within their area. Assistance given to families under S17 includes financial assistance

A Child Arrangement order decides where the child is to live and with whom. The granting of a child arrangements order to someone automatically gives him or her parental responsibility for the child if they do not already have it.

11. Appendix

11.1 Caring for Somebody Else's Child – Options

For further information please visit [looking after someone else's child](#)

11.2 Fostering Service training offer

For full details, visit [Foster carers training](#)

- **All About Me (Life Story Approach)**
- **Attachment Theory**
- **Behaviour That Challenges You**
- **Core Mandatory Refresher for Foster Carers**
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**
- **Equality and Diversity E-Learning**
- **First Aid for Foster Carers**
- **Foundations for Attachment**
- **Induction for Foster Carers**
- **Introduction to Court Processes for Foster Carers**
- **Intro to Safer Caring and Health and Safety**
- **Reporting and Recording for Foster Carers**
- **Safeguarding Awareness for Foster Care**
- **Special Guardian Training**
- **Supporting Children and Young People with Autism - neurodivergence awareness**
- **Supporting Education of Children in Care (Outcomes)**
- **Supporting Education of Children in Care WMVS**
- **Therapeutic Parenting and Behaviour Management**
- **Understanding the mental health and emotional well-being**

11.3 Special Guardianship Financial Support

1. Purpose and Legal Basis

Coventry City Council (CCC) provides financial support to Special Guardians (SGs) under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and in accordance with the Special Guardianship Statutory Guidance 2017. Financial support is payable only where the Council considers it necessary to enable the Special Guardian(s)/prospective Special Guardian(s) to care for the child (Regulation 6(1) & (2)). The amount of support is determined by considering other available resources, the Special Guardian's financial situation, and the child's needs (Regulation 13(2) & (3)).

2. Principles of Support

Financial support is intended to remove financial barriers to suitable Special Guardianship arrangements.

Financial support may be provided to facilitate arrangements for a person to become a Special Guardian or to support the continuation of the arrangement. Payments may be made where necessary to ensure the Special Guardian can look after the child, where the child needs special care (because of longterm illness, disability, emotional or behavioral difficulties or the consequences of past abuse or neglect) and for legal costs, or for necessary expenditure to accommodate and maintain the child.

CCC is committed to evidencing specific decision making and the provision of reasons for financial decisions. Financial support is assessed on its own facts and tailored to individual circumstances, resources, needs and the child's individual needs.

3. Assessment Process

All applications for Special Guardianship financial allowance are subject to a means test, except for in the following circumstances:

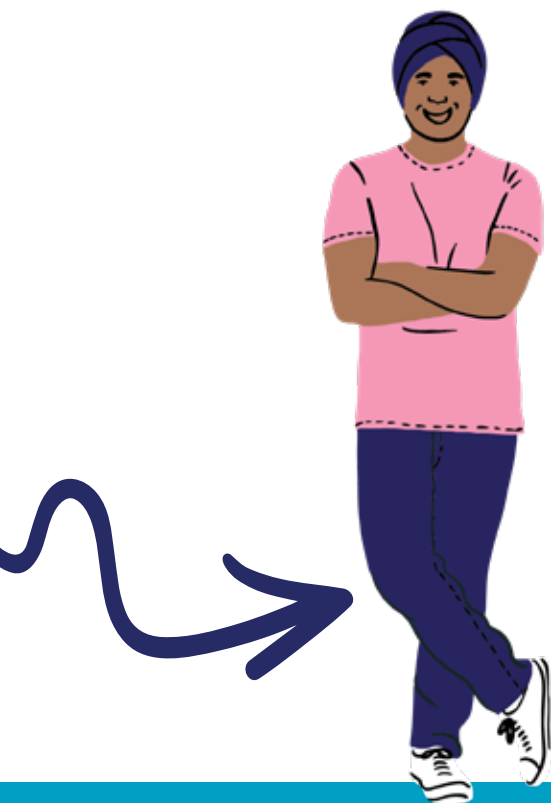
- i The first two years following a Special Guardianship Order for former Kinship/ foster carers.
- ii Where bespoke financial support packages have been agreed through the exceptional allowances panel.

In determining the amount of financial support, CCC must consider:

- Any other grant, benefit, allowance or resource available to the Special Guardian (Reg 13(2)).
- The Special Guardian's financial resources, including tax credits or benefits (Reg 13(3)(a)).
- The Special Guardian's reasonable outgoings and commitments (excluding child-related costs) (Reg 13(3)(b)).
- The financial needs and resources of the child (Reg 13(3)(c)).

CCC's model is based on its full fostering allowance, which exceeds the national minimum.

Financial support cannot duplicate other payments and must be based on individual need. The fostering allowance that would have been payable had the child been fostered is used as the maximum benchmark for calculating support. CCC will advise Special Guardians to access any benefits to which they are entitled; this will usually include child benefit and tax credits.



CCC will provide special guardians and applicants with clear reasons of how SGA is calculated.

Further details on the assessment process and request for review of SGA calculations can be found here; Applications for Special Guardianship Orders

4. Treatment of Child Benefit

CCC deducts child benefit from the final SGA assessment, including where Special Guardian's are in receipt of benefits. This deduction is justified because Special Guardian's are separately entitled to child benefit and CCC's fostering allowance exceeds the national minimum. This means that even after deducting child benefit, the SGA remains higher than the national minimum amount an SG would receive. However, child benefit will not be deducted as a blanket policy, as there will be exemptions and each case will be considered individually with written reasons provided.

5. Exceptional Allowances Panel

The Exceptional Allowances Panel considers bespoke financial support packages for Special Guardians where standard SGA arrangements may not meet the needs of the child or Special Guardian's circumstances. The panel may approve support for high-cost needs, transition arrangements, financial hardship, one-off payments, and legal costs. Referrals must include a clear rationale and evidence. Decisions are recorded with reasons and ongoing payments reviewed annually.

Special Guardians have the right of appeal to decisions made by the Exceptional Allowance's Panel, via an Appeal Panel if requested within 10 working days of their written receipt of the outcome from the Exceptional Allowance Panel.

6. Financial Assessment Process

Applicants complete financial assessment forms with supporting evidence. The allowance is calculated using income, standard outgoings, and benefits, measured against the fostering allowance. If disposable income falls below the fostering rate, the difference forms the basis of the SGA. If calculated at zero, the applicant is informed and documents returned. Proposed allowances are set out in the SGO support plan and reassessed annually.

7. Post-Order Support for Former Foster Carers

CCC supports transitions from fostering to Special Guardianship arrangements. Where a foster carer agrees to provide permanent care, and the child has been looked after by CCC for at least one month, CCC will provide an allowance equivalent to existing fees and allowances (minus child benefit and universal credit if applicable) for two years post-order. Thereafter, support is means-tested. Legal fee support up to £500 is available where CCC leads the application to discharge the care order. Private applicants are assessed under standard criteria.

8. Review and Changes in Circumstances

Financial support is reviewed annually through a 'desk top' review or sooner if there is a significant change in the Special Guardian's or child's circumstances, where a bespoke package of support has been agreed. SGO carers can request a review/ reassessment of their financial support, if their circumstances change, which will be presented to the Exceptional Allowances panel for consideration.

If the Special Guardian moves out of Coventry, CCC remains responsible for financial support unless agreed otherwise. Other support services will be the responsibility of the new authority unless the child was previously looked after prior to the Special

Guardianship Order being made in which case support services will remain the responsibility of CCC for at least three years post order.

Support may continue until the child ceases to have a home with the Special Guardians, end of education, training and commences employment or where the child qualifies for benefits in their own right (other than child benefit) as part of a transition plan

Support normally ceases when the child turns 18, unless;

- a The child is in full-time education or training.
- b The child has special needs or disabilities.

Any request for continued support post 18 will be considered by the Exceptional Allowance panel and should be made no less than 3 months prior to the child's 18th birthday. The financial element of this support, will generally be in line with the current Staying Put Allowance, taking into account that the child post 18, may be able to apply for alternative state benefits, have access to income or support from adult services. The Exceptional Allowance panel will consider each individual's case, to determine ongoing support specific to that child's circumstances and needs, as they transition into adulthood.

9. Contact Information

To request a financial assessment or learn more about postorder support, contact PSS Fostering at PSSFostering@coventry.gov.uk or call **024 7697 6759**



12. Notes

[illegible]

