

It is important for anyone considering asking the court to grant them a Special Guardianship Order that you are given all of the information about this to help you understand what will be required of you. This will help you make an informed decision as to whether this care arrangement is the right one for you and your family. An assessing social worker will complete an assessment to show that you are able to care for the child as a Special Guardian. The assessment goes into a lot of detail and includes information about you and your background, the child and any support you think you will need.

Before you can ask to be granted a Special Guardianship Order, you need to meet the following conditions:

- You are a UK Citizen or have permanent leave to remain in the UK.
- You are aged 18 years of over.
- You have a home where you have the right to live there permanently (You are either on the tenancy agreement, the mortgage or the house deeds)

Within the SGO assessment, the assessing social worker will want to talk to you about all of the things listed below:

Do you have a criminal record:

A specialist check is undertaken within any SGO assessment, known as a Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS) to show if you have any former convictions. Because this DBS check is 'enhanced', it will show all cautions and convictions that you may ever have received, regardless of how long ago they may have taken place. It is important to know that not all convictions will stop you from being able to become a Special Guardian, but it is also really important that you are honest about any cautions or convictions that you may have received at the very start of your SGO assessment so that this decision can be made. If you do not tell us about any convictions and we find out later as the assessment is ongoing, this would make us worry about how honest you were being with us and if you would be able to work with the Local Authority as a Special Guardian.

Your home:

- Is it owned or rented?
- Whose name is the mortgage or tenancy in?
- Are you in any mortgage or rent arrears?

Does the child you are going to become a Special Guardian for have their own bedroom within your home? If not, what are the plans to create a bedroom for the child?

Children under the age of five years old are not able to be placed in homes where there are smokers.

Your health:

You will be asked to have a medical undertaken with your GP and which Lambeth Council will pay for. It is important to know that not all health conditions will stop you from being able to become a Special Guardian and so it is also really important that you are honest about any

health conditions that you may have at the very start of your SGO assessment so that this decision can be made. If you do have a health condition, your assessing social worker will need to talk to you about this to understand how it impacts upon you on a daily basis and whether or not it may be difficult for you to care for a child as a Special Guardian because of this.

Employment History and work references:

You will be asked to provide the contact details for your current employer if you are working and any other referees for other places you may have worked before.

Your relationship:

- Your assessing social worker will want to talk to you about any adult relationships you may have had before. This will include speaking to you about any significant relationships (usually any relationship that has lasted over six months) you have had, and former spouses or where you have lived together as spouses, and especially any former partners where you have had children together.
- If a previous relationship has had some difficulties such as domestic violence or was an acrimonious split, you will be asked to provide the names of some people close to you who knew you at this time of your life.
- All of your birth children, if you are a parent, or stepchildren, whether they are still children and are now adults, will also need to meet with the assessing social worker. Your own children need to be able to meet with the assessing social worker to talk about why they think you could make a good Special Guardian and their experiences of being looked after by you.

Personal referees:

- You will be asked to provide the names of three members of your family or close friends (referees) who can provide support to you when you become a Special Guardian. This can be both practical and emotional support.
- Your referees need to be able to meet with your assessing social worker to talk about why they think you could make a good Special Guardian.

Local Authority checks:

Checks will be undertaken to see if you have been known to children's services before in respect of your own children or children known to you. These will be for both:

- The place where you live currently.
- Previous places you have lived.

Education:

Your assessing social worker will want to talk to you about:

- Your own experiences of education.

- The experiences of education for your own children if you are a parent.
- How you feel that you can support the education of the child you are asking to look after.

Finances:

Your assessing social worker will want to talk to you about:

- The money that you have coming in and the money going out. You will need to share the details of any bills, financial commitments or debts that you have. This is to make sure that by asking to be granted a SGO, you are not going to be at risk of not being able to pay your priority bills or financial commitments as well as having enough money to provide for the child.
- If you are working, the assessing social worker will talk to you about how you are going to continue to work and care for the child.
- You will be paid a SGO allowance for caring for the child as a Special Guardian and you are also able to claim any child specific benefits such as child benefit or additional elements of Universal Credit for the child. The SGO allowance is 'means tested' against how much money you already have coming in and going out so will not be the same for all Special Guardians.

Health and Safety:

Your home will be inspected to make sure that it is a safe place for a child to live.

Family Time:

This is sometimes called 'contact' and is where children spend time with their birth parents and other family members who may be important to them. Your assessing social worker will want to talk to you about:

- If you are happy to supervise family time for children with their birth parents?
- How you are able to manage any difficult situations that may arise?
- How will you support the child to engage in family time?

SGO Support plan:

The law requires that a Support Plan must be prepared if the local authority (Lambeth Council) is going to provide Special Guardianship support services to a person who is asking to have the SGO granted to them. In order to do this, your assessing social worker will talk to you about all of the support you think you will need to look after a child. This will include ongoing access to specialist financial and practical support, both now and in the future as the child grows older and their needs and the type of support they may need could change. The court have to agree the Support Plan before the SGO can be granted.

Other important things to know as a Special Guardian:

A special guardianship order (SGO) is a private law order made by the family court. The person or people named on the SGO will become the child's Special Guardian. As a Special Guardian,

you have parental responsibility for the child until they are 18 years old. The child will live with you permanently and will no longer be 'looked after' by the Local Authority (Lambeth Council).

As a Special Guardian, you will make all day to day decisions about the child, for example, where the child will go to school and any medical treatment that they may need. You do not have to discuss these decisions with the birth parents.

You will need to get the consent of everyone who has parental responsibility (usually the child's birth parents) for the child before you make some important decisions, for example:

- changing the child's surname
- putting the child up for adoption
- taking the child abroad for more than three months
- the child having surgery for reasons other than improving health, such as circumcision, sterilisation or cosmetic surgery

There are two routes to becoming a Special Guardian: private law and public law:

Private law is an arrangement between individuals, such as family members.

Public law is when children's services apply to the court for an order to safeguard the welfare of a child in care.

Before you apply for a SGO, it is important that you get legal advice:

- If you are applying for a SGO through Public law, Lambeth Council will fund some legal advice for you to help you to think about whether you want to apply for a SGO and to make sure that you understand the extent of this responsibility.
- If you are applying for a SGO through Private Law and are on a low income or receive government benefits, you may be able to apply to the family court to get help with paying court fees.

The Post Order support team:

Within Lambeth Council, there is a specialist team that looks after all of the families who have been granted a SGO. The specialist type of support they offer includes:

- Lambeth duty social worker provides telephone support which is available during the normal working week.
- Dedicated telephone advice line that is offered 7 days a week. This is a service that Lambeth Council pay to have delivered on their behalf by a specialist organisation called PAC-UK.
- Counselling support via PAC-UK
- Social worker support with submitting an application to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) if specialist therapeutic services may be needed for a child or their Special Guardian.

- Social worker support with accessing the Virtual School and submitting an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) if this needs to be done.
- SGO Support groups, 'Chill & Chat', where you can meet up with other Lambeth Special Guardians and their children for peer support and to enjoy social activities.
- SGO newsletter to share regular updates and information for Lambeth Special Guardians.

Resources:

Further information to support you to understand more about becoming a Special Guardian and the support available to you can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-special-guardian>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a8202c940f0b62305b92007/Special_guardianship_statutory_guidance.pdf

[https://compass.kinship.org.uk/advice-and-information/special-guardianship-orders/#:~:text=A%20special%20guardianship%20order%20\(SGO,will%20live%20with%20you%20permanently.](https://compass.kinship.org.uk/advice-and-information/special-guardianship-orders/#:~:text=A%20special%20guardianship%20order%20(SGO,will%20live%20with%20you%20permanently.)

<https://frg.org.uk/get-help-and-advice/who/kinship-carers/is-legal-aid-available-to-apply-for-a-child-arrangements-order-or-a-special-guardianship-order-what-is-involved-in-applying-for-one-of-these-orders/>

<https://www.pac-uk.org/>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/adoption-support-fund-asf>

<https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/lambeths-send-local-offer/im-parent-or-carer/education-health-care-ehc-plans>