

Swindon SGO Model

March 2024

Swindon Borough Council manage their SGO Support Service in house with a team made up of 1 Assistant Team Manager, 2 Experienced Social Workers, business and financial support and linked support from social care workers within the fostering service.

The Swindon Special Guardian Support Team transfers from Adopt Thames Valley to become an 'in house' service from April 2024. We are committed to developing our model according to the needs of children and their Special Guardians.

Advice and signposting

The team will advise on issues about special guardianship and redirect people to legally trained professionals as appropriate. The team will also advise around benefits and ensure that Special Guardian's are receiving all of the benefits that they are entitled to. They also provide consultation and mediation with other agencies, for example schools and health professionals. Referrals can be made for Family Group Conference.

Therapeutic support

Family needs are identified by completing an assessment of therapeutic need (see below). If appropriate, the team in Swindon can provide a number of therapeutic informed interventions including life story work and therapeutic training. The majority of the therapeutic packages are provided by independent therapeutic providers commissioned by the team and funded by the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) where the criteria is met. The therapeutic interventions can include Theraplay, attachment work, non-violent resistance (NVR), and therapeutic parenting. (see also training)

Supporting review of family time arrangements

In addition to this, they also offer a wide range of services supporting children to have time with their wider family. Sometimes an assessment of family time needs has to be completed which will include direct work with the child as well as gathering the special guardians and the parents' view on contact. Referrals can also be made for a Family Group Conference to support key people in children's lives to come together to agree a plan of how to communicate and work together.

Support Groups

The team offer regular support groups for Special Guardians. We will consult with Special Guardians about how these are run, location and frequency. In the future we will explore a support group for children living with Special Guardians.

Training

The team will develop a training offer for Special Guardians which will be informed by assessments of need; this may include online training, PACE training, life-story work and commissioned training using ASGSF grants. Wherever possible (and appropriate) our training offer for foster carers will be extended to Special Guardians to include our online training offer/ virtual courses.

Assessment of need and support plan

Where appropriate, and an assessment of need has been completed, the Special Guardian support team social workers can co-work cases with social workers to offer additional support to the Special Guardians. The remit of their role is offering support to the Special Guardians emotionally, explaining the processes and doing some specific, time limited pieces of work i.e. therapeutic parenting. They will not take the role of lead professional in these circumstances. Direct work will usually be for no longer than 12 weeks and a plan with outcomes will be set out at the beginning of the support and reviewed before it closes, in some circumstances it will be appropriate to extend support beyond 12 weeks.

The Special Guardian Support Team will primarily support Special Guardians, although it will be important to meet with and understand children's needs to inform our support plan. Where it is identified that direct work with children is needed, other services will be referred to and applications for therapeutic support through the ASGSF and it will often be appropriate for the Special Guardian team to form part of an EH plan. The Special Guardian Support Team will not take the role of Lead Professional for EH plans for children due to the short term nature of their work.

Introductions to SGO service and newsletter

The Special Guardian Support Team will work closely with Social Workers and the Fostering Team and where appropriate, carry out joint visits to carers considering Special Guardianship to explain the support offer in Swindon and answer questions. A Swindon information booklet will be developed with information on the offer and a link to an updated SBC webpage.

When a Special Guardianship Order is granted, a worker from the Special Guardian Support Service will carry out a joint introductory visit or telephone call to the family to introduce the service and ensure that they are aware of how to access support if needed. All Special Guardian Support Plans will be shared with the service by the assessing social worker. A follow up call at 6 months will be made to see how things are, with the hope that the special guardians would call at any time if they need support.

All Special Guardians will be invited to join a newsletter mailing list to keep them informed of developments in the service and the offer.

Birth parent support

Support will also be available to birth parents via our advice and signposting services and mediation in relation to family time. Where birth parents are actively involved in their children's lives we will give appropriate consideration to their level of involvement in the assessment.

Central list

The Special Guardianship Support Team will ensure that a central list of all Special Guardian arrangements is kept updated, including contact details for families. This will include notifications of children living with special guardians through orders made as a result of proceedings by other Local Authorities.

Payments to Special Guardians

Payments to Special Guardians are made according to our policy and are subject to annual means test. The team will work closely with the financial assessment team to ensure these reviews take place and that any changes in circumstances are closely communicated.