

## **FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE POLICY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many children and young people who are unable to live with their birth parents, for whatever reason, are brought up by family members, friends or other people who are connected to them, with whom they have an existing relationship. This is known as 'family and friends care'. Sometimes this is an alternative to children and young people going in to care, and sometimes they are in care, but live with a family member or friend. Family and friends care enables children and young people to remain with people they trust and are comfortable with, instead of being placed with foster carers who they do not know, or within children's homes.

This policy has been introduced to consolidate and develop the support that the council undertakes in relation to Family and Friends Carers and to improve outcomes for children and young people who live in these circumstances.

### **WHAT IS FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE?**

Children and young people are described as living in family and friends care when they are:

- in informal arrangements with a relative (see pages 9 and 16 for definition)
- in informal arrangements with other family members or friends which last for a period of less than 28 days
- in private fostering arrangements, if not a close relation (see pages 9 and 17 for definition)
- as a looked after child placed with family or friends who have been approved by the local authority as foster carers
- under a residence order or special guardianship order
- placed for adoption with family or friends

A 'family and friends carer' refers to a relative, friend or other person known to the child or young person who is caring for that child full time. A child who is cared for by a family and friends carer may or may not be looked after by the local authority.

There are a number of reasons why children and young people may be in family and friends care arrangements. Some examples include:

- children and young people who have been assessed as being unable to live with parents to safeguard their welfare
- children and young people whose family is going through a crisis
- children and young people whose parent(s) is(are) unable to care for them because of ill health, alcohol, drug or mental health issues
- children and young people living with friends to continue their schooling when parents move away for employment or education
- children and young people with families overseas
- children and young people living with host families while attending a language school or undergoing medical treatment.

## **FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARERS IN SUNDERLAND**

Family and friends carers play a unique role in providing a stable environment for the children and young people they care for, and many children and young people who live in family and friends care do well in life. However, it must be acknowledged that others remain vulnerable and at risk of failing to achieve good outcomes, and many family and friends carers both want and need support to enable them to help the children and young people they care for.

It is important to recognise that many family and friends care arrangements are private and informal, and occur without local authority involvement. This does not, however, mean that those carers do not need help and support and one of the key aims of this policy is to publicise where that support can be obtained.

Drawing on a number of research projects conducted at both the local and national level, it is acknowledged that the existence of private arrangements makes it difficult to determine the exact numbers of children and young people living in family and friends care.

Research highlighted within the statutory guidance from the Department of Education indicates that 300,000 children in England are cared for full time by a relative, friend or other person previously connected with the child (*Richards, A. and Tapsfield, R., 2010*) including 7,200 looked after children placed with family and friends who have been approved as foster carers (figures as at 31 March 2010) (DfE, 2010).

Research into the 2001 Census data by the University of Bristol found that 143,367 children in England were being looked after by kinship carers, with a prevalence of 1.3% against the whole population of children (*Nandy, S., Selwyn, J., Farmer, E. and Vaisey, P., 2011*). In the North East this equates to 7,700 children living with relatives, of whom 370 were cared for by a family member approved as a foster carer and 7,330 were cared for through informal arrangements – a proportion of 95%. The research also stated that 15 children per 1,000 in Sunderland are cared for through kinship arrangements, a prevalence of 1.5%.

Research carried out in Sunderland into the issues faced by grandparent kinship carers where the birth parents are involved in substance misuse found that there are currently 192 kinship carers in receipt of a means-tested allowance from Sunderland City Council's Children's Social Work Service (*Conqueror, K. and Robson, S., 2011*). These payments relate to Special Guardianship Orders (73), Residence Orders (102) and Kinship Foster Carers (17).

In applying the figures set out in the previous paragraph to the prevalence rates indicated by the University of Bristol, and taking into account the population cohort of 65,800 for those aged 0-19 years (ONS 2005 mid-year estimates), the number of children and young people living with family and friends in Sunderland is potentially 855. However, by applying a prevalence rate of 15 children in every 1000 to the population cohort, this figure increases to 987. The discrepancy highlights the challenges associated with trying to establish the true extent of family and friends care in Sunderland; however, the figures do suggest that only a small proportion of the children and their carers are formally known to the Council in this capacity.

Further challenges are around the lack of information about the scale and issues of family and friends care within Sunderland's ethnic minority communities. This will need to be addressed and will be included as an action in the delivery plan to establish this information as part of the implementation of the policy.

## **ISSUES FACING FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARERS**

In 2011, Sue Robson and Kate Conqueror, both grandparent carers themselves, carried out participatory action research among grandparent kinship carers in Sunderland where the birth parents are involved in substance misuse. They found that “barriers and difficulties facing grandparent carers were complex and multidimensional”. Of those carers who had taken part in the research, many were uncertain about their future and that of the children they were caring for – for example, carers expressed concerns about the financial implications of retirement, managing teenagers as elderly carers, care of children if the grandparent was to become very ill or die. The research also identified and prioritised the types of support and services family and friends carers required, which were:

- Respite opportunities
- Campaigning and lobbying to change the situation of kinship carers
- Kinship carer network (for mutual support/ self-help)
- Advocacy (e.g. with Children’s Services or schools etc.)
- Financial support
- Legal Advice and/ or Information
- One to one support (face to face)
- Support emotional or behavioural problems, special needs or learning difficulties.

### **Consultation with family and friends carers**

In order to understand first hand the issues facing family and friends carers, two consultation exercises were held on 13 and 19 July 2011. The first was an informal discussion with Sunderland Area Parents Support, and the second was a formal consultation with family and friends carers known to Children’s Social Work Service by way of the specific orders they hold. The formal consultation was also attended by representatives of Sunderland Carers Centre, First Contact Clinical, and representatives from Sunderland City Council who were facilitating the event.

The informal consultation provided the opportunity to gain insight into the range of issues faced by family and friends carers, while the formal exercise focused on the different aspects of the Family and Friends Care Policy grouped around the following themes:

- Values, principles and objectives
- Legal framework
- Information and support

Both consultations highlighted the complex situations that families can find themselves in which result in the need for alternative care arrangements for children, whether informally or formally. The consultations also underlined the difficulties faced by parents, carers, children and other members of the family network when such a need arises. Difficult decisions are required at a time of crisis when emotions and tensions are understandably high and fraught, complicated further with unclear and confusing information about what practical and legal options are available. Decisions are made quickly with emotionally persuasive factors centred on the immediate care of the child taking precedent over informed decisions that take into account longer term legal, financial, practical arrangements and their own needs as carers.

Having accurate and clear information alongside high quality support at the beginning and throughout the family and friends care arrangements is a critical issue and one which is addressed within this policy. Informed decisions about the most appropriate course of action a carer should take is dependent upon the quality of the information available. Decisions

which fail to account for the longer term implications of caring for a child will serve only to compound the issues and potentially result in more complex problems in the future. In response to the information and support issues highlighted by family and friends carers in Sunderland, the following key messages have informed the Council's Family and Friends Care Policy and subsequent delivery plan:

- Provision of accurate information, which is easily understood, avoids using jargon and is available in print as well as online and verbally, should not be difficult to find, and is essential before carers enter into the formal system
- Information will need to cover the different legal options available, access to support, family group conferences, specialist services, and financial support
- Information needs to be consistent across services and practitioners when dealing with children, families and kinship carers
- Independent support was highlighted as a key need covering advice, rights, welfare rights, legal issues and advocacy
- Having access to support groups for informal support from others in similar circumstances was considered as an essential requirement to be addressed
- Training of social work staff to cover the specific issues associated with family and friends care was highlighted as a requirement, with the potential involvement of carers in the training was seen as beneficial
- Having dedicated family and friends social workers who can take a whole family approach to the issues rather than a child only focus was highlighted as a need.
- Support needs to be ongoing with carers regardless of legal status suggesting that training be made available to help support them in looking after the child in their care.

Linked to the issues highlighted above, there are also key concerns in relation to information, advice and guidance around available legal options. Legal costs can be very high and it is essential that family and friends carers are fully informed about the different options available before pursuing a particular option.

For each option available there are practical and financial considerations to be taken into account by the carers. A full time caring commitment will drastically alter a carer's family unit and will have a direct impact upon their financial circumstances. It is clear from discussions with family and friends carers that financial and other practical implications are not always at the point of crisis but do have the potential to become a major issue in due course. The impact on the financial health of the carer's family unit can be significant, and low household income in combination with increased expenditure can present a real threat to the well-being of the child and the family. In addressing this issue through the Family and Friends Care Policy and delivery plan, it is essential that the approach reflects the commitments to address family and child poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Key to addressing the legal and financial issues faced by family and friends carers is the provision of clear and consistent information, and access to independent advice and support.

There currently exists a lack of information about the scale of family and friends care within Sunderland's minority ethnic communities and the particular challenges faced by these carers. This information will be established as part of the development and implementation of the Policy, through the second phase of consultation and a specific action within the delivery plan.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Giving every child an equal chance: Sunderland Child and Family Poverty Strategy, Phase 2 (2011-2013)

<sup>2</sup> An Equality Impact Assessment forms part of the development of the policy and delivery plan which forms part of the Council's Corporate Equality Plan

As part of the approval process for the Family and Friends Care policy, all family and friends carers involved in the consultation sessions were given the opportunity to feedback their thoughts on the first draft of the policy.

### **Consultation with young people**

In order to incorporate the views of young people a consultation session was carried out on 17 August 2011 with members of the Change Council. The Change Council is Sunderland's children and young people's care council and is made up of young people who are in the care of or are leaving the care of the local authority. Some of the members have first hand experience of being cared for by family and friends carers.

The consultation focused on three of the key principles of the policy:

- Promoting permanence
- Supporting the needs of the child
- Children need to be active participants when decisions are being made about them.

Questions were asked to encourage discussion which linked the above principles to key aspects of the policy including the need to provide support and information, the different care options and legal orders, and the involvement of children and young people in decisions at key points in the process.

The consultation highlighted the vulnerability of children and young people when they are no longer able to remain with their parents, and other care options need to be considered. It also highlighted the emotional difficulties they experience when decisions are being made about them that have a major impact upon their future. No matter how difficult the circumstances are, the need to actively involve children and young people all decisions, from the point of crisis through to long term options being agreed, is of huge significance. All options available, and their implications, must be explained to young people in ways that they can understand.

Having support outside of the family network, including having professionals that they could talk to, as well as peer support and friends, was identified as being very important. They also recognised the need for carers themselves to have professional independent support as well as access to support groups with people in similar situations.

The young people provided insight into the positive and negatives of promoting permanence through family and friends carers. Being placed with people they know, trusted and who understood them, having contact with family, and staying close to friends were all positive aspects. However, it was also recognised that it may not always be the best option to remain in the family network. Negatives that were highlighted included the potential conflict within the family, maybe having to move to a different area and starting again, and where older relatives become the carers, the bigger age gap may be a problem for the carer as well as the young person. Having the right information, advice and support was considered an essential part of dealing with this.

The young people's responses were largely consistent with those of the carers, identified in the previous section. However, in addition the young people highlighted the following key messages which have informed the Council's Family and Friends Care Policy and subsequent delivery plan:

- Relevant information about what is happening and what the options are, needs to be presented in way they can understand, which also takes into account the age of the children and young people
- Children, young people and carers need support outside the family from support groups and professionals
- Support from professionals has to be available which best promotes the interest of the child, which includes, when it is safe, supporting contact with parents, and possible return to the parents
- Emotional and practical support, including support for carers in dealing with children and young people, and financial support, needs to be considered
- Background checks on all carers
- Children and young people need to be treated with respect and honesty, and not provided with misleading information that may lead to expectations that cannot be achieved
- Children and young people need to be involved, according to their age and ability, in the decisions at every stage.

### **Further Consultation**

Members of the Children's Trust also considered the draft policy as part of the approval process, as did elected Members of the council.

Sunderland City Council will frequently consult with Family and Friends Carers, the young people they care for and partners involved in delivering services to this group, to ensure that the service they receive is continually improving.

### **Publicising the policy**

In order to publicise the Council's approach to family and friends carers in the city, the agreed policy will be made widely available through a range of distribution methods.

The policy will be circulated electronically, and where necessary in printed format, to all relevant Council directorates, services and personnel, as well as to relevant partner organisations and family and friends carers. The policy will be posted online via appropriate Council and partner websites, and support groups will also be encouraged to publish the policy on their sites.

A poster will also be produced which sets out the key principles of the policy and the support available for family and friends carers, along with contact details for further information. The poster will be circulated electronically and hard copies printed for display in key sites across the city.

## SUNDERLAND'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE POLICY STATEMENT

Children's Services, as a key partner in Sunderland's Children's Trust, is committed to the long-term vision of:

*'Working together to improve life chances and raise aspirations for each child and young person in Sunderland, and to narrow the gap in outcomes for our most vulnerable groups and families'*

The Children's Trust also works to a number of principles, one of which **directly** links to the aims of this policy:

*'Have every child, young person and their family at the heart of all we do, and to build resilience in children and young people whilst supporting parents and carers to help improve outcomes for their children'*

Sunderland City Council is very clear that children and young people who are brought up by their birth parents can often achieve the best outcomes in life.

However, this is not always the case. Some children and young people are not able to live with their parents, for a number of reasons. In these cases, Children's Social Work Service will always promote that they should, where it is possible and appropriate, live in the care of extended family members or friends. Family members or friends, who children and young people trust and are comfortable with, will often be able to provide the most stable environment in which the child can grow up.

### SUPPORT OFFERED BY SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL

- In the interests of safeguarding and promoting a child's welfare, Children's Social Work Service will always consult with immediate family members or friends who have a strong connection to the child, to find out whether they are willing and able to provide appropriate care for the child.
- Children's Social Work Service will offer families who are experiencing difficulties a **Family Group Conference**, at an early stage. A Family Group Conference can enable families to work together to make the best plan possible for their children, and ensure that they remain in their care and not the care of the local authority. Further information about Family Group Conferences can be found at Annex B.
- Where children and young people live in the care of family and friends, Children's Social Work Service will provide support, information, advice, guidance and signposting to relevant agencies, to carers and children to ensure that they are able to make an informed decision about the options available to them and that the child(ren)'s needs are understood and met.
- Children's Social Work Service will ensure that realistic expectations are communicated in ways that are understood by family and friends carers, children and young people, and their parents.
- Children's Social Work Service and other agencies have adopted a 'whole-family' approach to providing services in the city. This means that the individual needs of children and young people will be addressed within the context of the family unit, and recognises the critical role that family and friends carers have within this. Children's Social Work Service will work collaboratively with families and other agencies involved,

to ensure the best outcomes for the family and permanence for the child or children is achieved.

- Children's Social Work Service will always consult with children and young people about their care, involve them in all decisions made about them, and take their wishes into account in a way which is appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Where there is no legal arrangement linked to the care of the child, responsibility for supporting the child financially remains with the parents. They will be strongly encouraged to financially contribute to their child's care and transfer any state benefits they receive in respect of the child (such as child benefit, child tax credits, disability living allowance) to the child's current carer. Children's Social Work Service will only provide financial assistance to family and friends carers in exceptional circumstances and this will be means tested. This is in line with Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, linked to Children in Need.
- Children's Social Work Service will provide support to family and friends carers in dealing with different local authorities where there are cross-boundary issues, i.e. the carer lives in a different local authority area to the birth parents of the child.
- Children's Social Work Service will work with neighbouring north east authorities to develop regional arrangements, so that all authorities are working to the same principles. In addition to this, a local delivery plan will be produced.
- Children's Social Work Service will identify services available to family and friends carers and children and young people that can support the management of contact arrangements and offer independent supervision of contact where necessary.
- Children's Social Work Service will meet its legal duties in relation to family and friends care. In order to provide an enhanced service, we will work with partner agencies and the voluntary and community sector to ensure that family and friends carers and children and young people can access the support services they need, including individual advice and guidance, support at meetings, peer support and other support groups, learning and training opportunities.
- Children's Social Work Service will not necessarily be involved with family and friends carers and the children or young people they care for. However, if family and friends carers feel they need support in relation to the child or young person's safety or welfare, they should contact the service (see Annex D for contact details).



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The majority of family and friends carers act informally by agreement with those holding parental responsibility for the children and young people they care for. For example, a family member may take action to prevent a child entering the care system. Provided they are a close relative or have parental responsibility for the child, there is no requirement to notify the local authority of the arrangement. This is referred to as 'informal family care'.

### Common Assessment Framework

If a child or young person in family and friends care requires additional support, a professional working with them may carry out a Common Assessment Framework (CAF). This is a process which leads to a range of professionals, together with the family and friends carers and the child or young person agreeing the type of support needed and arranging for that to be put in place. This is known as Team Around the Family (TAF) or Team Around the Child (TAC). This does not require the formal involvement of Children's Social Work Service.

### Initial Assessment

If the needs of the child/young person or family cannot be met through the CAF, it may be that a referral for an initial assessment needs to be made. In this case, the local authority will have a number of statutory powers and duties in respect of the child or young person. The legal framework under which local authorities must operate in such cases is set out at Annex A.

### Private Fostering

In some circumstances, family and friend carers may be subject to the requirements of legislation that covers private fostering arrangements. A private fostering arrangement is essentially one that is made privately (that is to say without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be:

- from the extended family such as a cousin or great aunt
- a friend of the family
- the parent of a friend of the child
- someone previously unknown to the child's family but connected with the child.

However, a person who is a close relative, i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage) or step-parent **will not** be a private foster carer.

Further information about private foster care arrangements can be found at Annex A.

### Family and friends foster care

If a child or young person becomes looked after by the local authority, Children's Social Work Service has a duty to give preference to a placement with a person who is a relative, friend or other person connected with the child, and the potential carer must be assessed and approved as local authority foster carer. Family and friends foster carers are entitled to the same level of support as other local authority foster carers and will receive the full fostering maintenance rate for the age of the child in placement. Depending on whether the

child or young person is looked after under a voluntary agreement with the parent(s) or a care order, parental responsibility will lie either with the birth parents, or be shared between the local authority and the birth parents.

### **Residence Order**

A residence order is a court order which decides who a child will live with. In these cases parental responsibility is shared between the birth parent(s) and the carer who holds the residence order, but the carer may make decisions to meet the child or young person's daily needs without the permission of the birth parent(s). Birth parents can request for the residence order to be removed but the court will only do this if it considers it to be in the child's best interests. The local authority can pay a Residence Order Allowance to family and friends carers, but this will be at the local authority's discretion and will generally be paid only where Children's Social Work Service has had previous and significant involvement.

Family and friends carers can apply for a residence order if the child or young person has lived with them for at least three years, or for one year immediately preceding the application in the case of a close relative.

### **Special Guardianship Order**

A special guardianship order, like a residence order, is awarded by the courts. It offers more security than a residence order because a parent cannot request for it to be removed unless the court has given permission to do so. Parental responsibility is shared between birth parents and the family and friends carer. However, a special guardian can exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of others who share it, which means they can make all the major decisions about a child's upbringing without consulting the birth parents.

The local authority can pay a Special Guardianship Allowance to family and friends carers, but this will be at the local authority's discretion and will generally be paid only where Children's Social Work Service has had previous and significant involvement.

Family and friends carers can apply for a special guardianship order if the child or young person has lived with them for three out of the last five years, or for one year immediately preceding the application in the case of a close relative or an approved local authority foster carer.

### **Adoption Order**

Adoption is a court order which creates a new legal relationship between a child and his/her carer. Adoption permanently ends the legal relationship between the child and their birth family, and once an adoption order is made it cannot be revoked. An approved foster carer can apply for an adoption order after caring for a child for one year. Other informal carers can apply for an adoption order if the child has lived with them for a period of three years. However, if this is not the case it is possible to apply for an adoption order if the court gives leave to do so.

## MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPRESENTATIONS

Children's Services aims to provide high quality services to all customers at all times. The Head of Safeguarding is responsible for ensuring that local authority employees understand this policy and operate within its framework, so that it is applied in a consistent and fair manner. Children's Services will ensure that local partners are aware of their responsibilities towards children and young people living in family and friends care arrangements and will support partners to be proactive in meeting the needs of these families.

All Council employees responsible for implementing the policy will have appropriate training to ensure they understand the issues that family and friends carers are faced with.

We are pleased to hear from anyone who can give feedback on our services – whether this is a compliment or a complaint – as this helps us to plan and improve. The majority of people who do use our services are satisfied. However, if you are unhappy with the service you receive and wish to make a complaint, we have a clear procedure and dedicated Complaints and Feedback Officers to help you do this. Parents, foster carers and other adults can also use this procedure on behalf of a child or young person.

Information and advice on making compliments and complaints about Children's Services is available by contacting:

Children's Services Complaints and Feedback Team  
Sunderland City Council  
Room 3.4  
Civic Centre  
Sunderland  
SR2 7DN

Tel: 0191 561 1296  
Email: [complaints.team@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:complaints.team@sunderland.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.sunderland.gov.uk](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk)

### Advocacy

Advocates can assist you in making a complaint. An advocate will help you to make your complaint but they do not investigate it. There are a number of advocacy services available and the Complaints and Feedback Officer within Children's Services can offer further information on these.

There is also an independent advocacy service for children and young people who wish to make a complaint. This can be accessed by contacting either the Children's Services Complaints and Feedback Team or the advocacy service directly at:

Action for Children  
North East Children's Rights Services  
Third Floor  
Mea House  
Ellison Place  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 8XS

Tel: 0191 261 9212  
Email: [necrs@actionforchildren.org.uk](mailto:necrs@actionforchildren.org.uk)  
Web: [www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)

### **Other support available**

If you prefer, you can contact a number of other people if you are unhappy with the service you receive from Children's Services. This could be one of your local Councillors, your MP, or a solicitor. You can also approach the Local Government Ombudsman should you wish to do so (see contact details below)

Address: Local Government Ombudsman, Beverley House, 17 Shipton Road, York,  
YO30 5FZ  
Tel: 01904 380200  
Fax: 01904 380269  
Website: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

## **LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

As previously set out, many family and friends carers act informally in private arrangements between themselves and the child's parents. However, in some cases, the local authority will have a number of statutory powers and duties which family and friends carers should be aware of, specifically where the child is identified as a 'child in need' or becomes a looked after child as defined by the Children Act 1989.

This section outlines the legal framework under which local authorities must operate in line with the Children Act 1989. It also describes the different types of family and friends care arrangements to raise awareness of the different options available to people caring for someone else's child.

## **CHILDREN IN NEED**

### **Definition of children in need**

Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 sets out the definition for 'children in need' as:

- children and young people who need local authority services to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development; or
- children and young people who need local authority services to prevent significant or further harm to their health or development; or
- children and young people who are disabled.

### **Duties of the local authority in respect of children in need**

Under Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989, the local authority has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in the city, and to promote wherever possible the upbringing of these children by their families by providing an appropriate range of services. This means that Sunderland City Council has a legal duty to assist families who need help in bringing up their children, and to provide family support services to reduce the need for children to be looked after.

'Family' in relation to such a child includes not only a person who has parental responsibility for the child but also any other person with whom the child has been living with. Parental responsibility refers to all the rights, duties and responsibilities which by law a parent has in relation to a child.

Where it appears that a child or young person and their family are in need of local authority support, Children's Social Work Service is responsible for carrying out a Child in Need Assessment. A range of targeted and specialist support services may be provided by the local authority under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 if it is appropriate. Family and friends carers who are caring for a 'child in need' may also be eligible for these services, which can include:

- specialist advice, guidance and counselling
- parenting support and training programmes
- child and adolescent mental health services
- assistance to organise family holidays and days out
- domiciliary care
- respite care
- overnight short breaks for young disabled people aged 8 to 18
- accommodation services
- referral to other agencies where appropriate

## **Financial assistance**

There is no entitlement to financial support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, however, Sunderland Children's Social Work Service has the discretion to provide financial assistance where this is assessed to be the most appropriate way to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. This can take the form of a loan, regular or one-off cash payment, or payment in kind (e.g. vouchers), as well as financial support towards accommodation costs.

## **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

A child is 'looked after' when he/she is in the care of the local authority under a care order or emergency protection order, or when he/she is provided with accommodation by the local authority by voluntary agreement with the parents.

### **Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (Accommodation)**

Under this section, children and young people can come into the care of a local authority by a voluntary agreement with the parents (or the young person if he/she is aged over 16). The local authority has a duty to provide accommodation for any child in need if:

- there is no person with parental responsibility for the child
- the child is lost or abandoned; or
- the person who has been caring for the child is prevented from providing suitable accommodation or care, for whatever reason.

When a child is accommodated under Section 20, no court proceedings are involved, and the parents retain parental responsibility. This means that no action can be taken in relation to the child without the consent of the parents, and the parents may remove their children from such accommodation at any time, without notice.

### **Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (Care Order)**

The local authority will seek a court order if it considers that a child is not receiving the sort of care that is reasonable to expect from a parent, and this lack of care is causing the child significant harm. A care order is a court order made under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 which places a child compulsorily in the care of the local authority. Only a local authority or the NSPCC can apply for care orders.

The court may only make a care order if it is certain that:

- the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm; and
- the harm is caused by the child's parents, or
- the harm would be caused because of insufficient care being given to the child by the parents in the future, or
- the child is likely to suffer harm because he/she is beyond parental control.

When a child is subject to a care order, the local authority shares parental responsibility with the parents, however, the local authority can override the wishes of the parents if it believes this would be in the child's best interest.

## **Duties of the local authority in respect of looked after children**

The local authority has a duty to consider placing a child with an appropriate relative, friend or other person connected with the child (i.e. someone who would not fit the term 'relative or friend' but who has a pre-existing relationship with the child) before considering a placement with unrelated foster carers. If a relative, friend or other connected person is able and willing to care for the child, that person must then be approved as a local authority foster carer (see page 18).

The local authority also has a number of responsibilities towards looked after children (either by care order or voluntarily accommodation). The local authority must ensure that:

- the child or young person is allocated a social worker;
- the child or young person is provided with accommodation which meets his/her needs;
- the child or young person receives the best possible education – this includes making sure that young children access high quality nursery provision and that children and young people are supported to do as well as they possibly can in education;
- when making any decision about the child, the local authority consults the child, the parents or others with parental responsibility, and anyone else whose wishes and feelings are considered to be relevant, unless declared otherwise by the court;
- a care plan is drawn up for the child which sets out the placement plan, how the child's health, education and welfare will be supported, how contact with family and friends will be maintained, and the long term 'permanent' plan for the child (which might be returning to the family home, being looked after by foster carers or adoption). Wherever possible, plans must be drawn up in agreement with the child and key family members.
- the care plan is reviewed every six months by an Independent Reviewing Officer;
- a personal education plan in place if the child is of school age;
- the child receives regular medical assessments;
- contact is promoted between the child, parents, relatives, friends and any other person connected with the child unless such contact is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's welfare;
- the local authority assesses and meets the needs of children and young people aged 16 and 17 who are in care or care leavers, and keeps in touch with care leavers until they are at least 21 years of age.

## **FORMS OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE**

The majority of family and friends carers act informally by agreement with those holding parental responsibility for the children and young people they care for. For example, a family member may take action to prevent a child entering the care system. Providing they are a close relative or have parental responsibility for the child, there is no requirement to notify the local authority of the arrangement (see 'Informal family care' below). Most arrangements remain entirely private without the need for the involvement of Children's Social Work Service, unless the child meets the criteria to receive support as a 'child in need'.

In other circumstances, family and friend carers may be subject to the requirements of legislation that covers private fostering arrangements, residence orders, special guardianship orders or children who are looked after by the local authority.

An explanation of the different legal frameworks which might apply when caring for somebody else's child is set out below.

### **(i) Informal family care**

This is a private arrangement whereby a close relative, i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage) or step-parent, chooses to take on the care of child but does not have parental responsibility and the arrangement was not made by the local authority.

#### **Parental responsibility**

Parental responsibility remains with the birth parent(s) but the family carer may do what is reasonable to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

#### **Assessment and approval process**

There is no statutory requirement for the local authority to assess and approve a family carer so long as they are a close relative.

#### **Supervision and review**

There is no statutory duty on the local authority to provide supervision and review of the placement unless the child or young person becomes known to the local authority as a 'child in need'.

#### **Support services available**

All family and friends carers can access universal services such as day care facilities for children under 5, after-school and holiday activities for school age children, support with securing a school place, and anti-bullying support. For information on the full range of services available to families in Sunderland, please contact the Family Information Service:

Families Information Service  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor, City Library and Arts Centre  
Fawcett St  
Sunderland SR1 1RE  
Tel: 0191 520 5505  
Email: [fis@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:fis@sunderland.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.familiesinfoservice.com](http://www.familiesinfoservice.com)



Targeted and specialist support services may also be available to family and friends carers where the child is assessed as a 'child in need' under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

### **Entitlement to financial support**

The parent(s) remain financially responsible for the child, and family and friends carers should look to the child's parents to provide the primary means of financial support to them to care for the child. Family carers may be eligible for state benefits available for the child's maintenance (such as child benefit, child tax credits, disability living allowance) but only if these are not being paid to the child's parents. (Note: two people cannot receive benefits for the same child). If this is the case, family carers who wish to make a claim will need to agree with the parents that they can make a claim instead.

Family carers may also qualify for Guardian's Allowance if they are caring for a child who has lost one or both of their parents. Information and advice on claiming benefits can be found in Annex D.

### **(ii) Private Fostering**

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (without the involvement of the local authority), for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or 18 if the child or young person is disabled) by someone who is not a close relative with the intention that it should last, continuously, for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be:

- from the extended family such as a cousin or great aunt
- a friend of the family
- the parent of a friend of the child
- someone previously unknown to the child's family but connected with the child. This could include someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity, such as a childminder, a teacher or a youth worker.

However, a person who is a close relative, i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage) or step-parent **will not** be a private foster carer.

### **Legal obligations of a private foster carer**

Whilst private fostering arrangements can be made without the involvement of the local authority, it does have clear duties and functions in relation to private fostering if the arrangement is to last more than 28 days. Anyone involved in or aware of a private fostering arrangement has a legal responsibility to notify the local council. This is to ensure that private foster carers do not miss out on essential welfare checks for the child and other support services available.

Private foster carers must give Children's Social Work Service at least six weeks written notice of their intention to foster a child privately. If the arrangement was not planned in advance, Children's Social Work Service must be notified within 48 hours of the child arriving at the home of the private foster carer.

To notify Children's Social Work Service of a private fostering arrangement, or for more information, please contact:

Children's Services  
Cassaton House  
43-49 Fawcett Street  
Sunderland SR1 1RR  
Tel: 0191 520 5555  
Email: [childrens.services@ssd.sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:childrens.services@ssd.sunderland.gov.uk)

Private foster carers must also notify the Council within 48 hours of a privately fostered child leaving their care, and they must provide the name and address of the person who will be caring for the child.

### **Parental responsibility**

The private foster carer becomes responsible for providing the day to day care of the child. However, parental responsibility remains with the birth parent(s) in a private fostering arrangement. This means that the birth parents remain legally responsible for safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare and they should be involved in all major decisions concerning the child.

### **Assessment and approval process**

Sunderland City Council does not formally approve or register private foster carers. However, it is the duty of the local authority to ensure that all children and young people in the city who are being privately fostered are safe and properly cared for. Sunderland City Council has procedures for determining the suitability of all aspects of a private fostering arrangement.

A social worker will carry out a full assessment, including statutory checks on all adult members of the household. The purpose of the assessment is two-fold: to establish whether the private foster carers and their household and premises provide an environment in which the child's welfare will be safeguarded and promoted, and to assess whether the child is a 'child in need' under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Based on the information gathered through the assessment, a senior manager within Children's Social Work Service will make a decision as to whether or not the placement should continue.

### **Supervision and review**

Children's Social Work Service is required by law to visit a child who is privately fostered every six weeks in the first year, and every 12 weeks thereafter.

### **Support services available**

Sunderland City Council offers advice and support to private foster carers on all matters relating to the arrangement. Please refer to Annex C for a list of services available to private foster carers.

Private foster carers are also given the contact details of the social worker whom they can contact at any time if they have any worries about the care of the child.

## **Entitlement to financial support**

The parent(s) remain financially responsible for the child, and private foster carers should look to the child's parents to provide the primary means of financial support to them to care for the child. Private foster carers may be eligible for state benefits available for the child's maintenance (such as child benefit, child tax credits, disability living allowance) but only if these are not being claimed by the parents. If this is the case, private foster carers who wish to make a claim will need to agree with the parents that they can make a claim instead. Information and advice on claiming benefits can be found in Annex C.

### **(iii) Family and friends foster care**

If a child is no longer able to live with their birth parents, and becomes a looked after child, Children's Social Work Service has a duty to give preference to a placement with a person who is a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a local authority foster carer.

## **Parental responsibility**

If the child is looked after voluntarily, under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, parental responsibility remains with the parent(s). If the child is subject to a care order or emergency protection order, the local authority shares parental responsibility with the parent(s).

## **Assessment and approval**

Where Children's Social Work Service has agreed that a child needs to be looked after by the local authority, and a family / friend carer has been identified as being able to provide a suitable placement for the child, the family / friend carer **must** be assessed and approved as a foster carer in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

In certain situations, an immediate placement may be necessary and it will not be possible to complete the full fostering approval process before the placement begins. Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 allows the local authority to place a child with a relative, friend or other connected person for a maximum of 16 weeks whilst this person is being assessed as a foster carer.

Sunderland City Council recognises that, unlike many non-related foster carers who begin the assessment process at a time of their choosing, family and friends carers usually have to make decisions about whether to take a child into their own home at short notice in response to a crisis. This means that family and friends carers will not always have prepared themselves in the same way for an assessment by a social worker, which can often feel intrusive. The proposed carer should be given information about the assessment process which will follow if the placement is to last longer than 16 weeks, including the need for CRB checks and other agency enquiries on all members of the household aged 16 and over, as well as interviews with referees, adult children and ex-partners, which will be part of any such fostering assessment.

## **Supervision and review**

Looked after children in foster care will be visited by their social worker as a minimum of once within the first week of placement, every six weeks in the first year and every three months within the second year of placement. Those children and young people placed immediately with family and friends under Regulation 24 will be visited by a social worker on a weekly basis until the carers are approved as local authority foster carers

The local authority is also required to review the approval of foster carers at least once a year.

### **Support services available**

All foster carers have an allocated social worker who will visit on a regular basis. As a looked after child, the child will receive local authority support for their health and education needs and may be eligible for leaving care support services.

Family and friends foster carers will also have access to support from the council's Fostering Service. A list of services available to local authority foster carers in Sunderland can be found in Annex C.

### **Entitlement to financial support**

All family and friends carers who are approved as local foster carers must be paid the full fostering maintenance rate for the age of the child in placement. As part of the assessment and approval process, the Fostering Service may also provide an initial financial grant to carers for essential equipment and furniture.

Foster carers cannot claim child benefit or other ordinary state benefits in relation to children and young people, but they may be able to claim Disability Living Allowance or Mobility Allowance for disabled children and young people. They would also be able to claim benefits for themselves and any dependent children and young people that they are not receiving foster care maintenance payments for.

## **LONG TERM LEGAL OPTIONS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARERS**

Where a relative, friend or other connected person wishes to make a long term commitment to caring for a child, they may apply for a residence order or a special guardianship order to obtain parental responsibility and a legally protected arrangement. Where a child is already living with a family and friends carer it may also be possible for them to apply for an adoption order. An explanation of the different types of court orders available to family and friends carers is set out below.

### **(iv) Residence Order**

A residence order is a court order under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989, which settles arrangements as to the person with whom a child will live. The granting of a residence order discharges a care order, if one is in force.

In order to apply for a residence order, a family and friends carer must be one of the following:

- A guardian of the child
- A person with whom the child has lived for a period of at least three years
- A close relative with whom the child has lived with for one year immediately preceding the application, under a 2008 amendment to the Children Act 1989.

OR

- Where the child is in local authority care, have the consent of the local authority
- Have the consent of all those with parental responsibility
- Have the consent of the person currently holding a residence order in respect of the child

However, if this is not the case it is possible to apply for a residence order if the court gives leave to do so.

### **Parental responsibility**

Where a residence order is made in favour of a family and friends carer, the carer automatically acquires parental responsibility which is then shared with the birth parent(s). However, the holder of the residence order can make decisions to safeguard and protect the child and enable them to meet their daily needs without the permission of the child's parent(s).

Birth parents have the right to apply for the residence order to be discharged. Although the court will only discharge the order if it considers this is in the child's best interests, it can be stressful and costly to respond to the application.

### **Assessment and approval process**

Applications for a residence order are made through the court. There will be an assessment of the applicant's suitability as a long-term carer and their ability to meet the needs of the child. Where the local authority has had previous involvement with the child, or the child is looked after, Children's Social Work Service will be asked to carry out the assessment. If not, the assessment will be undertaken by a CAFCASS (the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) officer.

### **Supervision and review**

There is no statutory duty on the local authority to provide supervision and review of the placement. However, the approach in Sunderland is to work with the voluntary and community sector to support the family and friends carers to meet the child's or young person's needs.

### **Support services available**

Please refer to Annex C for support services which may be available to family and friends carers holding a residence order.

### **Entitlement to financial support**

Financial support is provided at the local authority's discretion. A residence order allowance will only be considered for family and friends carers in situations where:

- Children's Social Work Service has had a substantial role in placing the child away from their parents
- Children's Social Work Service has requested that they care for the child as a direct alternative to the child becoming looked after.
- the child was made subject to a residence order as part of care proceedings

Any allowances will be means tested and subject to annual review.

Residence order holders may also be eligible for state benefits available for the child's maintenance (such as child benefit, child tax credits, disability living allowance) but only if these are not being paid to the birth parent(s). Information and advice on claiming benefits can be found in Annex C.

**(v) Special guardianship order**

Special guardianship is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children and young people who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement. It is a more secure order than a residence order because a parent cannot apply to discharge it unless they have the permission of the court to do so; however, it is less secure than an adoption order because it does not end the legal relationship between the child and his/her birth parent(s). The granting of a special guardianship order discharges a care order, if one is in force.

To be eligible for special guardianship, a carer must be one of the following:

- A guardian of the child
- Currently holding a residence order in respect of the child
- A person with whom the child has lived with for three out of the last five years
- A close relative with whom the child has lived with for one year immediately preceding the application
- A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application

OR

- Where the child is in local authority care, have the consent of the local authority
- Have the consent of all those with parental responsibility
- Have the consent of the person currently holding a residence order in respect of the child

However, if this is not the case it is possible to apply for a special guardianship order if the court gives leave to do so.

**Parental responsibility**

A special guardian will share parental responsibility for the child with his/her birth parents. However, special guardians can exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others who share it. This means that the special guardians can make all the major decisions about a child's upbringing and do not have to consult with the parents about these decisions.

The special guardian can also appoint a guardian for the child in the event of his or her death.

As the parent(s) retain parental responsibility, there may be a times where the birth parent(s) would need to be consulted. For example, a special guardian cannot give their consent to change a child's surname, or live abroad for more than 3 months without the agreement of others with parental responsibility, or the leave of the court. The special guardian cannot override a parent's refusal to consent to the adoption of the child.

**Assessment and approval process**

Someone intending to apply to a court for a special guardianship order must give the local authority three months notice. Once an application has been made to the court, the local authority will carry out an assessment and prepare a report for the court. A social worker will assess the suitability of the applicant to be a special guardian and make a recommendation to the court. The final decision about whether or not a special guardianship order is granted lies with the court.

## **Supervision and review**

There is no statutory duty on the local authority to provide supervision and review of the placement. However, the approach in Sunderland is to work with the voluntary and community sector to support the family and friends carers to meet the child's or young person's needs.

## **Support services available**

If the child was looked after prior to making the special guardianship order, the local authority must carry out an assessment for special guardianship support services. Provision of these services is at the discretion of the local authority. For a list of services that may be available to special guardians, please refer to Annex C.

At the age of 16, a young person who was looked after prior to the making of a special guardianship order becomes eligible for the support under the Leaving Care Act, as a 'Qualifying Person'. This entitles them to:

- Advice and support (this could be financial) up to the age of 21 years;
- Financial assistance for accommodation costs during vacations whilst undertaking a course of higher education (up to 21 years).

In addition, support groups for special guardians, prospective special guardians, children subject to special guardianship orders and their parents are included in services prescribed by the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005.

## **Entitlement to financial support**

Financial support is provided at the local authority's discretion. A special guardianship allowance will only be considered for family and friends carers in situations where:

- Children's Social Work Service has had a substantial role in placing the child away from their parents
- Children's Social Work Service has requested that they care for the child as a direct alternative to the child becoming looked after.
- the child was made subject to a special guardianship order as part of care proceedings

Any allowances will be means tested and subject to annual review.

Special guardians may also be eligible for state benefits available for the child's maintenance (such as child benefit, child tax credits, disability living allowance) but only if these are not being paid to the birth parent(s). Information and advice on claiming benefits can be found in Annex C.

## **(vi) Adoption order**

Adoption is a court order which creates a new legal relationship between a child and his/her carer. Adoption permanently ends the legal relationship between the child and their birth family, and once an adoption order is made it cannot be revoked.

An approved foster carer can apply for an adoption order after caring for a child for one year. Other informal carers can apply for an adoption order if the child has lived with them for a period of three years. However, if this is not the case it is possible to apply for an adoption order if the court gives leave to do so.

## **Parental responsibility**

When an adoption order is made, parental responsibility is transferred to the adopters and the child's legal relationship with the birth parents is severed.

## **Assessment and approval process**

Where the child is not looked after, then family and friends carers must give notice to the local authority of their intention to adopt. The local authority will then carry out an assessment and prepare a report on the applicant's suitability to adopt the child and whether adoption is in the child's best interest. This will involve home visits from an adoption social worker and detailed discussions around various aspects of the carer's history, relationships past and present, family structure, support network, financial situation and employment. The social worker will also carry out statutory checks on all members of the household aged 16 and over, as well as interviews with referees, adult children and ex-partners. Based on the assessment, the local authority will make a recommendation to the court on the suitability of an adoptive placement.

Where a child is looked after, prospective adopters (including family and friends foster carers) must be assessed and approved as adopters in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and its associated regulations and statutory guidance.

## **Supervision and review**

Once the adoption order is granted, this is a permanent arrangement, where the adopter accepts full parental responsibility for care of the child. There is, therefore, no need for supervision of the placement and the placement, nor for the placement to be reviewed.

## **Support services available for family**

Adopters are entitled to an assessment for adoption support services, which may be provided at the discretion of the local authority. Services which may be available to adopters are listed in Annex C.

## **Entitlement to financial support**

Where the child was looked after prior to the making of an adoption order, adopters are entitled to an assessment for financial support, which may be provided at the discretion of the local authority.

Adopters may also be eligible for state benefits available for the child's maintenance (such as child benefit, child tax credits, disability living allowance). Information and advice on claiming benefits can be found in Annex C.



**FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE**

All families are different and will experience difficulties from time to time, which can be resolved fairly easily. However in some cases, where children and young people are involved, families may need some support in working through their issues in order to safeguard the wellbeing of the child(ren). Support can come from Children's Services departments, health services and/or other agencies.

Where support is required, Family Group Conferences can be arranged as a way of enabling families to work together to make the best plan possible for their children, and ensure that they can remain in the care of their families.

A Family Group Conference is a decision making and planning forum in which the wider family group makes plans and decisions for children and young people who have been identified, either by the family themselves or by service providers, as being in need of a plan that will safeguard and promote their welfare.

The primary decision makers at a Family Group Conference are the family members rather than the professionals. The child(ren) is also directly involved in the process and in all decisions made about their lives. The family plan that is devised must take account of any stipulations made by the referring agency (typically the local authority) in order for it to be agreed.

The plan will aim to:

- ensure that the child or young person lives in a safe environment
- provide an opportunity for the family to develop solutions to their issues, using their understanding of the child to decide what is best for them
- encourage the child or young person to take part in the decisions that directly affect them.

Family Group Conferences are most effective when they are held as early as possible, at the point at which difficulties are identified.

Sunderland Children's Social Work Service can support families to arrange Family Group Conferences.

**ANNEX C**

**SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED BY SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARERS**

	<b>Informal Family Carers</b>	<b>Private Foster Carers</b>	<b>Local authority approved foster carers</b>	<b>Residence Order</b>	<b>Special Guardianship Order</b>	<b>Adoption Order</b>
Financial support	No	No	Yes	At the discretion of the local authority	At the discretion of the local authority	At the discretion of the local authority
Access to support groups	Access to support groups within the community	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Assistance with contact arrangements between children and their parents	No	No	Yes	Not routinely provided, but may do so if needed	Not routinely provided, but may do so if needed	Yes
Mediation to help resolve difficulties with contact or disagreements between carers and parents	Not routinely provided, but may do so if requested by a parent or carer	Not routinely provided, but may do so if requested by a parent or carer	Yes			Yes
Therapeutic services for child(ren)	No	No	Yes – by referral, where appropriate	Yes – by referral, where appropriate	Yes – by referral, where appropriate	Yes – by referral, where appropriate
Respite care	No	No	No	No	No	No
Parenting programmes	Access to universal parenting programmes	Yes – access to specialised training sessions for foster carers	Yes – specialised training sessions for foster carers	Access to universal parenting programmes	Access to universal parenting programmes	Yes – access to specialised training sessions for adopters

	<b>Informal Family Carers</b>	<b>Private Foster Carers</b>	<b>Local authority approved foster carers</b>	<b>Residence Order</b>	<b>Special Guardianship Order</b>	<b>Adoption Order</b>
Advice and information	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Financial support with legal fees	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	In some circumstances, assistance may be provided, at the discretion of the local authority	In some circumstances, assistance may be provided, at the discretion of the local authority	In some circumstances, assistance may be provided, at the discretion of the local authority
Allocated social worker	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

**The following universal services are available to all family and friends carers, regardless of the legal status of the care arrangement:**

- Parenting programmes
- After-school and holiday care or activities for school age children
- Day care facilities for children under 5 and not yet at school
- Leisure Centre services
- Children's Centre services
- Family health and wellness services
- Social, cultural and recreational activities provided by Children's Services
- Advice on claiming benefits
- Support with school placements

## USEFUL CONTACTS

Listed below are a number of contacts that Family and Friends Carers can access for support. As part of ongoing improvements to the service that Family and Friends Carers in Sunderland receive, work is being undertaken to extend this list, and provide specific and accurate information about local support groups in the city and wider region.

### SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL

#### Children's Social Work Service

Provides social work support to Family and Friends Carers where the child/ren are assessed as children in need or in need of protection. Where the child/ren are not assessed in this way, signposting information is provided to help Family and Friends Carers access other forms of support they need.

Address: Cassaton House, Fawcett Street, Sunderland SR1 1RR  
 Tel: 0191 520 5555  
 Web: [www.sunderland.gov.uk](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk)

#### Families Information Service

A service for all parents and carers that provides information about all aspects of family life, such as childcare, schools, family activities, benefits etc. The service can offer help, advice or signposting to other organisations.

Address: Families Information Service, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, City Library and Arts Centre, Fawcett St, Sunderland SR1 1RE  
 Tel: 0191 520 5505 (Monday to Friday 8.30am-6.00pm)  
 0191 520 5505 (Out of office hours answer machine)  
 Email: [fis@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:fis@sunderland.gov.uk)  
 Website: [www.familiesinfoservice.com](http://www.familiesinfoservice.com)

### LOCAL SUPPORT GROUPS AND INFORMATION SERVICES

#### More than Grandparents (Sunderland)

Provides independent support and campaigning network led by, and for, grandparent kinship carers, particularly those who are caring for their grandchildren as a result of their parents' substance misuse. More than Grandparents are aiming to find solutions to the barriers and difficulties faced by grandparent kinship carers in this situation.

Tel: 0191 567 3232 (Kate Conqueror, based at Sunderland Carers' Centre)  
 07813 109 215 (Sue Robson)  
 Email: [sue@suerobson.co.uk](mailto:sue@suerobson.co.uk)

#### Sunderland Area Parent Support Group

Community based project that delivers support and services to the families of substance users across the City of Sunderland.

Address: Meadow Nursery Cottage, Silksworth Gardens, Sunderland SR3 2PE  
 Tel: 0191 520 3444  
 Email: [southareaparents@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:southareaparents@hotmail.co.uk)  
 Website: [www.sunderlandareaparentsupport.org](http://www.sunderlandareaparentsupport.org)

### **Sunderland Carers Centre**

Sunderland Carers' Centre provides confidential information, advice and support to people looking after a family member, partner, friend or neighbour, who due to illness, disability, frailty or addiction, is unable to manage alone. This includes grandparents or other family members who have responsibility for children because of the illness, disability or addiction problems of the parents.

The Centre also offers carer support groups; support at meetings with health, social services and other agencies; courses; social activities; free newsletter; opportunities to influence service development; and support and activities for young carers.

The Carers' Centre is open Monday – Friday, 9am to 5pm. Out of office hours by appointment.

Address: 12 Toward Road, Sunderland SR1 2QF  
Tel: 0191 567 3232  
Email: [info@sunderlandcarers.co.uk](mailto:info@sunderlandcarers.co.uk)  
[youngcarers@sunderlandcarers.co.uk](mailto:youngcarers@sunderlandcarers.co.uk) (Young Carers Email)  
Website: [www.sunderlandcarers.co.uk](http://www.sunderlandcarers.co.uk)

### **NATIONAL SUPPORT GROUPS**

#### **Action for Prisoners' Families**

Works to reduce the negative impact of imprisonment on prisoners' families. Produces publications and resources, and provides advice, information and training as well as networking opportunities.

Address: Unit 21, Carlson Court 116 Putney Bridge Road London, SW15 2NQ  
Tel: 020 8812 3600  
E-mail: [info@actionpf.org.uk](mailto:info@actionpf.org.uk)  
Advice line: 0808 808 2003 [info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk](mailto:info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk)  
Website: [www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk)

#### **Addaction**

Offers a range of support developed for families and carers affected by substance misuse.

Address: 67-69 Cowcross Street London EC1M 6PU  
Tel: 020 7251 5860  
Email: [info@addaction.org.uk](mailto:info@addaction.org.uk)  
Website: [www.addaction.org.uk](http://www.addaction.org.uk)

#### **Adfam**

Works with families affected by drugs and alcohol, and supports carers of children whose parents have drug and alcohol problems.

Address: 25 Corsham Street, London N1 6DR  
Tel: 020 7553 7640  
Email: [admin@adfam.org.uk](mailto:admin@adfam.org.uk)  
Website: [www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

### **Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)**

Offers free independent advice and information for parents and carers on a range of state education and schooling issues, including admissions, exclusion, attendance, special educational needs and bullying.

Address: 1c Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London N5 2DQ  
Tel: 0808 800 5793 (General advice line)  
0808 800 0327 (Exclusion advice line)  
020 7704 9822 (Exclusion information line) (24hr answer phone)  
Website: [www.ace-ed.org.uk](http://www.ace-ed.org.uk)

### **BeGrand.net**

Website offering information and advice to grandparents, plus online and telephone advice.

Website: [www.begrand.net](http://www.begrand.net)  
Helpline: 0845 434 6835

### **British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)**

Provides information and advice about adoption and fostering and publishes resources.

Address: Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS  
Tel: 020 7421 2600  
Email: [mail@baaf.org.uk](mailto:mail@baaf.org.uk)  
Website: [www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)

### **Child Benefit Helpline**

HM Revenue and Customs offers general help and advice with Child Benefits

Tel: 0845 302 1444 (8am - 8pm, Monday to Friday; 8am - 4 pm Saturday)  
Website: <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/childbenefit/start/who-qualifies/index.htm>

### **Children's Legal Centre**

Provides free independent legal advice and factsheets to children, parents, carers and professionals.

Address: University of Essex Wivenhoe Park Colchester Essex CO4 3SQ  
Tel: 01206 877 910  
0808 802 0008 (Child Law Advice Line)  
0845 345 4345 (Community Legal Advice – Education)  
E-mail: [clc@essex.ac.uk](mailto:clc@essex.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com)

### **Citizens Advice Bureaux**

Helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice through local bureaux and website.

Website: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

### **Community Legal**

Community Legal Advice can provide basic advice over the telephone and can give details of other advice providers in the area. A list of local legal advisors is also available through the Community Legal Advice website.

Tel: 0845 345 4345  
Website: <http://legaladviserfinder.justice.gov.uk/AdviserSearch.do>

### **Department for Education**

Provides a range of resources for parents and carers.

Website:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/Parentscarersandfamilies/Page1>

### **Family Fund Trust**

Helps families with severely disabled or seriously ill children to have choices and the opportunity to enjoy ordinary life. Gives grants for things that make life easier and more enjoyable for the disabled child and their family.

Address: 4 Alpha Court Monks Cross Drive York YO32 9WN

Tel: 0845 130 4542

Email: [info@familyfund.org.uk](mailto:info@familyfund.org.uk)

Website: [www.familyfund.org.uk](http://www.familyfund.org.uk)

### **Family Mediation Helpline**

Provides information and advice about family mediation services and eligibility for public funding.

Tel: 08456 026627

Website: [www.familymediationhelpline.co.uk](http://www.familymediationhelpline.co.uk)

### **Family Rights Group (FGR)**

Provides advice to parents and other family members whose children are involved with or require children's social care services because of welfare needs or concerns. Publishes resources, helps to develop support groups for family and friends carers, and runs a discussion board.

Address: Second Floor The Print House 18 Ashwin Street London E8 3DL

Tel: 020 7923 2628

Advice line: 0800 801 0366

Email: [advice@frg.org.uk](mailto:advice@frg.org.uk)

Website: [www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)

### **The Fostering Network**

Supports foster carers and anyone with an interest in fostering to improve the lives of children in care. Publishes resources and runs Fosterline, a confidential advice line for foster carers including concerns about a child's future, allegations and complaints, legislation and financial matters.

Address: 87 Blackfriars Road London SE1 8HA

Email: [info@fostering.net](mailto:info@fostering.net)

Tel: 020 7620 6400

Fosterline: 0800 040 7675

Email: [fosterline@fostering.net](mailto:fosterline@fostering.net)

Website: [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

### **The Grandparents' Association**

Supports grandparents and their families, especially those who have lost or are losing contact with their grandchildren because of divorce, separation or other family problems, those caring for their grandchildren on a full-time basis, and those with childcare responsibilities for their grandchildren.

Address: Moot House The Stow Harlow Essex CM20 3AG  
Tel: 01279 428040  
0845 434 9585 (Helpline)  
0844 357 1033 (Welfare benefits advice and information)  
Email: [info@grandparents-association.org.uk](mailto:info@grandparents-association.org.uk)  
Website: [www.grandparents-association.org.uk](http://www.grandparents-association.org.uk)

### **Grandparents Plus**

Champions the role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives, especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances.

Address: Grandparents Plus 18 Victoria Park Square Bethnal Green London E2 9PF  
Tel: 020 8981 8001  
Email: [info@grandparentsplus.org.uk](mailto:info@grandparentsplus.org.uk)

### **Mentor UK**

Promotes the health and wellbeing of children and young people to reduce the damage that drugs can do to lives.

Address: Fourth Floor 74 Great Eastern Street London EC2A 3JG  
Tel: 020 7739 8494  
Email: [admin@mentoruk.org](mailto:admin@mentoruk.org)  
Website: [www.mentoruk.org.uk](http://www.mentoruk.org.uk)

### **National Association of Kinship Carers (NAKC)**

NAKC is an independent association for the specific purpose of campaigning for better rights and entitlements for kinship carers and the children. They care for

Email: [nakinshipcarers@gmail.com](mailto:nakinshipcarers@gmail.com)  
Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/nakinshipcarers/>

### **National Family Mediation (NFM)**

Provides mediation services to support couples who are separated, and their children and others affected by this.

Address: 4 Barnfield Hill, Exeter EX1 1SR  
Tel: 0300 4000 636  
Email: [general@nfm.org.uk](mailto:general@nfm.org.uk)  
Website: [www.nfm.org.uk](http://www.nfm.org.uk)

### **Parents Against Drug Abuse (PADA)**

Delivers support and services to the families of substance users, including a national helpline.

Address: The Foundry Marcus Street Birkenhead CH41 1EU  
Tel: 0151 649 1580  
08457 023867 (National Families Helpline)  
Website: [www.pada.org.uk](http://www.pada.org.uk)



### **Parentline Plus**

Provides help and support in all aspects of family life, including information, an online chat facility and a 24 hour helpline.

Address: CAN Mezzanine 49-51 East Road London N1 6AH  
Tel: 020 7553 3080  
0808 800 2222 (24hr Advice line)  
Email: [parentsupport@familylives.org.uk](mailto:parentsupport@familylives.org.uk)  
Website: [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

### **Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group**

Operates helpline and provides a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners and other agencies.

Address: Valentine House 1079 Rochdale Road Blackley Manchester M9 8AJ  
Tel: 0161 702 1000  
0808 808 2003 (Offenders' Families Helpline)  
Email: [info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.co.uk](mailto:info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.co.uk)  
Website: [www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk](http://www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk)

### **Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)**

Provides practical and emotional support to prisoners and to their children and families. The Kinship Care Support Service provides support and advice to family members and friends who care for children whose parents are in HMP Holloway.

Address: Park Place 12 Lawn Lane Vauxhall London SW8 1UD  
Telephone: 020 77359535  
Website: [www.prisonadvice.org.uk](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk)

### **TalktoFrank**

The government's national drugs helpline which offers free confidential drugs information and advice 24 hours a day. Information and advice is also available via the website.

Website: [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)  
Tel: 0800 77 66 00 (24 hour advice line)  
Text: 82111  
Email: [frank@talktofrank.com](mailto:frank@talktofrank.com)

### **Voice**

Advocacy organisation for children living away from home or in need.

Address: 320 City Road London EC1V 2NZ  
Tel: 020 7833 5792  
0808 800 5792 (Young person's advice line)  
Email: [info@voiceyp.org](mailto:info@voiceyp.org)  
Website: [www.voiceyp.org](http://www.voiceyp.org)

### **Young Minds**

Works to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people and empowering their parents and carers.

Address: 48-50 St John Street London EC1M 4DG  
Tel: 020 7336 8445  
0808 802 5544 (Parents helpline)  
Website: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

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