

Barnet Kinship Care Offer

Supporting Kinship Families in Barnet

2025-2029

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Glossary

SGO- Special Guardianship Order.

CAO- Child Arrangements Order.

FGC- Family Group Conference.

BAFCA- Barnet Foster Carers Association.

ASGSF- Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

BACE – Barnet Active, Creating, Engaging Holidays.

SEND- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Introduction

The London Borough of Barnet's Kinship Care Offer sets out our vision, duties and practice towards supporting the needs of children and families in Kinship Care and towards empowering these families to thrive. It covers key definitions, process and detail of services and support which we offer to kinship carers¹. It is intended to be used both by prospective and established carers to provide them with clear information about what they can expect from us² and to signpost them to other relevant information.

Barnet's Values and Principles

Barnet believes that every child in the borough has the right to a healthy, happy childhood. Children's welfare and their best interests is always at the heart of what we do. We are also fully committed to the principle and culture of **family first**, when in the best interest of the child.

The Children Act 1989 established the principle that children are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless this is not safe for them. Following from the 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' social care framework, the National Kinship Care Strategy put forward the overarching vision that **children who cannot live with their parents should be supported to live with people who are known to them and who love them**. Hence, when a child can no longer live with their parents, we will think **first** whether they can live with family and friends.

The London Borough of Barnet adheres to the following principles³:

- Children are supported to stay within their families, wherever possible.
- When a child is unable to remain living with their parents, family networks are consulted and have their options explained to them clearly.
- When a kinship carer is formally assessed, the assessment process is detailed yet proportionate to what it needs to achieve.
- We aim to build trusting relationships with family members, whilst prioritising the safety of the child.
- Children in kinship care are supported to thrive and families actively offered support tailored to their needs.

Legal Framework

The London Borough of Barnet, as a local authority, has a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children living in Barnet and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families.

¹ Throughout this document references to 'we' / 'us' refers to the London Borough of Barnet. 'You' addresses the document's intended reader, kinship carers.

² This policy needs to be read in conjunction with other policies specific to the different legal arrangements which provide further information and detail and can be accessed to via this document.

³ as laid out by the National Kinship Care Strategy [Championing Kinship Care, December 2023](#)

Barnet's statutory powers and duties to be involved in family and friend care arrangements (kinship care) derive from the legal framework below:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations 2013
- Children and Families Act 2014
- The Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and Statutory Guidance 2017
- Children's Social Care National Framework statutory guidance 2023
- Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance 2023
- Kinship Care: Statutory guidance for local authorities 2024

What is Kinship Care?

Kinship care is any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member (the kinship carer) who is not their parent, for a significant amount of time, either as a temporary or permanent arrangement.

A 'family network' is a group of people close to a child made up of relatives and non-related, connected people (i.e. step-parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, or close family friends). They can provide support to enable children to live safely at home with their parents or may become kinship carers when it is not possible for a child to remain at home full-time with their parents.

Children come into kinship care through a variety of circumstances, often it is in response to a family emergency. Commonly it is a decision made by the court following a process of children's social care engagement. Kinship care can take different forms. The different kinship care arrangements and Barnet's duties and responsibilities in relation to them are described in the sections below.

Types of Kinship Care Arrangements

Carers with a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

SGOs fulfil the need for a legal status for children and families which offers greater security than long-term fostering without the legal severance from the birth family which arises from an Adoption Order. The order is permanent and cannot be challenged by birth parents unless there is a significant change in circumstances⁴ to the granted SGO.

Special Guardianship Orders provide special guardians with:

⁴ Such as a placement breakdown or the death of an SG carer.

- responsibility for all aspects of the child's upbringing and welfare (except about changing of surname, consent for adoption and relocating outside the UK longer than 3 months).
- a firm foundation on which to build a lifelong permanent relationship.
- legal security, whilst preserving the link between the child and their birth family.
- access to a range of support services, including, where appropriate, financial support.

Family and friends can apply for an SGO individually or jointly⁵. You can apply to be a Special Guardian if you:

- are over 18 years old and you are not the parent of the child.
- are a foster carer approved by us or a relative with whom the child has lived for, at least, one year immediately before the application is made.
- are a person with whom the child has lived for three out of the last five years.
- have the consent of everyone with parental responsibility.
- have a Child Arrangements Order for the child.
- are appointed as a guardian of the child.

Prospective special guardians should notify us 3 months before they apply to the court for a Special Guardianship Order. However, most typically, it will be the Family Court which will make a Special guardianship Order (SGO) in care proceedings, as a permanent placement for the child instead of a Care Order.

Once an SGO is in place, we no longer have parental responsibility for the child (which we would have with an Interim Care Order in place), and carers care for the child/ren as if they were their own for the rest of the child's minority, with entitlement to support⁶ (from the relevant local authority).

Kinship Foster Carers (also known as Connected Carers)

Where a child is a 'Child in Care' by virtue of either an Interim or Final Care Order or is being accommodated by the local authority (under section 20 of the Children Act 1989) and each of the following apply:

- The child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent.
- The friend or family member is approved as a local authority foster carer either on a temporary basis (before becoming a Special Guardian) or permanently, following a full assessment.

Under this arrangement the child/ren continue to be 'in Care', and the local authority *retains* parental responsibility. Therefore, under this arrangement the children's social workers will remain involved in carer's lives.

Kinship foster care⁷ arrangements require carers to fulfil additional responsibilities, similar to those of local authority foster carers. These responsibilities include:

⁵ Joint applicants do not need to be married. A joint applicant could be your partner or another relative, like a sibling. Birth parents cannot be joint applicants.

⁶ See section 'Services and Support' below for further detail.

⁷ The terms Kinship Foster Carer and Connected Carer are used interchangeably throughout this document.

- caring for the child as part of a team - this could include a local authority, schools, health professionals and the child's birth family.
- keeping records and writing reports about the foster child.
- attending meetings and advocating for the child.
- helping the child manage their behaviour and feelings.
- attending regular training and completing [the training, support, and development standards workbook for kinship carers](#) within 12 months of being approved.

Kinship Foster Carers are subject to annual reviews to ensure they are working towards and/or meeting the Fostering National Minimum Standard.

Carers with a Child Arrangements Order

Where a 'lives with' Child Arrangements Order⁸ (CAO) has been granted by a Family Court in respect of the child, in favour of someone who is a friend or family member but is not the child's parent. CAOs determine who a child can live with and/or who a child can stay with and for how long. Anyone with parental responsibility can apply for a CAO. Relatives can apply for a Child Arrangements Order without the permission of the court after caring for the child for one year.

The carer with a CAO shares parental responsibility with the child's parents, or others with parental responsibility, until the age of 18 unless the court states otherwise. Yet the person with a CAO is responsible for making decisions about the child's day-to-day care and upbringing. Unlike special guardians, they cannot make decisions to the exclusion of others with parental responsibility. However, they can make *routine* decisions without needing permission from others with parental responsibility.

Informal Kinship Carers

Informal kinship care arrangements are when a family member or friend looks after a child for a temporary or permanent amount of time. This arrangement is agreed privately with the parents and parental responsibility for the child remains with the parents. These are arrangements where:

- the local authority has had no major role in making the arrangement for the child.
- a Family Court has not made an order in respect to the care of the child.

In such cases, there is no requirement to notify the local authority.

Private Fostering Arrangements

A private fostering arrangement happens when someone **who is not a relative⁹ or does not have parental responsibility for the child** looks after the child for 28 days or more¹⁰ (as per section 66(1)(a) and (b) of the Children Act 1989).

⁸ Section 8 of the Children Act 1989. In 2014, Child Arrangements Orders replaced Residence Orders and Contact Orders

⁹ "Relative" has the meaning given in section 105 of the Children Act 1989. It includes only the following: grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership), and stepparent (a married stepparent, including a civil partner).

¹⁰ For the purposes of this kinship definition, the term private fostering arrangement includes only individuals accommodating a child. It does not apply to organisations or bodies.

For detail on Barnet's requirements and other relevant information about **Private Fostering Arrangements** –i.e. when someone who is not a relative of the child looks after the child for 28 days or more— please refer to [Barnet Private Fostering Statement of Purpose](#).

Becoming a Carer (I)

You may have initiated the process of becoming a kinship carer yourself by asking the Family Court to grant you a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order (private law proceedings). Or, perhaps, you find yourself part of a process initiated by us via public law proceedings¹¹ –and you may be coming into the caring role in circumstances not of your own choosing.

When a child is referred to us because of concerns that they do not have reasonably good health or care, or that they are at risk of harm, we intervene to provide support. We always work closely with parents first, to ensure that key steps are taken, and parents address problems in a timely way. We must also, at the same time, plan for the welfare of the child *should* things not get better at home, this is called Parallel Planning. Therefore, we ask early about who else in the family, if anyone, could look after the child/ren. If you are put forward, we will get in touch with you to explore this possibility, *should it be needed*.

Family Group Decision Making

If, after a process of working with parents, we do not have evidence that circumstances are improving sufficiently for the child, we may decide to initiate pre-proceedings or *care proceedings*. If we initiate care proceedings, we will apply to the Family Court to become involved in a child's care.

At this point, we will arrange family meetings to involve the wider family (the family network) in deciding what is best for the child. This is referred to as *family group decision-making* and includes [family group conferences](#) and [other meetings](#).

Barnet will convene a Family Group Conference (FGC) when:

- a case is at pre-proceedings stage (i.e. before we apply to Court), unless it is not in the best interests of the child.
- a case where there has been a legal planning meeting, and it is deemed appropriate to convene a FGC.
- a child is on the 'edge of care' (when a child is with their family but there is a risk that a child could be taken into care).

The aim of the FGC is to agree a *safe and relevant plan* to address the challenges identified, led by what the family thinks will help. The family group conference is a voluntary process for families. If plans put forward by family members are not suitable, we are not obliged to abide by them. Our experience suggests that often families come up with plans which would perhaps not otherwise have been proposed.

¹¹ Under section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

Becoming a Carer (II). The Assessment

Where the plan is for a child to live with kinship carers in Special Guardianship or Kinship Foster Care arrangements, and where you agree in principle to become the main carer for the child, then you must, by law¹², be *formally assessed*.

The purpose of assessments is to understand and provide evidence for court about who is the best person to care for the child, their own needs in doing so –so as to best assist the future carer— and therefore to enable vulnerable children to remain living safely with their family and friends.

Barnet commits to undertake assessments of prospective carers:

- Focusing on the child and on their views.
- With an open mind, curiosity and a desire to know and understand you.
- In a spirit of partnership with you and your family.
- Setting out in our report your views and feelings as you tell us.
- Including the views of others close to you such as your immediate family, friends and agencies.
- Based on evidence and including analysis of the evidence.

Prospective Special Guardian and Connected Carers

In private or public Family Court proceedings for SGOs (or for Connected Carers) Barnet must undertake an assessment of the suitability of the potential special guardian / connected carer and write a report for the Court. We are typically not involved in private family applications to Court for a CAO.

The information which assessments for SGO and Connected Carers (Kinship Foster Carers) must include is set out in law. The assessment process is the same for both, but legal timelines are different¹³.

Agreeing to care for a child who is not your own is a life-changing decision –which many family members make without hesitation. This is why Court wishes you to take time to consider the implications. Therefore, Family Court generally asks that our assessments address these questions in relation to prospective carers¹⁴ (no matter what circumstances have led them to consider taking this step):

- Do you understand what the child's needs are?
- Do you have experience of caring for the child / of being a parent?
- What were your own childhood experiences of care? How aware are you of the impact of your own experiences on your parenting?

¹² The Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

¹³ There is a statutory 26 week time limit for proceedings to be completed.

¹⁴ Public Law Working Group 2020, Recommendations to achieve best practice in the child protection and family justice systems: special guardianship orders.

- How aware are you that there may be a need to change your life or your parenting to meet the needs of the child? How do you plan to realistically do it?
- Are you aware of the impact an SGO may have on your family relationships?
- Are you aware of the challenges it may bring to you as time goes by?

Note: Assessments are shared with parents and all parties involved in family proceedings.

Viability Assessments

Firstly, we will get in touch with you, and possibly with other member/s of a child's family, to do a 'viability assessment' if you consent to be considered as a potential carer for the child.

This is a short version of the full assessment, and it is used to explore who, of the members of child's family and friends network, can realistically offer the best care for that child¹⁵. It makes a recommendation to the court about which family member should **be further assessed** as a potential carer. This assessment is also designed to assess your suitability for temporary approval as Connected Carer (see section below).

We aim for this preliminary assessment to require 1 home visit¹⁶ and take 2 to 3 weeks to complete. If needed, we will invite an interpreter to assist. Ideally we would like to see you in your home so we can assess its suitability.

We will call you to inform you of the result of the assessment. You will also receive a letter with the outcome in writing. You have the right to challenge the report if you do not agree with the outcome –details of how, when and where would be included in this letter.

Full Assessments

If the recommendation in the viability assessment is to further assess you, and if you wish to continue the process, we will then undertake a full assessment. There may be a time lapse between the viability and the full assessment. This assessment takes between six to ten visits to your home where we speak with you at length and gather the information we need to:

- make a well-thought-out recommendation to Court.
- understand your support needs if you were to care for the child.

The assessments include information about the child (current and likely future needs, any harm they have suffered), about the child's parents, the wishes and feelings of the child and others. Assessors will also want to know about you, and will ask detailed questions about your:

- relationship with the child
- background, family and relationships

¹⁵ We do various viability assessments because the law tells us that all realistic options for a child must be explored. The Public Law Outline (which sets out the protocol for managing the legal processes involved where the local authority is considering care proceedings) and *Re R (A Child)* [2014] EWCA Civ. 1625.

¹⁶ Depending on where you live, and if at a considerable distance from Barnet, then this may be initially arranged virtually.

- personality and interests
- finances
- home and accommodation
- your parenting experience and capacity
- your wishes and feelings

They will also seek references and undertake statutory checks (Disclosure & Barring Service, medical and local authority checks).

Prospective Special Guardians will be asked to join in a preparation group, of 6 hours duration. We aim to complete the full assessment in 12 weeks.

In addition to your suitability to care for the child long term, the full assessment will also make a recommendation to Court as to what we believe is the most appropriate kinship arrangement for the child and your family. When assessments are positive and children are young, we would aim to recommend the arrangement that provides the highest stability and security in family life for the child.

We will provide you with a copy of the assessment and, if the result is negative, a letter that explains your options at that stage. As with the viability assessment, you also have a right to challenge this report –details of how, when and where will be included in this letter.

Temporary Approval as Connected Carer (Kinship Foster Carer): ‘settling in’ period

For assessments and support plans to comply with statutory requirements and be of high quality, time should be allowed to build relationships and develop (and observe) contact between the child, and you as a proposed carer.

If you are a relative seeking private law proceedings, you can apply to be a Special Guardian only if the child has lived with you for, at least, one year immediately before applying or for three out of the last five years.

In public law (care) proceedings, if the child has not previously lived with you, we would typically seek to establish a ‘settling in’ period of at least 12 weeks (and no longer than 24 weeks) duration¹⁷. During this ‘settling in’ time the child would live temporarily with you, prior to your approval as Special Guardian / Connected Carer –if deemed appropriate and if it benefits the child. This temporary approval is undertaken under Regulation 24: Temporary Approval as Connected Carer.

As a connected carer, you would be allocated a Fostering Supervising Social Worker at the point of the Regulation 24 sign-off. They would work closely with the assessing and the child’s social workers to ensure your support needs are identified very early on.

If after 24 weeks, care proceedings have not ended, a full assessment report would be taken to a Fostering Panel for consideration with a view for you to become approved as kinship foster carer during the time before the SGO is granted by Family Court. Regulations also require that

¹⁷ The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

approval is reviewed at least once a year. Once a SGO is granted, you will no longer be a Kinship Foster Carer.

Becoming a Carer (III). After Approval

Being a Party in Care Proceedings

You can become a party to care proceedings if, when receiving a positive full assessment, you want to issue an application to become a special guardian¹⁸.

You may prefer to simply confirm that you are happy to become a special guardian if the court decides that the child cannot live with their parents. The court has the power to make a special guardianship order at a final hearing in care proceedings.

Information of Interest:

- Family Rights Group. [DIY special guardianship orders: care proceedings](#)

Assistance with Legal Fees

Prospective special guardians (and connected carers) should **seek independent legal advice** before agreeing to, or applying for, an Order.

In public law proceedings, if you are party to care proceedings, you can apply for legal aid to be represented. This is subject to means and merits eligibility assessments.

When you are positively assessed, and we support the child being placed with you, we will fund one session with a solicitor to provide you with legal advice about the support plan that we have provided and the implications of the SGO.

If appropriate, in line with [Regulation 6 \(2005\)](#), we may provide potential special guardians with financial support to contribute to court fees or, in exceptional cases legal costs, for:

- the making of a Special Guardianship Order, the variation or discharge of such an Order.
- an application for an Order under section 8 of the Children Act 1989.
- an Order for financial provision to be made to or for the benefit of the child.

Barnet assesses whether to contribute to legal fees on a case-by-case basis.

In private law proceedings, legal aid is available for prospective kinship carers for special guardianship orders. This is also subject to means and merits eligibility assessments.

Some organisations that can provide advice and assistance to prospective kinship carers are:

- [Kinship](#)
- [CoramBAAF](#)
- [Family Rights Group](#)

¹⁸ If you do, it would be joined with children's services' application and heard together in the same hearings with the same parties.

- [Families in Harmony](#). For kinship carers of African heritage, Caribbean descent or birthed British and of mixed heritage.

You can also get help and information from:

- [Citizens Advice](#)
- [Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service \(Cafcass\)](#)

Useful resource:

- [Find a legal aid adviser tool](#)

Support Plan

We will assess the support needs of the child, parents, and prospective carers, including the need for financial support.

Where support is more than simple advice and information, or a one-off, we will prepare a Support Plan for special guardians / connected carers, typically during assessment, and will keep this under review. We will consult prospective special guardians / connected carers about proposed changes to this plan.

The plan sets out:

- support needs of the child about their health, education, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships. The plan details the services to be provided, who will provide it, frequency, outcomes expected and how this will be kept under review.
- support needs of carers in terms of health and housing, training, point of contact, peer contact, as well as in terms of financial support if applicable.

If you have initiated the process of becoming a kinship carer yourself via private law proceedings and **the child is not looked after** immediately before the making of a SGO, then:

- the Local Authority where you live is responsible for carrying out an assessment and for the provision of support services in response to that assessment.
- The Local Authority has discretion as to whether it will undertake an assessment for special guardianship support, including financial support.
- If you live in Barnet and you make a request for an assessment of support, we will exercise our discretion as to whether to undertake it¹⁹

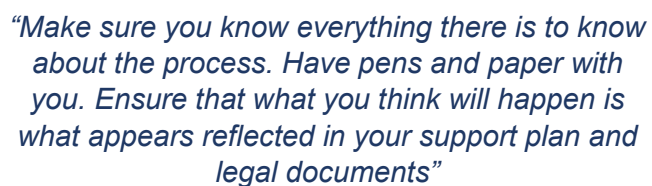
If we decide not to carry out an assessment, we will give you notice of the proposed decision in writing including reasons for it. You will have 28 days to make challenge the decision.

There is no right to an assessment for support for carers who have been granted a CAO. We have the power to provide a CAO allowance where we believe this is the most appropriate way

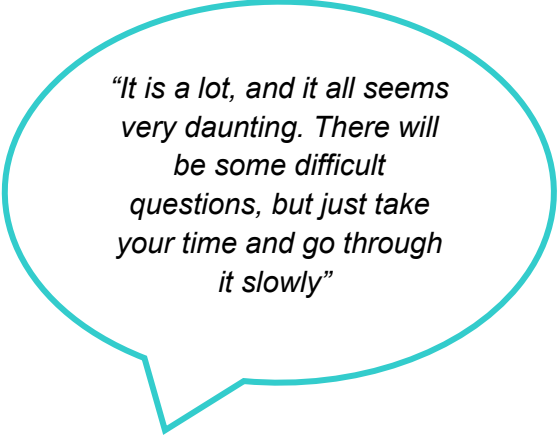
¹⁹ Fully considering the [statutory guidance](#) which makes it clear that it is important that children who were not looked after should not be unfairly disadvantaged by this approach.

to safeguard and promote the child's welfare –where the person with whom the child lives, or is to live, is not a parent of the child or the husband / wife / civil partner of a parent of the child ²⁰.

What Carers Say



“Make sure you know everything there is to know about the process. Have pens and paper with you. Ensure that what you think will happen is what appears reflected in your support plan and legal documents”



“It is a lot, and it all seems very daunting. There will be some difficult questions, but just take your time and go through it slowly”

²⁰ Children Act 1989, Schedule 1, Paragraph 15. Where a child lives, or is to live, with a person as the result of a child arrangements order, a local authority may make contributions to that person towards the cost of the accommodation and maintenance of the child. This does not apply where the person with whom the child lives, or is to live, is a parent of the child or the husband or wife / civil partner of a parent of the child.

Services and Support

Entitlement to support varies depending on the different kinship care arrangements, most typically pertaining to SGO and connected / kinship foster care. The services and support that you and your kinship child/ren can access are typically specified in the Support Plan for SGOs, Connected carers and sometimes for CAOs; and in the Care Plan and Placement Plan for Kinship Foster Carers (Connected Carers).

Most CAO and **informal kinship arrangements** remain entirely private without the need for the involvement of children's social care services. However, where a child is assessed as being in need, support may be provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

For SGOs, support will be provided by your local authority (i.e. where the prospective carer lives). However, when the child has been *in our care immediately before* the order being made, we will provide the support for at least 3 years, even if you do not live in Barnet.

Support, advice, training and peer groups

All Barnet kinship carers have access to the support network of the North London Fostering and Permanence Consortium.

Kinship Foster Carers / Connected Carers (temporary approval)

When you are temporarily approved as kinship foster carer (Connected Carer), at the point of sign-off of the Regulation 24²¹, you will be allocated a fostering supervising social worker²². The social worker will work closely with you (supervising you on a monthly basis) and with other professionals to ensure your support needs are identified very early on.

You will have access to:

- training;
- support groups;
- a dedicated kinship support group.
- out of Hours Support

The dedicated group takes place every two months, and it is facilitated virtually to make it easier for carers to attend.

Special Guardians

Once an SGO is granted, you will be supported by a specialist team. Barnet will contact you with a welcome telephone call to introduce you to the service.

²¹ Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) regulations 2010.

²² This means the allocated, suitably qualified social worker who would be responsible for supervising and supporting you.

We will seek your consent to:

- be referred to PAC UK²³ and Kinship
- be added to the special guardians mailing list for training and information.

All SGO families are supported by an allocated practitioner for the first year of the order when they will be visited a minimum of three times to offer ongoing support. After this first year, when carers settle in their role, we aim to stay in touch with you via a visit, video or phone call, at least once a year, to seek reassurance on the welfare of the child/ren and on your welfare, and as an opportunity to stay in touch.

We arrange peer support opportunities for special guardians via:

- Special guardian 'brunches'
- Annual summer party for special guardians and children
- Kinship Coffee mornings

Kinship Foster Carers (full approval)

If you are approved as kinship foster carer by a Fostering Panel –due to proceedings taking longer than 24 weeks or due to the specific family circumstances and need— the child in your care continues to be a *Child in Care*. You will be provided with support, training opportunities and social work intervention as an approved registered kinship foster carer. You will also be subject to the same requirements as registered foster carers.

As a kinship foster carer you have access to:

- out of hours support.
- support groups.
- training
- peer support from experienced foster carers through buddy arrangements and the Barnet Foster Carers Association (BAFCA).
- the support network of the North London Fostering and Permanence Consortium.
- The Fostering Network
- Fostering celebration events

The child will have a placement plan setting out the specific care arrangements for them, including the expectations of the kinship foster carers and the support they can expect to receive to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities for the child.

For more information on support for kinship foster carers please refer to the [Barnet Foster Carer Handbook](#).

²³ Formerly Post Adoption Centre, now PAC-UK.

Therapy

Special guardianship and child arrangement orders

The [Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund²⁴](#) (ASGSF) is currently available to children and families where the children are subject to Special Guardianship Orders, or Child Arrangement Orders, and were *previously in care*. The ASGSF provides funding for therapeutic support for these children and young people up to and including the age of 21, or up to the age of 25 if the child has an education, health and care plan.

In addition, special guardians can access:

- online training which provides the opportunity for self-directed learning within assessment (when learning needs are identified).
- Great Behaviour Breakdown and Non-Violence Resistance training via [North London Fostering & Permanency Consortium](#)
- Mediation training

Life Story Work

Barnet is committed to promoting the long-term resilience and emotional wellbeing of all children and young people in Kinship Care.

Life story work helps children and young people in unstable family circumstances to understand their family background. It contributes to a child's sense of identity and helps ground their sense of who they are. High-quality life story work can help improve stability at (the new) home and relationships with family members and reduce mental health difficulties.

Barnet offers life story work to all children with a care plan of special guardianship or living with kinship foster carers, with the option of therapeutic life story work via the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund for particularly complex cases.

We will seek your consent for the child to be referred for life story work and we will ask you to be a part of this work where appropriate.

Advocacy

Advocacy is about representing the views, wishes and needs of children and young people to professionals making decisions about their lives. An advocate works to champion your child's or young person's views, wishes and feelings, and their rights.

Barnet practitioners can refer children in special guardianship arrangements who are no longer in care but who may need assistance in making their voices heard with different agencies to Kinship and PAC UK. Children in care living with connected / kinship foster carers and those living with Special Guardians also have access to independent advocacy support.

²⁴ The funds for the ASGSF are provided by the Department for Education with fund availability for Barnet confirmed every three years.

Accommodation

We work to ensure that housing services work in partnership with us to support the housing needs which may face kinship carers.

We engage with housing authorities and registered social landlords to ensure that their policies recognise the importance of the role performed by kinship carers, and that *whenever possible* kinship carers living in social housing are given appropriate priority to move to more suitable accommodation if this will prevent the need for a child to become looked after. Carers ought to bear in mind that the social housing market in London is in crisis and current expectations for Barnet's housing authority are of increased demand and a general reduction in available supply throughout all property types.

We have the power²⁵ to give financial support towards accommodation costs. This is used only in exceptional circumstances, where we assess this as the most appropriate way to safeguard and promote a child's welfare.

Support to Stay in Work

Family members sometimes take on the care of children in an emergency and may have to take unpaid time off work or a career break in order to settle the child/ren into their new environment and to make adjustments to their own lifestyles. Yet we understand it may not always be possible, or in the child's or your best long-term interests, for you to reduce your hours and therefore income, or give up work altogether, particularly if this would lead to future financial hardship which would impact on the care you provide for the child.

The Department for Education has published statutory guidance for employers on providing [support to kinship carers in the workplace](#).

Subject to meeting eligibility and other requirements, employed kinship carers can access:

- Right to request flexible working.
- Time off for family and dependents.
- Unpaid Parental Leave.

You should have conversations with your employer about flexible working early on.

Information of Interest:

- [Flexible working: overview- GOV.UK](#)
- [Time off for family and dependants-GOV.UK](#).
- [Kinship Friendly Employer Toolkit](#)

²⁵ Under section 17 of the 1989 Act.

Education

Children in kinship care attending a school in Barnet will be supported in their education at their school and via the Virtual School.

If your child has previously been looked after, they have top priority in school admissions and will be placed in good or outstanding schools. Previously looked-after children and those in formal kinship care arrangements are also eligible to be secured a school place through Fair Access Protocols²⁶.

At school

- Each maintained school and academy have a designated teacher who has a leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of every previously looked-after child in the school.
- Schools receive Pupil Premium Plus funding to help improve the education outcomes of children who have been looked after²⁷. You will be asked to provide proof of your child's status so that the school can apply for the funding.

You should contact your child's school to ensure they are aware your child lives with you as their special guardian / kinship foster carer / carer with a CAO.

Virtual School

It is not an actual, physical, school, but a service to promote the achievement of children in care, previously in care and children in kinship care. Every virtual school has a headteacher.

The Virtual School gives information and advice to schools and to carers about the needs and educational progress of children who are / have been in care, have a social worker or are in kinship care, so that they can achieve the best educational outcomes possible.

The Virtual School works to:

- Raise the visibility of the distinct needs of children in different types of kinship care arrangements and the disadvantages that they can experience.
- Promote practice that supports attendance and engagement in education.
- Promote practice that improves children in kinship care's outcomes to narrow the attainment gap, so that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

It advises schools on how they can support all children subject to special guardianship orders and child arrangement orders to improve behaviour and help avoid exclusion. This includes training and information *for schools* ensuring that the unique experiences and different kinds of kinship arrangements are visible and understood, including to the roles of designated teacher and designated safeguarding lead.

²⁶ This is the mechanism which ensures that unplaced and vulnerable children who are having difficulty securing school places in-year are allocated one promptly.

²⁷ The [funding](#) is paid to and managed by the school, with allocations based on the number of previously looked-after children recorded in the school's October school census return to the Department for Education. Schools can decide, within the choices provided by the Department for Education, on how to spend it for the benefit of these children.

The Virtual School can also provide advice and information to all kinship carers with special guardianship orders and child arrangement orders, regardless of whether their child was previously a Child in Care to the local authority, which can help you navigate the education system. You must request this support.

Please refer to the Virtual School's [website](#) in the first instance for information and advice.

After-school & Holiday Activities

If your child is also in receipt of benefit-related free school meals, they will be able to access [BACE Holidays](#). BACE holidays support children and young people in Reception - Year 11 with free of charge holiday club activities.

Children not receiving benefit-related free school meals can access funded holiday places via [Positive Activities](#). Activities must be booked online, and some have limited capacity. Children who are known to social care and who are vulnerable are prioritised. The [Positive Activities Holiday Project](#) is designed especially for youths aged 0-19 and up to 25 with learning disabilities and / or Autism.

Useful resource:

- Kinship provides useful free [Training and Events](#) for kinship carers, some of which is related to education
- [Barnet Local Offer](#) - information about services and support available to families affected by SEND in Barnet.

Supporting Family Life

All children who are living away from their parents should have an opportunity to keep in touch with parents and other family members where this is safe and in their best interests²⁸.

Informal kinship Care

Where a child is living in an informal kinship care arrangement, the carers should agree with the family on contact arrangements, where doing so promotes the child's welfare and safeguarding. If a kinship carer requires assistance to ensure that any such contact can be managed safely this will be identified and provided. Barnet can provide you with information about local contact centres and family mediation services, and how to make use of their services.

Kinship Foster Carers

If you are a kinship foster carer the child you care for is a 'Child in Care'. We, together with you as carer, are required to endeavour to promote contact between the child and his or her family unless it is not practicable or consistent with the child's welfare. The overall objective of the

²⁸ The Children Act 1989 requires that we (the local authority) endeavour to promote contact between a looked after child and their family unless it is not practicable or consistent with the child's welfare, and that we promote contact between a child who is not looked after but who is living away from home where it is necessary to do so in order to promote their welfare.

contact arrangements will be included in the child's Care Plan and the specific arrangements will be set out in the child's Placement Plan.

Special Guardians

If you are a carer with an SGO, we will support you in maintaining contact between the child and parents that is safe and in the best interest of the child. When needed, we will create a 'contact agreement' between you and birth parent –consulted with and agreed by all parties— that is reasonable, achievable and supports the welfare of the child. We will also provide you with information about local contact centres and family mediation services, and how to make use of their services.

Financial Assistance

Financial support is one of the support services which may be available to Special Guardians and Connected Carers (Kinship Foster Carers).

Kinship Foster Carer (Connected Carers)

As a fully approved (not temporarily approved) Kinship Foster Carer, you receive the same level of financial support as Local Authority Foster Carers. The payments you would receive as a kinship foster carer are made up of two elements: a weekly maintenance allowance (designed to cover the cost of caring for a fostered child) and a weekly professional fee (to acknowledge the undertaking of required, on-going training and development and all other responsibilities).

The maintenance allowance is set up by government and it changes in April every year. Barnet provides detailed guidance on how you should spend the maintenance allowance.

Special Guardians

We may support you financially to ensure that suitable guardianship arrangements do not fail because of financial difficulties. Financial support may be paid to a special guardian where we consider²⁹ that:

- it is necessary to ensure that you, as prospective special guardian, can look after the child.
- the child needs special care which requires greater expenditure of resources due to illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties, or the continuing consequences of past abuse or neglect.
- it is appropriate to contribute toward the expenditure necessary for the purposes of accommodating and maintaining the child, including the provision of furniture and domestic equipment, alterations to and adaptations of the home, provision of means of transport, and provision of items necessary to look after the child.

We provide a financial allowance to all special guardians who care for a child who has been previously 'in Care'. An initial assessment to ascertain the need for an allowance may be required.

When Special Guardians care for children who have not been previously 'in Care' they can request an assessment for financial support.

²⁹ Regulation 6 (2005).

Financial support is conditional on your child:

- being under 18³⁰ years of age.
- living with you.
- being in full time education or training until age 18;
- not starting employment before turning 18.
- not qualifying for Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance in their own right.

If you receive an allowance you must *immediately* notify us of any significant changes in the family and child/young person's circumstances. We will also undertake a light-touch annual review to ask you about changes in your circumstances.

If you are to receive the financial allowance, this is paid at the same rate as the minimum weekly maintenance allowance paid to local authority foster carers (London rate). The allowance will **not** be means tested, but child benefit is automatically deducted. The minimum weekly maintenance allowance is set, and updated yearly, by central government.

In exceptional circumstances, considered on a case-by-case basis, other additional and time-limited financial support may be payable to carers with SGOs (i.e. setting in allowance).

If you had become a permanent kinship foster carer and had then fostered the child (for longer than 12 weeks) *before* becoming a Special Guardian, we will continue to pay the weekly maintenance allowance and fee that you were receiving for a **two year transition period**³¹. However, you will now be entitled to claiming child benefit, and this benefit is automatically deducted from your allowance. If at the end of the 2 year transition period there is reduction to your weekly payment we will give you the opportunity to make representations.

Complaints

Where a carer is not satisfied with an aspect of this policy or its application and would like to make a comment or complaint then they can access Barnet's complaint's procedure. A copy of the procedure can be requested by email: childrens.service.complaints@barnet.gov.uk or tel: 020 8359 7008.

You can also make a complain via this [link](#)

³⁰ In some circumstances the allowance may continue after the child turns 18 depending on assessment.

³¹ This arrangement may continue after two years in exceptional circumstances only, if we consider it appropriate. Please note the annual allowances will cease to be paid (birthday, festival, uniform, etc.).

Appendix- Journey of prospective kinship carers

JOURNEY of PROSPECTIVE KINSHIP CARERS

