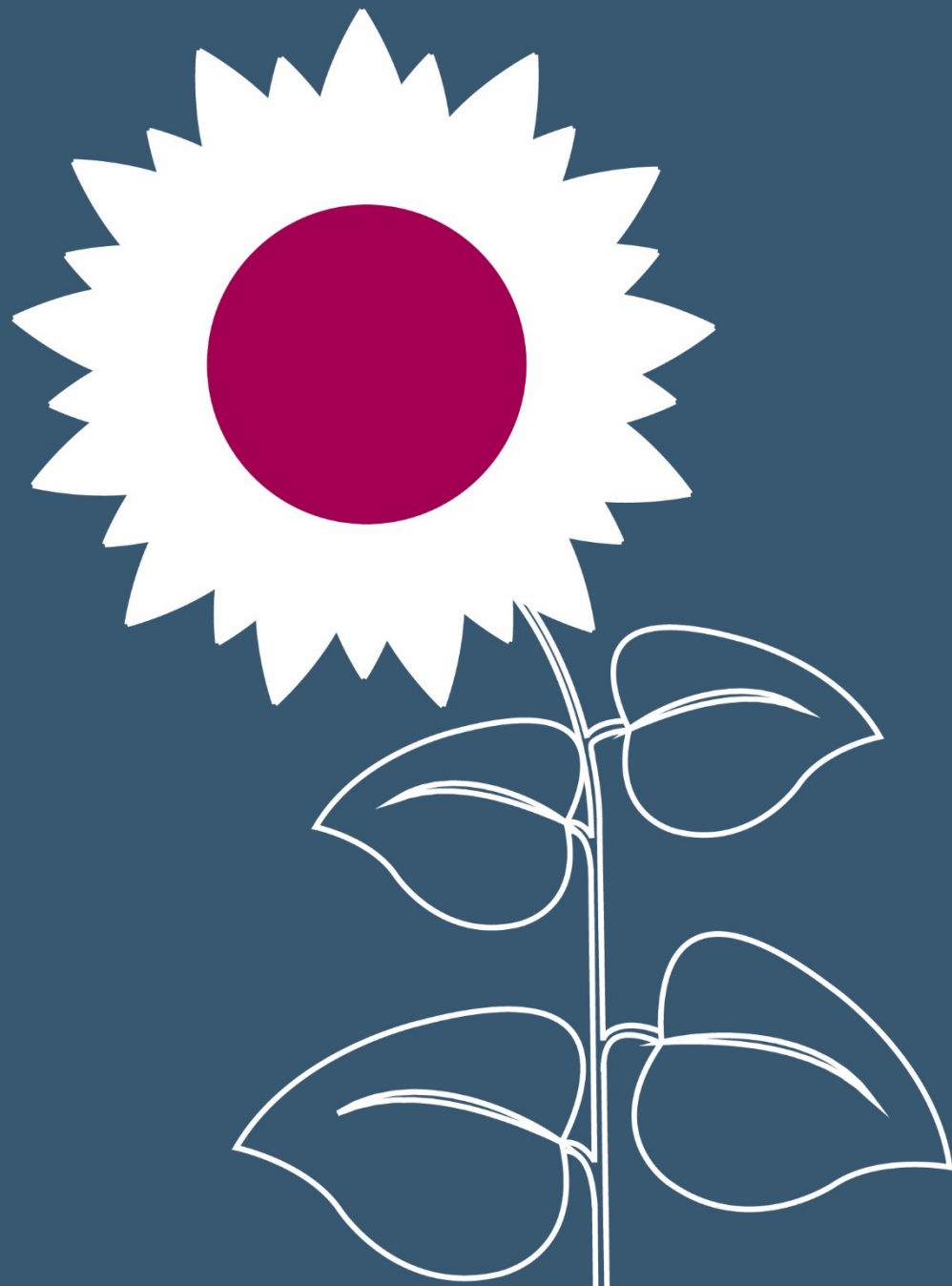




# Connected Carers Policy

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# Introduction

The Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Family and Friend Care published in 2011 makes it a requirement for each Local Authority with responsibility for children's services to publish a policy setting out its approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of children living with connected (family and friends) carers, when the children are in the care of the Local Authority.

Connected carers have said that they are often uncertain as to what help is available and how to access services. This policy will help connected carers to understand the type of arrangements they are undertaking, the duties and responsibilities involved in these care arrangements, the types of services available and where to go for further information.

Children may be brought up by members of their extended families, friends or other people who are connected with them for a variety of reasons and in a variety of different arrangements.

This policy sets out the local authority's approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of such children and covers the assessments which will be carried out to determine the services required and how such services will then be provided.

This policy will be regularly reviewed, and made freely and widely available.

## Background to the policy

Placements with connected carers come about because relatives or friends offer to care for the children in agreement with parents or arrangements are sometimes initiated by the Local Authority because of child protection or welfare concerns.

Consideration of children's welfare and best interests will always be at the centre of the work we do.

It is an underlying principle that children should be enabled to live within their families unless this is not consistent with their welfare. We will therefore work to maintain children within their own families or connected persons, and facilitate services to support any such arrangements, wherever this is consistent with the child's safety and well-being. This principle applies to all children in need, including those who are looked after by the local authority. Where a child cannot live within their immediate family and the local authority is considering the need to look after the child, we will make strenuous efforts to identify potential carers within the child's network of family or friends who are able and willing to care for the child.

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

We will provide support and training in ways that are appropriate and encouraging for connected carers.

# Who this policy applies to

This policy relates to all situations where a child/young person needs to live away from their family of origin and arrangements are being considered or have been made for them to be cared for by family and friends.

This policy is relevant to:

- Lead members for Children's Services in Stoke-on-Trent
- Directors of Children's Services
- Managers of services for children in need and children in care services
- Social workers and other social care staff working with children in need and children in care
- Social workers in the fostering service
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council's relevant partners
- Other providers of services to children in need and children in care including private and voluntary sector providers
- Connected carers
- Children/young people living with connected carers and their parents.

The policy explains how Stoke-on-Trent City Council Children and Family Services, Children's Social Care and its partner agencies exercise their duties and responsibilities to children and young people living in these types of arrangements.

The policy is issued in accordance with the Statutory Guidance for Family and Friends, Department of Education 2011, and also has regard to the statutory framework including:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2011
- Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations on Private Fostering, DfE 2005
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011
- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011
- Special Guardianship Guidance DfE 2005
- Equality Act 2010
- Special Guardianship (Amendment) Regulations 2016

Due regard has been given to any relevant case law at the time of writing.

For the purposes of this policy the definition of a connected carer is:

*'A relative, friend or other person with a prior connection with somebody else's child who is caring for that child full time. An individual who is a 'connected person' to a child who is, either in care or on the edge of entering care, may also be a family and friend carer.'*

## **What is connected care?**

A connected carer refers to a relative, friend or other person known to the child or young person who is caring for that child full time.

Children and young people are described as living with connected carers when they are:

- in a formal arrangement with a close relative, defined as grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings and step parents
- in a formal arrangement with other family members or friends

There are a number of reasons why children and young people may be in connected care arrangements. Some examples include children and young people who have been assessed as being unable to live with parents to safeguard their welfare.

Connected care encompasses a range of private and public arrangements provided by relatives or friends on a temporary or permanent basis, dependent on the child's circumstances. Private arrangements can be made informally by parents for the care of their children with their family and friends, or more formally via the use of private law proceedings. (please refer to Private Fostering Policy).

In the case of a looked after child the local authority may have placed the child with connected carers who are approved as foster carers for that child. Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 allows a child to be placed with a connected person for up to 16 (sixteen) weeks or while the carer is being assessed as an approved foster carer. The regulations also provide the opportunity for that temporary approval to be extended for a further 8 weeks (24 in total) if the full fostering assessment has not been completed by the 16 week period.

# Aims and Objectives

The objectives of this policy are:

- To ensure that children who have to live apart from their family of origin have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond.
- To ensure that the needs of children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent who are unable to live with their parents are understood and strategies, policies, and services are developed with the needs of these children in mind.
- To increase the likelihood and success of family and friend placements when children and young people cannot live with their parents.

In order to achieve this we will:

- Promote permanence for children by seeking to enable those children who cannot live with their parents to remain with their extended family or friends, in conditions that provide for their emotional and physical needs and are legally appropriate.
- Work in collaboration with local partner agencies to promote and support the needs of children living with connected carers, whether or not they are a child in care.
- Consult with and listen to the views of children and young people, connected carers and parents as appropriate when reviewing policies. Consultation will include children and adults with disabilities, using appropriate communication methods.

## Public Arrangements for Children who are in the care of the local authority

Public arrangements are defined as the placement of a child with their family/relatives and friends where that child is in the care of the local authority. Children enter the care of the local authority when their birth parents or someone else who has parental responsibility are unable to provide on-going care in either a temporary or permanent capacity. Children can either be in care as a result of a voluntary agreement by their parents or as a result of a court order.

Our aim is to ensure that connected carers who are approved as foster carers receive the support they need to meet the needs of the specific children they are caring for.

# Our Approach

Where a child is a 'child in care' and where in their best interests it is the most appropriate placement, Stoke-on-Trent City Council will give preference to a member of the family, or friend (connected persons) as the placement of choice for the child.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council will therefore take a pro-active approach in identifying and considering a member of the family or friend (connected person), at each stage of the decision making process, during any legal proceedings or assessment, and as part of the Public Law Outline process in relation to the child in care.

Many children benefit from placements with family and friends. However not all relatives are able to safeguard and promote a child's welfare and their parenting capacity should be rigorously assessed before being put forward for approval as a local authority foster carer.

## The Legal Framework

To enable relatives, friends or other persons connected to the child to care for a child who is in care, they must be approved as foster carers under the 2011 Fostering Service Regulations or temporarily approved under Regulation 24/25 2010 Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations and then subsequently approved under the 2011 Fostering Service Regulations. The regulations cover temporary/emergency, short term, and long term approvals.

Accountability for the placement resides with Stoke-on-Trent City Council as the placing authority.

## Assessment and Approval

Whilst nobody has the right to be a foster carer, Standard 13 of the National minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 requires that people, who express an interest in becoming foster carers, are treated fairly, without prejudice and with respect.

The Standard also requires that prospective foster carers should be considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their developmental needs.

In all circumstances, where the proposed carer is the most appropriate placement and where it meets the child's needs as identified in the child's care plan, the carer will be assessed and approved as a foster carer before the child is placed.

# Emergency Assessment and Temporary Approval as a Foster Carer under Regulation 24

If the child has to be placed with a connected person in an emergency and it is not possible to carry out a full assessment, the carer can be temporarily approved for 16 weeks (or in exceptional specified circumstances 24 weeks) provided Stoke-on-Trent City Council has:

- ascertained key information about the proposed carers and members of their household which does not preclude the placement, before the placement or if not possible, immediately afterwards (Regulation 24(2) of the Care Planning, Placement and Care Review Regulations (2010)). This is called a suitability assessment.
- made arrangements, where required, to carry out a full fostering assessment under the Fostering /Service Regulations 2011 and taking into account the Fostering Service National Minimum standards 2011.

Children will only be placed in an emergency with a connected person where it is in the child's best interests and where the child has to enter care and be placed that day, or is already living with the connected person, and where there has been insufficient time to complete a full assessment under Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

The assessment for this temporary approval will be carried out by an assessing social worker from the Fostering Service. This temporary approval only lasts for up to 16 weeks and can only be provided if the connected carer is willing to progress with a full assessment.

Where the full assessment is not completed within 16 weeks (or in exceptional cases 24 weeks if an extension has been applied for) from the date of temporary approval, or the outcome of the assessment is negative, then the placement cannot continue under fostering regulations. If the placement is in the child's best interests but the applicants do not comply with fostering standards consideration would be given, as to whether the placement could continue under a different legal framework, such as a Child Arrangement or Special Guardianship Order. Such orders may have different financial implications.

If none of the above orders were suitable, and the connected carers fostering assessment is negative, the placement arrangement would become unregulated following the expiry of the temporary approval period, and therefore unlawful. The connected carers will be consulted as part of the process and unless in an emergency, would, where possible, be given the opportunity of seeking their own legal advice prior to the child being removed from their care.



# Planned Assessment as a Foster Carer under Fostering Service Regulations

Where possible, placements should be planned to enable a thorough and full assessment of the proposed carer under Fostering Service Regulations.

In Stoke-on-Trent, the assessing social worker from the Fostering Service, in partnership with the child's social worker, will undertake a full fostering assessment. The purpose of this fuller assessment is to ensure that, with reference to the child's care plan and permanence plan, the proposed carer has the capacity to meet the specific child's needs in a safe and responsible way for the duration of the proposed placement whether this is short or long term. As part of this assessment, the proposed carer must undergo and satisfy certain specified statutory checks and references before approval can be recommended.

The competency-based assessment allows the assessor to focus on the specific needs of the child or children concerned whilst assessing the carer's skills and qualities against the required standards (National Minimum Fostering Standards, standard 30, 2011). The assessment will balance the experiences and strengths of the carer against any aspects which might make them less suitable. The needs of the child will be kept central as the process of the assessment will also be to match the child to the carer.

On completion of the full assessment the carer will be considered for approval by Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Fostering Panel in relation to the specific child or children they are connected to. The panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker.

Carers have recourse to seek review of the initial decision either directly to the Agency Decision Maker or to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism within 28 days.

Carers may wish to consider funding their own legal advice should they wish to challenge the decisions made.

## Supporting Family Time

It is usual that most children in care living with members of their extended family or friends will be in contact with one or both of their parents and with other relatives. Such family time is generally a positive experience in that it helps the child to maintain a sense of identity and belonging.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council has a responsibility to promote family time for children in care with their parents, relatives or anyone connected to the child unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with their welfare. An application would need to be made to the court in the event that the local authority refuses contact between a child and parent for a period of more than 7 days.

Family time will be carefully managed, monitored and supported for children in care who are placed with connected carers and any need for additional support identified at the child's review or during the foster carer's supervision sessions and Annual Foster Carer Review. In some circumstances it will be necessary for contact to be facilitated and supervised by the local authority. Those arrangements would be considered at regular reviews and care planning meetings for the child.

## On-going Support

Throughout the assessment process, connected carers with children in placement will be supported by a supervising social worker as well as their assessing social worker, and the child will be supported by the child's social worker.

The need for any on-going support or support services, especially in relation to managing family time for children will also be identified in the assessment and addressed in the foster carers' subsequent supervisions sessions and annual reviews chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer.

The child's social worker is responsible for the child's care plan and the allocated supervising social worker is responsible for supervising the carer. It is the responsibility of all professionals involved for ensuring that the carer exercises delegated authority within the overall framework of the care plan and the placement plan and that the carer demonstrates that they are meeting the child's needs as set out in the plans.

## Training and Development of Connected Carers

All connected carers are entitled to the same level of training and support as unrelated foster carers including the payment of relevant fostering allowances.

As outlined above, all connected foster carers will be supported by a supervising social worker who will be responsible for the foster carer's support, supervision, training and development.

All carers are issued with a Foster Care Agreement which they are expected to sign and comply with, following their approval. This agreement details the expectation of the carer to meet Fostering Service Regulations and Fostering National Minimum Standards. It also sets out the level and type of support they can expect from Stoke-on-Trent City Council Fostering Services.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council will ensure that connected carers have access to Skills to Care pre-approval training, relevant post approval training, together with support in order to achieve the Training, Support and Development standards within 18 months of approval.

# Financial Support

Connected carers are considered to be foster carers for the local authority and as such will receive a fostering allowance for each child placed in their care. The allowance is the same for all foster carers whether they be connected or general carers. Additionally, in line with our recruited foster carers, all connected carers will receive birthday, holiday and festival allowances for the child. Initial clothing allowance and provision of essential equipment will be available at the discretion of the Strategic Manager of the Fostering Service.

# Permanence

At any stage of the assessment process, where it is considered in the child's best interests and will promote their welfare and secure permanency, consideration will be given to supporting the carers to apply for an appropriate legal order giving them parental responsibility through a Child Arrangement order, or Special Guardianship order. The child's care plan will be reviewed through the care planning process to ensure that the child does not remain in care for longer than is needed.

If the child is not to return home, Stoke-on-Trent City Council will consider whether the child's needs can best be met by permanent placement with the connected person as a special guardian, or as a long-term foster carer.

# Legal Fees

Stoke-on-Trent City Council will consider the payment towards legal advice for carers to apply for a Special Guardianship order where it supports the application and where not doing so would lead to the children remaining in the care of the local authority unnecessarily. In the event that family members and the local authority are in agreement to the placement under such an order consideration will also be given as to whether the social worker supporting the family with applying for an order will suffice.

# Accommodation

It is important that all homes comfortably accommodate all who live there and are expected to be warm, adequately furnished, decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The home and immediate environment must be free of avoidable hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm and contain safety barriers and equipment appropriate to the child's age, development and level of ability.

The initial suitability assessment and the full fostering assessment must clearly state the appropriate sleeping arrangements for each child. Each child must have their own bed/cot and accommodation arrangements must reflect the child's assessed need for privacy and space or for any specific need resulting from a disability.

It is acknowledged by the local authority that connected carers may need support with accommodation as their home may not be of sufficient capacity to suddenly take on the care of a child or a sibling group. Stoke-on-Trent City Council will work in partnership with the housing authority to ensure that connected carers who are being assessed for approval are not rejected solely on the grounds of inadequate housing. When connected carers own their own home, requests for support with accommodation will be dealt with on a case by case basis and any requests for financial support will be made at Stoke on Trent's Permanency Panel.

Any agreements to provide financial support with accommodation must be provided in writing.

Connected carers living in social housing will be given appropriate priority to move to suitable accommodation if this will prevent the need for a child to be moved to an unrelated foster carer.

## **Education and Health**

Connected carers may take on a caring role in an emergency or at a stage in their lives when they are not aware of local support services for children and families. They will be given information to assist them in their caring role and about what resources are available in their local area such as early years provision, colleges, health services, leisure and youth services. They will also be advised of specialist services for children with special educational or mental health needs such as CAMHS.

## **Complaints by Connected Carers**

All foster carers for children in care are encouraged to discuss any complaint or dissatisfaction about the service with their supervising social worker so that the complaint can be resolved informally. However, if the matter cannot be resolved in this way the formal complaints procedure can be used.

# Appendix 1: Caring for someone else's child options

(Source: Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011)

	Private Fostering	Family care (informal)	Connected Carers	Unrelated foster care	Child Arrangement Order	Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	Adoption
<b>Route into the caring arrangement</b>	<p>This is a private arrangement whereby the child is being cared for for 28 days or more (or the intention is that the arrangement will last for 28 days or more) by anyone who does not have parental responsibility, and who is not a close relative.</p> <p>Relative means grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (by full blood, half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or a step parent.</p> <p>The child is not a looked after child.</p>	<p>The relative has chosen to take care of the child but does not have parental responsibility, and the arrangement was not made by the local authority.</p> <p>The child is not a looked after child.</p> <p>Relative may perceive the parents to be unable to care for the child;</p> <p>or the parents may be dead or otherwise not available (e.g. in prison);</p> <p>or there may be an arrangement between relatives due to difficult family circumstances.</p>	<p>The child has been placed with the relative or friend by the local authority, because the person who had been caring for the child was deemed not to be providing suitable care.</p> <p>The child is a looked after child and so the local authority must approve the relative or friend as a local authority foster carer.</p> <p>The child may be accommodated voluntarily with the agreement of the parents or may be subject to a care order.</p>	<p>The child is a looked after child being accommodated by the local authority under section 20 Children Act 1989 or because the child is subject to a care order; but has been placed with a foster carer by the local authority.</p> <p>(Alternatively, the local authority may choose to place a child into residential care where this is considered to best meet the child's needs.</p>	<p>The child may be at risk of becoming 'looked after' and a friend or relative applies for an order, or</p> <p>The child may have been 'looked after' and their foster carer or other relative/friend applies for an order.</p> <p>In either circumstance, application can be made without the support of the parents or the local authority. Relatives may apply for an order after the child has lived with them for one year.</p> <p>Or, there can be benign reasons e.g. after parents' death and in line with a prior agreement between the birth parents and the carer.</p>	<p>Looked after children: the LA may decide that the child should be placed for adoption. They can only do so with the consent of the birth parent or under a placement order made by a court.</p> <p>An approved foster carer can apply for an adoption order after a year of caring for the child.</p> <p>Other approved carers could apply for an adoption order if the child has lived with them for a period of three years.</p>	

<b>Parental responsibility</b>	Remains with birth parents.	Remains with birth parents but the person who carers for the child may do what is reasonable to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.	Remains with birth parents if child accommodated under section 20 CA, or if the child is subject to a care order or emergency protection order the local authority will have parental responsibility and determines the extent to which it may be exercised by others.	Shared by parents and holder of residence order.	PR shared with parents and anyone else with parental responsibility for the child. The special guardian may exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others with PR, Apart from another special guardian.	Transfers to adopters and relationship with birth parents is severed.
<b>Approval basis</b>	The arrangement is assessed by LA, but the carer is not 'approved' as a local authority foster carer is. The arrangement may be prohibited if assessed by the local authority as unsuitable.	None	Approved as local authority foster carers in accordance with Fostering Service Regulations. (If child is looked after, carers <b>must</b> be approved as foster carers even if close relative.)	Appointed by court following application.	Appointed by court following application from the applicant. LA must investigate the matter and prepare a report for the court dealing with the suitability of the applicant to be a special guardian.	Adoption agency assesses and approves prospective adopters, court makes order regarding specific child. If the child is not looked after then notice of intention to adopt must be given to the LA who then carry out an assessment / report for the court.
<b>Duration</b>	Subject to discretion of person with PR and readiness of private foster carer.	Subject to discretion of person with PR.	So long as placement remains in line with child's care plan, as determined by LA.	Age 18.	Age 18 unless varied or discharged by the court before the child reaches 18 years.	Permanent lifelong relationship.
<b>Placement Supervision</b>	It is not a placement, but there are statutory visits to child by social worker (minimum 6 weekly in first year, then 12 weekly).	None	Statutory: visits to child by social worker and supervision of foster carers by supervising social worker.		None	When child is placed for adoption by the LA, the placement is supervised and there are statutory reviews. Once the adoption order is made, none.

<b>Review of placement</b>	It is not a placement, but the LA may do formal reviews in addition to on-going assessments during visits.	None	Statutory reviews of child's care plan (minimum 6 monthly) and annual reviews of local authority foster carers' approval.	None	None	See above
<b>Support services</b>	Provision of advice and support as determined necessary by the LA, which may assess the child as a child in need, with a child in need plan, and provide services/ support for child/ family under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.	No entitlement but the LA may assess the child as a child in need, with a child in need plan, and provide services/ support for child/ family under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.	<p>Support to meet child's needs including health plan and personal education plan.</p> <p>Training and practical support to foster carers in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations, NMS and CWDV standards.</p> <p>Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services.</p>	<p>No entitlement.</p> <p>(But LA has discretion to provide services/ support for child/ family under section 17 of the CA)</p>	<p>If child was looked after prior to making the SGO, LA must assess for need for special guardianship support services. LA has discretion whether to provide support.</p> <p>Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services if was a looked after child prior to making of the SGO.</p>	Entitlement to assessment for adoption support services, which may be provided at discretion of LA in accordance with Regulations and NMS.

<b>Financial Support Entitlement</b>	<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p> <p>Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR.</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p> <p>Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR.</p> <p>Guardians Allowance payable if both parents have died, or the only surviving parent cannot be found or serving 2 years or more prison sentence.</p>	<p>Child benefit and child tax credit not payable.</p> <p>Weekly allowance to meet the costs of caring for the child. This should meet at least the national minimum rate set by DfE.</p> <p>The Manchester City Council judgment ruled that allowances must be the same for all foster carers, whether or not family and friends.</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p> <p>Entitlement to assessment for financial support (part of adoption support) if child looked after prior to order.</p>
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<b>Financial support discretionary</b>	LA has discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section 17 Children Act.	LA has discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section 17 Children Act.	<p>Some fostering providers pay their foster carers a fee to recognise carers' skill, experience and commitment.</p> <p>The Manchester City Council judgment (which requires allowances to be paid on the same basis regardless of the relationship of the carer to the child) did not consider fees. However, Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services requires that any policy in relation to the payment of fees must be applied to all foster carers who meet the criteria in the same way and must not discriminate on the grounds of a pre-existing relationship with the child.</p>	LA has discretion to pay residence order allowance - usually if child was previously fostered by the carers, or exceptionally if making residence order prevents child becoming looked after. Any allowance reviewed annually.	<p>Entitled to an assessment for financial support under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 if child looked after prior to order and meets the criteria in the regulations.</p> <p>Subject to assessment as above and for former foster carers can include an element of remuneration.</p> <p>Regular or one-off payments.</p> <p>Any allowances reviewed annually.</p>	Subject to assessment, one off payments or regular adoption allowance may be paid.
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