

ADOPTION AND SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP LEADERSHIP BOARD

- **KEY ELEMENTS OF A SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT SERVICE**
 - A survey of some exemplar special guardian support services in England
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(Brief summary document)

Note – This is a summary of longer document and is intended to be read by strategic managers. The longer document contains more detailed examples of exemplar practice, references to research and more detailed feedback from carers. It also has an appendix with a range of resources which have been made available by contributors. It is designed to be used by those with responsibility for service development.

Introduction:

Supporting formerly looked after children in Special Guardianship Order (SGO) placements is a growing aspect of the work of local authorities. There is increasing evidence of the unmet need of these children and their families, just as there was for adopted children over the last decade. This has been compounded by the use of the order in ways which were not foreseen when the order was implemented (Wade et al 2014).

Although children with an SGO have received much less attention, their situation and needs are often more complex and challenging than those of adoptive families, whilst SGO and kinship carers are almost always less prepared and often more poorly resourced for their responsibilities. The challenge to develop appropriate support services is therefore just as, if not more, challenging.

Aim of the project

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB) has commissioned this work as part of their 'Modernising Permanence Programme' with the aim of supporting the development of responsive and effective support services for children leaving care under an SGO. This 'blueprint' for Special Guardian (SG) Support Services is effectively a generalised service specification based on a review of some 'exempla' services¹ currently available in England, together with the expressed needs and lived experience of SG families themselves.

The scope of this project is confined to those children who leave care under an SGO in line with the ASGLB's responsibilities. However, it is also informed by good practice that has a more generic reach and should inform wider developments in kinship care more generally.

Grateful thanks are extended to all those who have participated in this piece of work and have agreed to share their resources.

Contributions were received from the follow individuals and agencies:

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¹ The services profiled here are examples of good practice, there will be others that are added as our understanding of 'what works' develops.

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In order to check the relevance and accuracy of the document, three consultation sessions were held with Special Guardians and Project Workers from Grandparents Plus (several of whom are SGs themselves). The purpose of these sessions was to consult with Special Guardians on the content of the tool, identify any gaps or weaknesses and identify any best practice which could be included

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KEY ELEMENTS OF A SPECIAL GUARDIAN SUPPORT SERVICE

SUMMARY AND AUDIT TOOL

The following is a summary of the key elements of an exemplar special guardianship support service together with a tool which can be used to audit these components and develop an action plan to improve services.

	Key Elements of a Blueprint for Special Guardianship Support Services	Not present	Partially Present	Matches Exempla services	Exceeds Exempla Services	NEXT STEP ACTIONS	ALLOCATED PRIORITY 1 – Low 4 - High
1.	An understanding of the need for services						
2.	A mechanism for governance, management and service planning						
3.	Information for, and communication with, carers						
4.	Engagement and consultation with Special Guardians						
5.	Communication with children & young people						
6.	Referral and assessment systems and processes						
7.	Preplacement support to Special Guardians and children						
8.	Support with contact arrangements and managing family relationships						
9.	Financial advice and Support						
10.	Preventive/Early Intervention support for families and children’s emotional and psychological well-being						
11.	Specialist support for families and children’s emotional and psychological well-being						
12.	Services to support the transition of young people to independence						
13.	Support to access services from other parts of the Local Authority						
14.	Support to accessing services from other agencies						
15.	Commissioning systems and processes						
16.	Workforce development						
17.	Monitoring and evaluation						
18.	Birth parent support						
19.	Budget and resources						
20.	A plan for the future development of services						

1.	An understanding of the need for services
	<p>Why is this needed? Understanding the number and nature of SGO placements, and the nature and level of their need, is fundamental to service development, resource planning and co-ordination.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements <i>Reg 4.10 Effective policies will be informed by up-to-date information. Local authorities and partner agencies will have access to certain relevant information, such as the number of family and friends foster carers, and of those to whom they are providing special guardianship or adoption support services. In monitoring implementation of the local family and friends care policy, the responsible manager may find it helpful to gather further specific data. (Department for Education 2011 p22)</i></p>
	<p>Exemplar services seek to collect the following data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No of SGOs/kinship carers - Number of assessments for SGOs - Number of withdrawals from the assessment process - Type of order/legal status – including if an SGO has been made with a Supervision Order - Number of previous foster carers - Relationship of SG to child - Age of child - SGO support requests - Number of SGs receiving financial support and total amount of financial support <p>Simple changes to existing processes can provide a large amount of valuable information, e.g. Including a kinship question on the Early Help Assessment Form to produce a summary breakdown of all kinship carers (including SGs) known to the LA.</p>
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward: A very simple question which could be asked as part of all referrals to children’s services departments is, “Has this child been previously looked after?”. This then sets the context for understanding current needs, circumstances and entitlement to services.</p>

2.	A mechanism for governance, management and service planning
	<p>Why is this needed? A clear governance and management structure for kinship and SG support services is needed in order to engage sections of the LA outside of children’s services, and other agencies, such as health, in strategic planning and coordination.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements</p>

	<p><i>Reg 4.11 The responsible manager must ensure that local authority staff understand the policy and that they operate within its framework so that it is applied in a consistent and fair manner across the authority; an alleged failure to do so has been a significant source of complaint from family and friends carers. He or she must ensure that local partners are aware of their responsibilities towards children living in family and friends care and are proactive in meeting those needs. (Department for Education 2011 p22)</i></p> <p><i>25. The local authority should take into account the similar services already being delivered in their area, such as adoption support services, and plan the provision of special guardianship support services accordingly. (Department for Education 2016)</i></p>
	<p>Exemplar services</p> <p>There were no examples of governance structures which included education and health providers or commissioners. There were two examples of services being incorporated into Regional Adoption Agencies, but this is not the case in the majority of areas. There were very few examples of a strategic and planned approach to supporting SGs, or of SGs and kinship carers being treated as of equal importance to foster carers and adopters. Examples are provided of services which are organized and aligned with other permanency services for better coordination and impact (Brighton and Hove, Leeds, ASPIRE ADOPTION)</p>
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward:</p> <p>Consultation with practitioners and voluntary sector representatives suggests that there is strong support for a dedicated support service to SGs and kinship carers within each LA. This is based on the clear differences in circumstances, legal status and needs between adopters, foster carers and kinship carers, and the specialist knowledge required to support these different groups. However, there are clearly functions such as the commissioning of specialist services (from the ASF), and back office functions around data, finance, carer assessment and approval, vetting etc. which could be joined up between these services areas.</p>

3.	<h3>Information for and communication with carers</h3>
	<p>Why is this needed?</p> <p>Understanding the role of the Special Guardian and the implications of becoming an SG is not straightforward. Easily available and clearly written information on the role would make this much easier. Information is needed on two levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrally available information (e.g. on websites) for SGs • Information at the point of enquiry which is more detailed and relevant to the specific circumstances of carers.
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements</p> <p>The Local Government Ombudsman has given very clear advice on this area.</p> <p><i>Give early, clear and unambiguous advice to people who are considering becoming special guardians. Consider how this can: explain what special guardianship is and what this means for parental responsibility, legal security and stability explain the council's role and that of the court</i></p>

	<p><i>set out who can apply to be a special guardian and what alternatives could be more suitable</i></p> <p><i>make the process of applying to be a special guardian clear, including the role of the council in writing a report to court</i></p> <p><i>explain the assessment process before becoming a special guardian</i></p> <p><i>explain that applicants may need to complete some training</i></p> <p><i>Be as clear as possible about the support that might be available and how the council will assess the applicant's support needs</i></p> <p><i>Be as unambiguous as possible about the fixed term duration of support and what it is likely to be used for.</i></p> <p>(LG&SCO 2018 p15)</p>
	<p>Exempla services offer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A dedicated website for SG carers which include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o A Family and Friends Policy o Advice and information about the support available o FAQs o Links to other sources of support and information such as Grandparents Plus and Family Right Group - Keep in touch with carers via newsletters, emails, WhatsApp groups, Facebook etc.
	<p>Carers' Perspective</p> <p>Every consultation with SGs and kinship carers highlights the lack of clear and accessible information about the role, responsibilities and support available. Some SGs, in reviewing a draft of this documented commented that many Social Workers who undertake SG assessments often lack information about support services and the role of SGs.</p>

4. Engagement and consultation with Special Guardians	
	<p>Why is this needed?</p> <p>Just as with adopters, Special Guardians themselves are best placed to evaluate service quality, gaps in provision and priorities for future development. Relationships between SGs and statutory services can be very strained; sensitive engagement can promote trust and partnership.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements</p> <p><i>24. Under section 14F of the Act, as amended, the local authority must make arrangements for the provision of special guardianship support services.Special guardianship support services are defined as.....</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>services to enable groups of children for whom a special guardianship order is in force or in respect of whom is being formally considered, special guardians and prospective special guardians, and parents of the child to discuss matters relating to special guardianship (regulation 3(1)(b)).</i> (Department for Education 2017 p11)
	<p>Research/SGO perspective</p>

	Grandparents Plus and the Family Rights Group have undertaken a number of consultation exercises with SGs and kinship carers. The Kinship Care Alliance brings together key stakeholders in this area and has produced a number of briefing documents and responses to government policy initiatives. The issues facing SGs and kinship carers should be well understood.
	<p>Exempla services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have engaged with a consultant or researchers to undertake a survey of SGs and to identify priorities for future development and service commissioning (NLAFC) - Establish a Voice & Influence Group including SG carers. (Leeds) - Commission Kinship Connected (Grandparents Plus) - a service which builds connections and trust with SGs who are reluctant to engage with statutory services. These can be used as a means of consultation. (Leeds, Bromley, NLAFC and others)
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward:</p> <p>Whilst SGs have limited time and resources due to the pressures they face, it is not clear that this is the biggest obstacle. There is a need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make use of occasions when carers do come together as an opportunity for engagement and consultation. - Work with voluntary sector providers who can act as brokers and advocates between SGs and services.

5.	Communication with Children & Young People
	<p>Why is this needed?</p> <p>To develop the most relevant and effective services it is crucial both to listen to the views of individual children and to gather information from those children and young people who have experience of special guardianship and kinship care.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements</p> <p>Schedule to the regulations</p> <p><i>103. In all cases it is important to accurately ascertain and report on the child's wishes and feelings.</i></p>
	<p>Exempla services</p> <p>Run a programme of support groups and activities for children of different ages. (Kirklees).</p> <p>Conduct overall satisfaction surveys of user groups (Kinship Carers Liverpool) and of specific activities (NLAFC, Aspire Adoption, Bromley).</p>
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward:</p> <p>There appears to have been very little consultation and engagement with children and young people subject to an SGO at LA or regional level and few clear links to policy or service development. This is accompanied by a lack of written information for children, or information available via other media (e.g. digitally).</p>

6.	Referral and assessment systems and processes
	<p>Why is this needed? Ideally, effective support services will flow from the initial SGO assessment and support plan. However, SGs often point out that their experience of the SGO assessment process actually serves to alienate them from services, rather than develop an ongoing relationship of mutual trust and respect (McGrath- in preparation; ASGLB 2018). Additionally, many carers will be approaching services for support after a gap in contact, or due to a change in circumstances. The ‘front door’ to a support service therefore needs to be easily identifiable, lead to a comprehensive assessment of needs, and provide access to a variety of services.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements - <i>Regulation 31. The local authority where the special guardian lives is responsible for undertaking an assessment of need and provision of any special guardianship support services in response to that assessment. The only exception to this is where a child was looked after before the special guardianship order was made. (Also see paragraphs 32,33 and 34)</i></p> <p><i>Make sure support plans:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>are shared, discussed and agreed with special guardians, and this is well documented</i> • <i>are written so that they are easy to evaluate and keep under review. It should be easy for the council and guardian to decide whether all the support has been provided</i> • <i>are regularly reviewed and kept up to date. Make sure plans continue to meet the child’s needs as they change</i> • <i>set out the approach to calculating special guardianship allowance. Explain this at the earliest stage as possible, making clear this will be reviewed and depend on evidence of continuing needs</i> • <i>keep the best interests of the child at the forefront of decision making.</i> <p>(LG&SCO 2018 p16)</p>
	<p>Exempla services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Produce high quality SGO Support Plans. Leeds has recently produced a comprehensive suite of documents for SG Support Plans together with templates and audit tools which can be used to assess the quality of the LAs policy and practice in this area. - Ask screening questions at the point of referral to identify previously Looked After children - Engage SGO support staff in the screening of all referrals involving SGO children. (Brighton and Hove) - Have specialist duty workers to receive referrals - Provide speedy access to drop-in sessions, training, support groups and social events. (Aspire Adoption) <p>It has been difficult to find services which publish their eligibility criteria for SG support services. There is a risk that SGs will not find their way quickly to the most appropriate support services. Many ‘front door’ duty services do not routinely ask if children have been previously looked after.</p>

	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward: SGs suggested some simple measures which they would find helpful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A newsletter with updates about the service and the staff - Facebook and social media groups to keep SGs up to date - Clear information on who to contact for support
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7.	Preplacement Support to Special Guardians and children
	<p>Why is this needed? Good quality preparation enables SGs to understand the role and responsibilities they are taking on and to become more prepared for the challenges and the support which is available.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements. <i>Regulation 19. The relevant local authority should make arrangements for children who meet these criteria to receive advice and assistance in the same way as for any other child who qualifies for advice and assistance under the Act, as amended. Regulation 22 provides that the relevant local authority is the one that last looked after the child.</i></p>
	<p>Exempla services provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive information about the role and support services, sometime in the form of a welcome booklet (NLAFC) - Family group Conferencing (Leeds CC) - Financial support for legal consultation - Preplacement to training to SGs (Enfield & Hertfordshire) - Signposting to advice lines and support services from Grandparents Plus and Family Rights Group - A dedicated website http://www.specialguardiansnorthlondon.co.uk/ - A rolling programme of parenting and other workshops (Brighton and Hove) <p>Grandparents Plus deliver Kinship Ready, a preparatory workshop series for special guardians, ideally before they are granted the order.</p>
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward: Family Group Conferencing is a potentially powerful approach which was one mentioned by one LA. SGs consult in the preparation of this document reported on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The value of Kinship Ready and other similar courses - The value of meeting with other SGs as part of their preparation - The difference between their role and that of foster carers, making joint training problematic (supported by the Nuffield review of international research (Nuffield 2019c))

8.	Support with contact arrangements and managing family relationships
	<p>Why is this needed? The fact that parental responsibility is shared between SGs and birth parents; that the court may agree to contact arrangements which are neither binding nor realistic, and that relationships between SGs and birth parents can be fraught, all contribute to this being one of the most difficult issues which SGs have to manage.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements <i>24. Under section 14F of the Act, as amended, the local authority must make arrangements for the provision of special guardianship support services. (including).....</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between the child and their parents or relatives or any other person with whom the child has a relationship that the local authority considers to be beneficial to the welfare of the child (regulation 3(1)(c))</i> (Department for Education 2016)
	<p>Exemplar services provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual training on managing contact for carers and social workers (NLAFC, Leeds, Brighton and Hove, PAC UK) - Written guidance for carers <p>Mediation where necessary (Brighton and Hove)</p>
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward: SGs consulted for this document suggested the following approaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Workers need to spend time with the Birth Parent and the SG after the Order to ensure there is clarity about what was agreed, how it is going to be implemented, how it might change in the future and how support can be accessed if necessary. - All parties need to understand that contact arrangements and the support plan will need to change over time. - SGs need help to understand how to manage changes in the future and particularly how to consider long term safeguarding concerns. - Sometimes ongoing external supervision of contact is required, especially if children are at risk.

9.	Financial advice and Support
	<p>Why is this needed? SGs often have a very short time to prepare for special guardianship and may have to leave or reduce employment and adjust to the additional cost of caring for children. They consistently identify financial issues as one of the greatest sources of strain on the placement.</p>

	<p>Government/Statutory requirements</p> <p><i>38. Regulation 6 sets out the circumstances in which financial support may be paid to a special guardian or prospective special guardian. (Department for Education 2017)</i></p> <p><i>Regular contact to review plans is crucial to making sure they reflect current needs. Where specific cost limits are used, councils must make sure they are realistic and based on the actual cost of delivering what a support plan requires. (LG&SCO p10)</i></p> <p><i>Councils should publish a clear, simple explanation for how they will calculate any allowance. This should set out what factors will be considered. This means potential guardians can be clear, up front, about what support they might have. (LG&SCO P14)</i></p>
	<p>Exemplar services provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An overview of the support available to carers and specific guidance about the financial support which is available (NLAFC) - A published protocol for Special Guardianship financial support (Hackney) <p>Leeds CC has produced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A template for the assessment of SGs (in development) - A West Yorkshire policy on Special Guardianship and support (in development) - A common approach to means testing for SGs (in development)
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward:</p> <p>The strongest message from the SGs consulted for this document was the need for easily accessible and transparent information on the financial support available and how it is calculated. Very few LA/RAA respondents were able to supply an easily accessible, clear description of the financial support available to SGs. SGs also requested that they be given clear information on how to challenge a decision to withdraw financial support or how to access the complaint process when a decision has been made to revoke an SG allowance and LAs communicate with each other and co-ordinate their actions when a child moves between authorities.</p>

10.	Preventive support for families and children’s emotional and psychological well-being.
	<p>Why is this needed?</p> <p>As with other permanence situations, SG families are likely to benefit greatly from easy access to low level support, particularly from peers, rather than requiring more intensive, less effective and more costly support at a later stage.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements</p> <p><i>24. Under section 14F of the Act, as amended, the local authority must make arrangements for the provision of special guardianship support services. Local authorities are required to make a range of support services available in their area to meet the needs of people affected by special guardianship. (Department for Education 2017)</i></p>
	Examples of approaches currently being taken

	<p>Exemplar services offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer to peer support groups and social activities - An allocated Social Worker, at least for a period post-order. - Review the SGO support plan before making a decision to withdraw support - Consultation sessions with a social worker when needed - A menu of support programmes to cover such issues as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Contact Intervention o Therapeutic Life Story Intervention – involving carers and direct work with the child o Life Story Intervention – coaching the carer to undertake Life Story work with the child o Relationship Based Play Intervention o Signpost and refer to other agencies
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11.	Specialist support for families and children’s emotional and psychological well-being
	<p>Why is this needed?</p> <p>Children and young people with an SGO have often experienced trauma and disruption similar to those who remain in care or those who leave care through adoption. They therefore need a similar range of therapeutic services.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements</p> <p><i>24. Under section 14F of the Act, as amended, the local authority must make arrangements for the provision of special guardianship support services. Local authorities are required to make a range of support services available in their area to meet the needs of people affected by special guardianship. Special guardianship support services are defined as.....</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>therapeutic services for the child (regulation 3(1)(d))</i> • <i>counselling, advice and information (section 14F(1)(a) of the Act)</i> <p>(Department for Education 2017)</p>
	<p>Exempla services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have good links and communication between SG workers, CAMHS, third sector therapeutic providers (Brighton and Hove, Bromley, Dudley, Kirklees) - Provide easy access to an assessment for support which could be funded from the ASF (Brighton and Hove) - Deliver in-house therapeutic parenting training for SGs and kinship carers (NLAFC) - Provide access to one-off ‘surgery’ consultations with social workers or psychologists (ASPIRE ADOPTION, Leeds)
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward:</p>

	<p>It is noteworthy that applications to the ASF on behalf of Special Guardians form only 8% of all applications. This may be due to a lack of appreciation of the needs of SGs, a lack of understanding about the ASF on the part of staff, and/or a lack of staff resources to complete assessments and make funding applications. It is also noteworthy that the involvement of the voluntary and private sector in supporting SGs is small (when say compared with adoption support). A strategic approach to commissioning services for SGs could substantially improve this situation (see section 15).</p> <p>SGs consulted as part of the development of this document identified the following barriers to gaining access to the Adoption Support Fund:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The legal status of some children (e.g. those on a Residence Order or those who have not previously been looked after) makes them ineligible - Lack of available Social Workers to complete assessments leading to a postcode lottery - SGs living with the fear of negative Social Work intervention and the possible inference that they are unable to cope with the child(ren) - Cultural issues – some SGs come from communities where the practice is to look internally for support first and there is little history of asking for external support. This is made even harder if the services available are not culturally appropriate or do not support the child’s culture or heritage.
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12. Services to support the transition of young people to independence	
	<p>Why is this needed? Young people who are subject to an SGO often require more coordinated support than others in their transition to independence. This exacerbated by the fact that an SGO ceases when the child reaches 18 and often with it, any financial support.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements <i>18. Children who were looked after by a local authority immediately before the making of a special guardianship order may qualify for advice and assistance under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002. In the context of special guardianship, to qualify for advice and assistance, section 24(1A) of the Children Act 1989 provides that the child must:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>have reached the age of 16, but not the age of 21</i> • <i>if less than eighteen years old, have a special guardianship order in force</i> • <i>if eighteen years old or above, have had a special guardianship order in force when they reached that age, and</i> • <i>have been looked after by a local authority immediately before the making of the special guardianship order</i>
	<p>Exempla services provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessments of need for young people who qualify under the leaving care act - Financial support for children over 18 which is aligned with their Staying Put Policy (Leeds) - Provide advice and support from the local Youth Employability Service to any NEET young people who were previously in care up until 25 years, which matches the offer to children in care (Brighton and Hove) - Liaison with FE colleges etc. (ASPIRE ADOPTION). - A settling in home allowance for previously looked after young people (Bromley)

	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward:</p> <p>Many areas appear to have a gap in provision for young people on an SGO, who were previously looked after, and who are entitled to advice and assistance once they reach 16 (see regulation 19 above). Support to young people transitioning to independence is a good example of the need for services (e.g. housing, education, employment social care, welfare rights & mental health) to work together in a coordinated way and to common protocols (see section 13).</p> <p>SGs consulted in the development of this document suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their children require support similar to the Staying Put arrangements available in foster placements. - That online support to young people would be one effective way of providing information. - That peer to peer support for young people at this time would be valuable.
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13.	Support to access services from other parts of the LA
	<p>Why is this needed?</p> <p>Co-ordinating services to SGs often requires good levels of communication and cooperation between different LA services such as safeguarding, education support, SGO support, housing and welfare rights.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements</p> <p><i>26. Special guardianship support services should not be seen in isolation from mainstream services. It is vital to ensure that children and families involved in special guardianship arrangements are assisted in accessing mainstream services and are aware of their entitlement to social security benefits and tax credits as appropriate.</i></p> <p>(Department for Education 2016)</p>
	<p>Exempla services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribute to wider service meetings and working groups considering policies and procedures across Families, Children and Learning to ensure the needs of SG's are considered. - Ensure that referrals for SGO support are responded to appropriately at the point of referral - Have close working links with the Virtual School and a named Education Support Worker for children previously in care (Brighton and Hove) - Communicate with the school about the needs of SG carers (Bromley) - Has a close working arrangement with housing services (Leeds) - Supply written information outlining the education support and other services available (NL AFC) - Have strong links are in place with the local Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (ASPIRE ADOPTION)
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward:</p>

	<p>Co-ordinating the full range of support services to families and children is challenging. Developing joint protocols across LA services or developing a ‘Lead Professional’ approach, would be two ways of helping to ensure that this group of families and children receive the appropriate services in a coordinated way.</p> <p>SGs consulted in the preparation for this paper highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The vital importance of schools and education settings in meeting the needs of young people. - The importance of behaviour policies and approaches which take account of childhood trauma and attachment issues are required. - That liaison between Children’s Services and housing providers is a crucial issue but lacks clarity and coordination, particularly if co-ordination between LAs is required.
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14.	Accessing services from other agencies
	<p>Why is this needed? Accessing support from a range of public sector agencies, particularly CAMHS, is crucial for some SG families where these issues are affecting the stability of the placement. This support is more helpful where it is coordinated and when agencies communicate well with each other.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements <i>60. Regulation 12 requires that the local authority consults the relevant PCT (or LHB) or LEA during the course of the assessment, if needs identified relate to services provided by bodies other than social services, and it appears that there may be service implications for health or education services.</i> Regulation 14: The Plan <i>70. Regulation 14 requires that a plan must be prepared if the local authority proposes to provide special guardianship support services to a person on more than one occasion, and the services are not limited to the provision of advice or information. Where it appears to the local authority that the person may have a need for services from a PCT, LHB or LEA, it must consult those agencies before preparing the plan.</i></p>
	<p>Exemplar services A multi-agency approach is taken to services which support previously looked after children and this group clearly includes SGO children. CAMHS recognizes and plans to meet the needs of this group (Brighton and Hove, Bromley)</p>
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward There were very few examples from the survey of joined up systems and processes to co-ordinate services on a multi-agency basis to SG families. This is mirrored in many adoption support services. SG families need access to attachment and trauma-informed services whether these are delivered as part of mainstream services or delivered by specialist providers under the ASF.</p>

15.	Commissioning systems and processes
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	<p>Why is this needed? Since 2016 Local Authorities can now apply to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic services to children subject to an SGO and previously LAC. Commissioning and procuring the most appropriate services for an individual or group, in a timely and effective way, is key to supporting SGO placements.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements <i>Regulation 4: Securing the provision of services</i> 29. Section 14F(9)(b) of the Act enables the local authority to arrange for special guardianship support services to be provided by another body. (Department for Education 2017)</p>
	<p>Exempla services Have access to a resources team for procurement processes. A list of approved providers is kept to speed-up the process of providing therapeutic services. (ASPIRE ADOPTION) Have a commissioning plan and support from a Strategic Commissioning Team (ATV) The most commonly commissioned service was the Kinship Connected service provided by Grandparents Plus.</p>
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward: The only two examples offered of good commissioning practice were provided by the two RAAs in the survey. However, all LAs and RAAs should have access to procurement and commissioning advice, given the level of spending on adoption and special guardianship support services made possible by the ASF.</p>

16.	Workforce Development
	<p>Why is this needed? Supporting Special Guardianship Placements is often a complex task demanding a high level of legal understanding and significant experience in supporting families who face multiple physical, social, emotional and relationship challenges. The quality and experience of the workforce to deliver these services is therefore crucial.</p>
	<p>Government/Statutory requirements <i>Make sure frontline staff dealing with young people who could be special guardians have the right advice. Where older siblings, who may themselves be vulnerable, may become special guardians, councils should think about how to help them make a properly informed and supported choice. Consider whether frontline social worker staff for this type of vulnerable young person have the right advice and support to give appropriate guidance. (LG&SCO 2018 p7)</i></p> <p><i>Develop advice for social workers involved in supporting potential and actual special guardians. This could include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a flow chart showing responsibilities at key stages such as suitability assessment, financial assessment, permanence panel and court • a checklist of things to cover at first assessment visit (for example explaining the process and financial situation)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a summary of the SGO assessment process including child information (for example attachment issues and any early neglect or trauma), carers information (for example current relationship and stability) (LGO 2018 p16)
	<p>Examples of approaches currently being taken</p> <p>Responses in this area were weak. Exempla services had:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A workforce development plan covering this group of staff and linked to other permanence support services (Brighton and Hove) - A range of in-house training, including training on how to undertake an SG assessment (NLAFC)
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward:</p> <p>Only one agency had a workforce development plan in place at the time of the survey which covered work with SGs in any detail. However, individual workers did show a high level of understanding and knowledge in key areas. Developing even a short training module on the needs of Special Guardians could reap large dividends, particularly if delivered across a number of agencies.</p> <p>SGs consulted in the development of this document suggested, amongst others, that Social Workers need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand the complexity of the practical, everyday lived experience which SGs have to manage - Explain all the available options for looking after the child, including long term fostering - Undertake assessments which take account of the circumstances of the SG and the child's background and experience - Be aware of and acknowledge the possibility of pre-birth exposure to alcohol and drugs - Support the SG in the transition process

17.	Monitoring and evaluation
	<p>Why is this needed?</p> <p>As the number of SGO placements increases, the need to evaluate the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of assessment and support services becomes more urgent.</p>
	<p>Examples of approaches currently being taken (See also section one)</p> <p>Independent evaluation of support services to SGs has only so far taken place in the voluntary sector. E.g. Grandparents Plus - Kinship Connected Programme and The Kinship Ready programme.</p> <p>Other services internally monitor user feedback on their services (Kirklees)</p>
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward:</p> <p><i>The most marked gaps in knowledge relate to children's developmental outcomes and experiences and how to effectively manage contact.</i> (Nuffield 2019 p16)</p> <p>For SG children (as with adopted children) there is a lack of agreement on how to measure success and almost no data is collected at national level to demonstrate outcomes. A national data set for children with an SGO is overdue. This would greatly assist monitoring and evaluation at a local level and</p>

	contribute to the case for investment in support services. However, at a practice and service level, the needs of SGs, kinship carers and children are becoming increasingly clear and are consistently stated across a number of studies cited in this document. Local monitoring of services should be enough to demonstrate whether their basic needs and requirements are being met or not.
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18.	Birth Parent Support
	Why is this needed? The welfare of birth parents is very often of significant concern to their children and SGs. Support to birth parents who are not living with their children can often make for a stronger placement for the child.
	Exemplar services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide information specifically for birth parents about SGOs (NLAFC & PAC-UK) - Birth Parents are invited to Contact Review Meetings post order (NLAFC) - Signpost birth parents to support services and voluntary organisations for further support and advice - Offer support to help birth parents understand the experience of permanent separation and to access the help they need to plan for their futures (Brighton and Hove)
	Comment/Possible ways forward: SG's consulted in the preparation of the document suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a need for support to be provided to birth parents immediately after the order to ensure that the effect of the order, the support plan and contact arrangements are jointly understood. - This should include recognition that the relationship between child, SG and birth parents is likely to change over the years and that this requires preparation and support for all parties. - There needs to be recognition that the SG family cannot also support the birth parents. - LAs have a duty of care to the parent to support them as the relationship with the children can be so harmful

19.	Budget and resources
	Why is this needed? A key issue which cannot be ignored is the level of resources required to implement the types of SGO support services outlined in this paper. This is extremely difficult to quantify given wide differences in services between LAs and RAAs and the fact that support services to SGs are often part of a larger services which also support foster carers or adopters.
	Examples of expenditure and staffing

	<p>None of the services in this study were able to say exactly how much the services cost. However, some respondents did identify how many staff were employed in their support services and at what level. Even at this level of breakdown, some services were still only able to identify a staff compliment which delivered a wider support services, some of whose services users were SGs.</p> <p>Brighton and Hove Family and Friends team delivers support to a range of kinship carers, including SGs, and consists of: 1.6 Pod (Team) Managers, 8 FTE Qualified Social Workers, 1.5 Non-qualified workers, 0.8 FTE Admin workers</p> <p>Kirklees Connected Persons Support team holds case accountability for SGO support cases as well as Looked After Children who reside with Family & Friends foster carers and consists of: 3 FTE Qualified social workers, 3 FTE Family Support workers, Shared admin staff with the LAC team, 2 FTE Contact Officers</p> <p>Bromley Connected Persons & Special Guardianship Team undertakes SGO preparation work, oversees 95 cases that are within 3 years of the SGO, 121 case which are post 3 years of the SGO, with 125 children who were previously looked after. The service has a team of - 9 qualified social workers, 1 Social work assistant, 1 FTE Admin worker, 1 FTE other staff</p>
	<p>Comment/Possible ways forward SGO and kinship placements are an area ready for a wider economic assessment, both in the cost of delivering and of not delivering support services.</p>

20.	A plan for the future development of services
	<p>Why is this needed? Support services to SGs and kinship carers are often embryonic in their development, although demand for them is clearly growing. It is helpful therefore to understand how some services are planning to develop and what they see as their priorities.</p>
	<p>Examples of approaches currently being taken</p> <p>Examples of planned future development of services</p> <p>NLAFC (now an RAA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support children and young people more directly – for instance by commissioning peer therapeutic support from a voluntary sector provider - Ensure social workers are trained in making ASF applications - Launch contact template/guidance - Training for social workers on engagement and assisting prospective SGs to make an informed decision as part of the assessment process and with evidence of how prospective carers will meet the child’s identified needs. - Set up steering group with SGs to facilitate best practice with promoting and marketing support services <p>ASPIRE ADOPTION – Implementing new duty system, Delivering regular PACE (DDP) workshops and training events on a monthly basis at different venues</p>

Brighton and Hove

- Developing a specific Family and Friends website
- Explore group applications to ASF for co-facilitated Therapeutic Parenting Group and NVR Group, with practitioners from the team
- Develop a peer mentoring program for Family and Friends Carers
- Develop a pathway for SGs to access universal Parenting Support which reflects the trauma and attachment needs of children in their care

Bromley

- Provide therapeutic parenting workshops for groups of parents
- Work more closely with children's centres
- Develop the Information pack that is provided to carers preorder/ preapproval
- Develop a leaflet for birth parents so that they can understand better what it means having their child in an SGO placement
- Formalise contact arrangements in the form of a contract at the point of assessment

Conclusion:

Support to Special Guardians and kinship carers is unquestionably an undeveloped area in terms of the understanding of need, service provision and practice. Developing a tool such as this based on best existing practice is therefore a challenging task and has, in some areas, been more about spotlighting the gaps and inadequacies in services as much as highlighting strengths. The difference in approach between various LAs provoked one final question. Why have some services become much more well developed than others? Two managers were briefly interviewed, representing two of the more advanced services, to examine this question.

Neither service would say that change and progress had been driven by senior management, or by an identified strategic need to support SG and kinship carers. However, both had been successful in securing the approval of senior management to develop this area of work and saw this as vital to progress.

For one service, the recognition that children deserve to be treated and supported equally, regardless of legal status, had underpinned developments. A combination of staff commitment, carer engagement, supportive leadership, the occasional complaint, individual case examples and political engagement, had come together and generated energy and progress. The advent of the RAA then stimulated a group of LAs to work on these issues together, with the aim of creating greater consistency, even though kinship care and SG support do not currently sit with the RAA. The strategic direction for this LA is in fact to move SG services closer to Early Help provision and away from fostering, in order to provide appropriate support sooner and at a community level, linking particularly with schools. The provision of therapeutic services is seen to be a major challenge for the future.

The other service (in a smaller LA) had evolved as workers recognised the needs of SG carers stemming from the assessment work which they had undertaken and their recognition of their continuing needs post-order. Work started with the development of a life-story workshop and has resulted over time in the development of a comprehensive workshop program, development of a link to local therapy services and then to the Virtual School. Eventually influence spread as far as the local judiciary. The service seeks to raise the profile of SG and kinship care within the LA care planning and decision-making system but is increasingly recognized as playing a key role and providing an important perspective. In engaging with other services such as schools, youth and employability, CAHMS etc. they continually ask the question, has this child been looked after or lived in a different family? This is beginning to influence practice in other areas e.g. an attachment aware policy and behavior strategy has been developed for schools. Their commitment to the provision of support for SG's means that every SG can receive some form of support if they need it.

It is hoped that this document has provided a useful summary of the needs of SG and kinship carers and the children they care for; provided a framework for service analysis and development, and highlighted enough good current practice to inspire others to improve the quality and consistency of services to a neglected and vulnerable group of families.

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