**SECTION ONE**

**Audit and Good Practice Tool and Checklist (based on the Ombudsman’s report ‘Firm foundations: complaints about council support and advice for special guardians)**

The aim of this checklist and audit tool is to provide local authorities with a benchmarking framework to check the quality and coverage of their SGO policy and practice framework.

**Special Guardianship Order Policy:**

Does the local authority have an easy to read SGO policy (and leaflet) that provides information about the following?

1. The positive advantages of an SGO (positive permanence option) and issues to consider when contemplating an SGO;
2. Provides a timeline and critical decision timetable for prospective SG’s;
3. The provision of legal advice about becoming an SG;
4. Explains the assessment process;
5. The financial allowances available (a] for special guardians b] (who were previously foster carers));
6. One-off financial support that may be available for a) SG’s, b) child/young person
7. The a) means testing process, b) the means testing review and changes of circumstance timeline and process;
8. Practical support available for a) SG’s, b) child/young person;
9. The purpose of the SGO Support Plan;
10. The framework for reviewing the SGO Support Plan.

**Auditing the SGO Support Plan (see section two checklist):**

Does the SGO Support Plan reference the initial SG assessment?

Is there evidence of legal advice being offered/provided/funded for the SG and whether the offer has been taken up?

Cost of legal support?

The SGO Support Plan provides core and basic information about the SG Carers and the child/young person?

* Carers contact details and family make up,
* Child/young person’s D.o.B. NHS number, health information, family background, important family and other important people’s contact details etc,

Is there evidence of background information provided to the SG at the point of initial contact/enquiry?

Leaflet provided to prospective SG’s about becoming an SG?

A flowchart provided about the process of becoming an SG, which includes key decisions, milestones and timescales?

Is there evidence of information provided about the positive opportunities that an SGO can provide for the child/young person and the prospective SG?

Is there evidence of information being provided about the changes created when a foster carer becomes an SG and the potential implications?

Is there evidence that the financial support available to the SG was explained?

* Allowances;
* Means testing;
* One off payments;
* Payments to the child/young person for support/activities/assessed needs.

Is there evidence that information was provided as to what would trigger a review of financial support and about the means testing process?

Is there evidence that a blank copy of the SGO Support Plan template and Guidance was provided to the SG and information was provided about what circumstances would trigger a review of the Support Plan and about the review process?

Is the Support Plan dated and signed and authorised:

* Social worker/local authority representative;
* Special Guardian;
* Child/young person;
* Advocate/other – please specify.

Does the Support Plan contain a review date and/or explain the process whereby the SG can request a review and/or what circumstances would trigger a review?

Does the Support Plan explain the support to be provided and an anticipated end date for each element of support and/or a review date?

Does the Support Plan explain the roles and responsibilities and expectations of the SG and the LA?

Does the Support Plan explain the different types of support to be provided, practical and financial, support? (Allowances, one of payments, respite, holidays, leisure cards, enhanced access to services, other [explain])?

Is there an explanation of who in the local authority authorises the plan, or if the plan is approved by a panel?

Does the SG have a carer file, is recording up to date?

Does the child/young person have a case file, is recording up to date?

For older children/young people – is there evidence that ‘capacity’ has been considered and that they understand what an SGO is?

Does the Support Plan set out the information about the transfer of the:

* Junior ISA/Child Trust Fund;
* A Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority application/award, if one has been made;
* Any savings accrued by the foster carer /local authority;
* Any identity or important documents.

Does the Support Plan explain how the SG can contact the local authority if they wish to request a review of the Support Plan if required and/or their, or the child/young person’s circumstances change?

Is there evidence that the initial draft of the Support Plan was sent to the SG for comment or changes and for approval?

Is there evidence that the means testing model was explained to the SG, what income is taken into account and how any changes of circumstances may lead to a review of the means tested allowances, and how long allowances are provided?

Is the local authority SGO policy dated and does it contain a date when it will be reviewed?

Special Guardianship - Audit Tool/Checklist

John Short

2nd January 2020