Support for special guardians

A guide on what help there is for you…

What are the benefits of a special guardianship order for foster carers and for looked after children?

A special guardianship order transfer’s parental responsibility to the special guardians meaning that children do not remain looked after by the care system.

For children this means that they can remain within their families and networks. Recognising the importance of continuity of relationships children can also remain in contact with their birth families. Children consistently say they do not want to stand out as being different, as a child in care. A special guardianship order allows children to live a more normal life without LAC reviews, and without additional health and education reviews.

For Special Guardians it allows families to get on with life without having to consult with the local authority over every decision. This also means there are no longer things like social worker/fostering social worker visits including unannounced visits, and looked after child reviews. No more medical checks and annual approval reviews. No need for record keeping and report writing, assessments, compulsory training and supervised contact.

What support is available for special guardians?

We provide a number of specific support services focused on your needs at different stages until your child is 18 years old. We tailor our service to the specific needs of each family.

* Parenting advice for special guardians
* Advice on issues about special guardianship
* Access to a support group specifically for special guardians and their families
* Consultation and mediation with other agencies, for example schools and health professionals
* Signposting to services for children
* Assessment of need for therapeutic support via the Adoption Support Fund for children who were previously looked after. http://www.adoptionsupportfund.co.uk/FAQs
* A wide range of services supporting contact arrangements
* Financial support to help with the extra costs of parenting your child bearing in mind their specific needs and your financial resources. This also includes advice and signposting to help families’ access direct payments for children with disabilities where eligible.
* A clear finance policy
* Access to training
* Financial support towards legal advice expenses – up to 2 hours paid at the Legal Help rate. Foster carers have access to free legal advice via their Fostering Network membership.
* Financial Means Test assessment available at least annually or more frequently if your circumstances change as requested.
* Support is also available for 16-21 year old young people who were looked after immediately before the Special Guardianship Order was made. Such as advice and assistance, financial assistance, and where a young person is in higher education or training assistance in securing vacation accommodation.

How can I access this support?

We will talk to you about what services would be best to support you. The support we offer is built around the needs of each family. You are entitled to support if you are a child under a special guardianship order or you are the special guardian. If you are the birth parent of a child under a special guardianship order you may also be able to access support.

Support is available if:-

a) Your child lives in Herefordshire and was previously a looked after child in Herefordshire.

b) The guardianship order was made over 3 years ago in another local authority but now your child lives in Herefordshire.

c) Your child does not live in Herefordshire but was a looked after child in Herefordshire and the guardianship order was made less than three years ago.

d) Your child lives in Herefordshire but has never been a child looked after in Herefordshire.

 What happens next?

 Together we will agree one of the following options:

* Advice and information may be all that you need at this stage
* We may agree that the services you need would be best provided by an alternative agency or department and we will support you in accessing these
* If necessary we will arrange for an appointment at your convenience so that we can do an assessment of your support needs. If we agree that an assessment would be helpful once we’ve completed the assessment we will share it with you and agree a plan of action.

What if I want to complain about something?

We welcome any comments you have on our service and if you are unhappy - we will try to put things right. If you feel you want to raise a complaint you can do so by contacting accesstoinformation@herefordshire.gov.uk or writing to

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| Information Access Team, Plough Lane, PO Box 4, Hereford HR4 0XH  |