**Devon County Council**

**Special Guardianship Support for Former Foster Carers**

As a local authority, and as corporate parents, we have a moral and legal duty to always act in the best interests of the children and young people in our care and promote their long-term life chances in all that we do.

For some children who have previously had a permanence plan to remain as a child in care, and with the agreement and commitment of their foster carer(s), a special guardianship order (SGO) is the legal arrangement which will best provide them with long-term security, stability and support. Where this is the case, as a local authority, we will support foster carers and the child to make sure the new arrangement is suitable, viable and sustainable for all parties.

**Financial support**

For two years following the granting of an special guardianship order, the (now former) foster carer(s) will receive a continuation of their fostering allowance at the same rate. Following this two-year transition period, they will receive the basic fostering allowance until the child’s 18th birthday provided the child continues to reside with them, enhanced rate if this was being received previously as well as birthday / Christmas allowances.

On top of this, financial support may also be payable where the child has additional health or care needs which incur a direct additional cost to the child’s special guardian(s). More detail can be found in Devon’s [Special Guardianship Policy](https://devoncc.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/s/APlaceCalledHome2/ETKgbRI6-IpDmEQhP0egmI4BenHeDF_QoPeTn5i_i9hxRA?e=TympAR).

When the young person turns 18, they may be eligible, as a [qualifying care leaver](https://www.standupspeakup.org.uk/info-for-care-leavers/localoffer/who-is-a-care-leaver/), to access practical and financial support, including grants and bursaries, to help them with the transition to adulthood and independence. More information can be found in the Care Leavers Local Offer on the [SUSU website](https://www.standupspeakup.org.uk/info-for-care-leavers/localoffer/). Alternatively, contact the Permanence and Transition Team at 01392 383000.

**Additional guidance and support**

Special guardians also have access to advice, guidance and support from our in-house Special Guardianship team. Before any special guardian order is granted by the court, alongside financial assistance, a support package must be agreed.

This may include supporting family time arrangements with birth families, professional advice and support, access to support groups, therapy services via the Adoption Support Fund, and dedicated training to help meet the child’s individual needs. More information about special guardianship support can be found on [our website](https://www.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/adoption-and-fostering/special-guardianship/#:~:text=A%20special%20guardianship%20order%20gives,without%20having%20to%20consult%20them.).

We know that the initial transition to the new arrangements can often be the most challenging time for the child and their special guardian(s). As a result, each child will have a bespoke transition plan which will set out how we will support them to move out of our care.

Each plan will consider whether any ongoing additional support is required, whether that is as a Child in Need or through Early Help services. Where there are any challenges relating to family time arrangements or safeguarding, which pose a barrier to the special guardianship order, consideration of support required may be incorporated into the transition plan. Special guardian(s) will continue to receive Supervising Social Worker support during a 3-month transition phase after which time they will receive support from the Special Guardianship support team as outlined above.

**Later life letters**

Given the additional permanence of special guardianship arrangements and the complexities of the care system, it can be especially important to support children, who are moving out of care and into special guardianship, to understand their life-story. That is why we commit to sending Later Life Letters to each child in this situation.

Later Life Letters are personally written to the child by their social worker, and they describe information about the child’s life, why they can’t live with their birth parents and what the new arrangements will mean for them. The timing of when the child can see the letter is up to their special guardian(s), usually depending on age and circumstance. But we would expect children to receive letters before they enter their formative older teenage years.