

Merton's Kinship Care Local Offer



Introduction

Merton Children, Families and Lifelong Learning are committed to prioritising a family-first culture and at the heart of our work is a commitment to working with families in a way which enables them to look after their children, and where this may not be possible, children to live with kinship carers.

The Kinship Care Guidance 2024 makes it clear that children and young people who are unable to live with their parents should receive support that they and their carers need to safeguard and promote their welfare, whether or not they are cared for by the Local Authority, outlining what support should be available for various arrangements including; informal arrangements, temporary arrangements, private fostering, kinship foster care, child arrangements orders, special guardianship orders, and arrangements leading to adoption.

The guidance outlines that kinship care refers to any situation where a child is being cared for by a grandparents or another family member or friend who is not their parent. This may include any of the following circumstances below;

- Informal kinship arrangements with private family arrangement in which a close family member who does not hold parental responsibility, raises the child and the local authority has had no major role in making the arrangement for the child; and where a Family Court has not made an order in respect to the care of the child.





- An informal kinship arrangement where a child under the age of 16 is being provided with accommodation for less than 28 days by an individual in their own home who is not a close relative
- An informal kinship arrangement where a 16 or 17 year old is being provided with accommodation by an individual who is not a close relative in their own home
- A private fostering arrangement in which someone who is not a close relative of the child under the age of 16 looks after the child for 28 days or more (as per section 66(1)(a) and (b) of the Children Act 1989)3

- Where a ‘lives with’ Child Arrangements Order has been granted in respect of the child, in favour of someone who is a friend or family member but is not the child’s parent
- Where a Special Guardianship Order has been granted appointing a friend or family member as the child’s special guardian
- Where a child is a ‘looked after child’ by virtue of either an interim or final care order or being accommodated by the local authority (usually under section 20 of the Children Act 1989) and each of the following apply (this may be described as ‘kinship foster care’ or ‘family and friends foster care’):
 - The child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent, and
 - The friend or family member is approved as a local authority foster carer either on a temporary basis or following full assessment
- Where an Adoption Order has been granted in respect of the child and, prior to the making of the order, the adopter was a friend or family member

Merton recognises that Kinship carers provide love, protection and stability for some of our most vulnerable children, often requiring a level of sacrifice for themselves. Merton aims to ensure that all kinship carers, both through formal and informal arrangements are aware of the support available to them across the borough. Merton is committed to working with families and carers to help ensure that children are thriving and have access to the right education, health care, social and emotional opportunities of all children across the borough.

The Merton Kinship Care Local Offer sets out how Merton will support kinship carers in all arrangements the required support to ensure that the children in their care achieve the best possible outcomes regardless of their legal status.

Our values, principles and objectives

Merton has a strongly connected community and Merton Children, Families and Lifelong Learning and their partners¹ hold a key commitment to supporting children and families to remain together. Living with relatives supports a child's sense of belonging to a wider network, a closer attachment is more likely to occur and relatives are more likely to stand by the child through difficulties that may arise. In addition, the Government reforms outline key messages in relation to kinship care, primarily;

- 1. Children should remain with their families and be safely prevented from entering the care system in the first place.**
- 2. Where children cannot remain at home and it is in their best interests, we should support children to live with kinship carers or in fostering families**

The child's welfare should remain paramount at the centre of support for children and families, alongside the child and family being involved in decision-making and planning for the future of the child. Children should be enabled to live with their families unless it is assessed that to stay would not be consistent with their welfare.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) outlines key principles to support in achieving outcomes for children and families, primarily a commitment to building strong, positive, trusting and co-operating relationships with parents and carers, communicating in a respectful and inclusive manner, and empowering parents and carers to participate in decision-making. Merton's children's services and partners are committed to bringing in parents and family networks at the earliest possible stage to ensure that they are at the centre of decision-making and planning for children.

In instances where the Local Authority does need to care for a child, there is a duty to ensure that children are placed with people who they are connected with as an alternative to being cared for by people they have not met before. Children should be supported to develop and maintain safe attachments to their carers who are providing safe and loving homes for them.

Merton's children's services and partners are committed to working effectively together and with children and families to promote the welfare of the child and provide the best possible outcomes.

Professional practice

Management decision-making for children who are unable to live in the care of their parents should be led on the needs of the child, views from the family and child and the social workers assessment. Kinship carers should be supported to provide care for connected children and the fear of losing support should not be allowed to become an obstacle to kinship carers taking over responsibility for the long-term care of the child.

Information in relation to children, carers and families will be treated sensitively and stored confidentially. When seeking information in relation to kinship carers, consent will be obtained in the first instance. Any required information sharing across agencies, practitioners will seek the permission of the individuals in the first instance. If information sharing is required on the grounds of safeguarding, clear communication will be shared with the carer or individuals to confirm their understanding regarding this.

Evidence base

Research has shown that outcomes are positive for most children living in kinship care, and considerably better than for children in unrelated carer arrangements. It has also found that family and friends care arrangements last longer than arrangements with unrelated carers.

Merton children's services works closely with children and families to understand their needs and ensure that the services they receive from the Local Authority support in responding to that need. Children and families will be supported to express their views and decisions through family network meetings, family group conferences and as part of the assessment and review process.



The legal framework

There are many pathways for caring for another person's child and all have different legal frameworks that are applied.

If the Local Authority becomes involved, an assessment will be undertaken as to how best meet the child's needs. This will inform the decision to made under whether or not a child will need to become cared for.

The Kinship Care Guidance (2024) outlines;

'Whilst the decision about the legal arrangement will be based on the specific circumstances of each particular child, local authorities should take into account the principle that children are best looked after within their families unless compulsory intervention in family life is necessary. Local authorities should also give due consideration to providing support without the child becoming looked after. For kinship carers to provide appropriate care to children, they may require access to support services.'

Local Authorities have a duty under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to children in need which supports children's needs to be met through the best possible use of resources. This will support to ensure that children do not become cared for by the Local Authority unless it is assessed the most appropriate way to meet and safeguard the welfare needs of the child.

In Merton, there are some differences between the entitlement of different kinds of support for informal kinship carers, special guardianship and adoptive parents and those who have been assessed as connected persons foster carers to a child who is in care of the Local Authority.

Permanence focus

Children who grow up in kinship care arrangements, both formal and informal, are more likely to experience stable and permanent homes. In Merton there is strong focus on promoting permanence for children who are unable to remain living with their parents to remain within the family network. By applying these principles, family and friends carers provide an alternative pathway for permanence for children, especially when this is supported by a child arrangements order, special guardianship order or through adoption.

This offer aims to strengthen the response for all kinship arrangements and promotes the needs for children living in kinship care arrangements. The Special Guardianship and Fostering Recruitment team are focussed on providing support for kinship carers and support with signposting to services if required. This is also supported through Merton's Early Help and Family Hubs that offer universal and targeted support for all carers and children within the borough.

Merton recognises and respects the role that grandparents play for children and families as long-term viable options for their grandchildren. The Family Hubs includes a robust offer of support and advice available for grandparents.



Management accountability

The Kinship Care Local Offer is held within the responsibility of the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting.

The Director of Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion, Senior Managers and the Team Manager for Special Guardianship and Fostering Recruitment Team will ensure that Merton's CLLF workforce are aware and understand the local offer to ensure that it is applied consistently across services.

The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting and the Service Manager for the Resources Service will ensure that all local partners are aware of their responsibilities towards children living in kinship care arrangements. They will ensure that the local offer is publicised and reviewed.



Merton's Offer

Early support

Majority of kinship care arrangements work well and meet the needs of the child through universal services such as education, health and housing. Early Help means picking up on any problems as soon as possible so they don't get too big. We will seek to consent to working alongside families to put things in place to help them get better. In Merton there are lots of different services that work together with children, young people and families providing 'Early Help' so that their needs are met. Advice on such services can be obtained from local support agencies, the child's social worker or the Special Guardianship Team in Merton.

In Merton, there are a wide range of universal and targeted services that can support children in the local area, including youth clubs, children's centres, family hubs, local library services, day care, school clubs, Holiday Activities and Food Programmes, schools, health services, leisure facilities and specific support groups targeted at kinship carers.

Full details of support provided through the family hubs can be found here: [Local Directories | Family Hubs Directory](#). Drop in sessions available;

- **Family Hub at Church Road Children's Centre – Mondays, 1:30pm-4:30pm.**
- **Family Hub at Acacia Children's Centre – Wednesdays, 9:00am-12:00pm.**

Further details on Holiday activities and Food Clubs can be found here: [Holiday activities and food clubs | Merton Council](#)

For Children and Young People with Special Education Needs and Disabilities, Merton offers a range of support including leisure activities, support with education or training, health, social care and preparation for adulthood. It also tells you how to get support from services you need, such as a referral or assessment. More details can be at [Local Directories | SEND Local Offer](#)

Merton's short breaks offer is designed for children and young people with different levels of need. Most children and young people with disabilities use universal services and attend the same activities as all children. Other children need additional support to access play and leisure activities. This support is provided in Merton's Targeted and Specialist short breaks offers.

For more information please see this [guide to the Short Breaks offer in Merton](#).

Family networks, decision-making and Family Group Conferences

Merton is committed to embedding a family first culture, putting family networks at the heart of decision-making while ensuring children are safe to thrive. Where there are concerns identified for a child's safety or well-being, the voices of the family should be prioritised through family group decision making. This should be considered at the earliest opportunity and regularly revisited throughout the referral and assessment process.

A family network is considered a group of people who is close to the child, that can be made of relatives and non-relatives. This could include step-parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents or close family friends. It is considered that within this group, that is the family network, may have the resources to support in making a plan of response to concerns about the child's safety or well-being. This can also include practical and emotional support for the parents.

Merton has Family Group Conference Coordinators who support as an independent person supporting the family network. They hold Family Group Conferences (FGC) that bring families together to think about ways they can support the child. FGC Coordinators will meet with the child, their parents and wider family members in preparation for the FGC.

Family Network Meetings and FGC's are intended to be an empowering process in which children, families and extended members of the their network are provided with clear information about the worries and supported to consider a plan to address these. These plans may involve practical support for parents such as sleepovers, school runs or babysitting or it may involve the child living with a connected carer.



Finances

Parents retain parental responsibility for the financial and practical care of their children if they live with informal family and friends carers. However, in instances where they can't, under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, Local Authorities have the power to provide support to Children in Need. It is identified that there can be a significant impact for informal family and friends carers who may take on caring responsibilities who may not have the financial resources to support the child.

Although informal family and friends carers can access benefits advice to ensure they are claiming all they are entitled to, they may still experience financial difficulties, therefore financial support may be considered under Section 17 of the Children Act. These payments are based off the need of the child, and can be one off, such as financial support for bedroom furniture for a child or this can be on an ongoing basis.

The child's social worker will work with the child, parents and the informal family or friends carers to understand the needs of the child and any financial support that may be required to meet these needs. This will be made in line with Merton's duty to safeguard and promote the well-being of the child. With consent, they will be able to support with liaison with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to help identify what schemes or benefits you may be entitled to. Some benefits may include (for further information, click on the hyperlink);

Child Benefit **Universal Credit** **Housing Benefit**

Guardians Allowance **Carers Allowance** **Pension Credit**

Apply for Council Tax Reduction - GOV.UK **Child Maintenance Service**

Personal Independence Payment **Disability Living Allowance for Children**

The UK Government has provided funding through the Household Support Fund to help Merton's residents during the cost of living crisis. During 2024-2025, financial support was paid to carers and special guardians directly into their bank account. Further information regarding the Household support fund can be found at [Household Support Fund | Merton Council](#).

If the child comes into care under the Local Authority, the fostering allowances would be paid to the carer as per the rates outlined in the Merton Fostering Scheme. If a child is in care and then leaves care under a Special Guardianship Order, the Special Guardian will receive the same fostering allowance for the first two years post the order being granted.

Accommodation

In some situations, family and friends carers who take on the caring responsibility of a child/children may find this put strain in their accommodation and living situation. In instance such as these, with consent Merton would offer support to kinship families living in social housing by supporting application for larger properties should this be required.

Education

Merton values and recognises the impact the continuity of education can have for children and families.

Currently, eligible working parents of 9 months to 3 years old can up to 15 hours a week of free education and childcare, which is due to increase to 30 hours in September 2025. Further information on Early Education for children from 9 months – 4 years old can be found [here](#).

For children who have previous cared for experience, they are entitled for up to 15 hours of free nursery per week. Carers should speak to their nursery provider regarding this.



Education for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is a graduated response to support. If you are looking for further support, it is best to speak the Special Education needs coordinator at the education provision that the child is attending. Those with more complex special education needs, may have an Education, Health and Care Plan. The SEN Team coordinates the assessment of education, health and care needs when it considers that it may be necessary for special educational provision to be made for the child or young person in accordance with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

For more details about the process that the SEN Team follows in carrying out an assessment and issuing an EHCP (where appropriate) ,see the guidance around **Transferring to an EHCP**. For information about how to request an EHC needs assessment for your child, please see the guidance around **How to request an EHC Needs Assessment**

Advice and guidance is available for kinship carers on education matters for children from 0-18 via Merton's Virtual School. Advice is also available through the Virtual School for education queries post-18.

Merton's Virtual School is committed to supporting Kinship Carers in raising awareness of the needs and educational challenges faced by children across the early years, primary, secondary and post-16 age ranges. This includes promoting good practice that supports high levels of attendance and engagement for all children in Kinship Care, regardless of whether the arrangements are formal or informal.

The Virtual School also provides information, advice and guidance to Kinship carers, educators and other partners, which may include signposting to other service areas.

To make initial contact, please email virtualschool@merton.gov.uk or call 020 8545 4199.

Merton is committed to building a better picture of children living in kinship arrangements. Children's social care and education will work together in building a dataset on children who are not living with their parents and ensure the information regarding the local offer is shared directly with these families.

Supporting family time

There is a duty on Local Authorities to promote family time for all children in need, however the duty may vary depending on the legal status of the child. Schedule 2 (Children Act 1989) paragraph 10 states that “Every Local Authority shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable where any child within their area who is in need and whom they are not looking after, is living apart from their family – a) to enable him to live with his family and b) to promote contact between him and his family, if in their opinion it is necessary to do so, in order to safeguard or promote his welfare”.

If the child or young person is cared for by the Local Authority paragraph 15 of Schedule 2 of the Children Act states that “the authority shall unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with his welfare, endeavour to promote contact between the child and – a) his parents; b) any person who is not a parent of his but who has parental responsibility for him; and c) any relative, friend or other person connected with him”.

It is recognised that family time arrangements for those involved can cause some challenges due to family dynamics. How the children and parents view these arrangements may also impact on some of the challenges faced.

If there are any concerns regarding the welfare of the child or young person during contact time, Merton Children’s Services should be involved to ensure that safe family time can be arranged.



Support groups

It is acknowledged the importance for kinship carers to have a network of other carers in similar positions who can support in providing reassurance, comfort and prevent isolation. Support groups are a valuable way to access information about services that can support them care for the children, as well as providing a space for emotional support.

Special Guardianship carers will also have access to the Merton and Sutton's councils quarterly Special Guardianship Support Group and Monthly SGO Coffee Mornings hosted by Merton this provides special guardians with training and support and advice and a chance to meet other special guardians. There are also frequent drop-in sessions with Merton's virtual school lead for guidance and advice on any issues pertaining to education.

If the child/young person was previously in care prior to the Special Guardian order being granted they may be entitled to therapeutic support via the Adoption Support and Special Guardianship Fund. For further information regarding this the carer should contact the Fostering Recruitment and Special Guardianship Team on 0208 545 4070 or emailing frpt@merton.gov.uk

Training

Kinship carers, both formal and informal arrangements are able to access Merton's local Parenting offer. Carers can contact that Family Information and Support Hub where you can get help and support from a specialist advisor about your child's development, behaviour, relationships and more and will be helped to access relevant information and services to help you.

Merton's Early Years, Family Wellbeing and Early Help Service offers a range of child development and age-related parenting programmes available to all parents and carers. These are broken down as Children aged under 5, children of school age, Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Whole Family Support.

SGO Carers will be able to access the training and support offered to foster carers and special guardian carers within Merton. To access this training, the SGO Carer will be able to contact the Fostering Recruitment and Special Guardianship Team. The SGO Carer will be added to the distribution mailing list with his or hers consent where they will be sent regular updates and information about support available to SGO Carers in Merton including training opportunities, workshops, support groups, free activities and SGO Events.

Kinship also offers a number of online training and events for kinship carers which can be accessed at: [Free training and events for kinship carers | Kinship](#)

Private fostering

A private fostering arrangement is something that is made without the involvement of the Local Authority. When a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if disabled) is cared for 28 days or more by someone who is not their parent or a close relative this is called a private fostering arrangement. It is a private arrangement between a parent and the carer. The local council is not usually involved but the carer or parent should notify the Council.

Close relatives are defined as grandparents, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by marriage) or step-parent (a parent's unmarried partner is not a step-parent in this context).

The London Borough of Merton has a legal duty to ensure that any child or young person is safe, well looked after and does not come to any harm in a private fostering arrangement, by making sure that he/she and their carer are visited regularly and offered advice and guidance when needed.

The private fostering team will support in providing information to carers and families in relation to Merton's Kinship Local Offer.

Kinship or Connected Persons foster carers

Assessment

If it is identified through the assessment process that the plan for the child is to be cared for, either under Section 20 (voluntary/with consent from their parents) or Section 31 (Full Care Order), they must be cared for by an approved foster carer.

As Merton strives to ensure that families are involved in decision-making and care plans from the earliest possible stage, should care be required, Merton will take a pro-active approach in exploring and supporting kinship carers to be identified. If care is needed quickly, family and friends carers can be temporarily agreed by the Director of Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion for 16 weeks (Regulation 24 of Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010) following the completion of a Viability Assessment for connected friends and family. Regulation 25 allows for this to be extended for a further 8 weeks.

During this time, an assessing social worker from the Special Guardianship and Fostering Recruitment team will be completing a Family and Friends assessment which will include several checks, including enhanced DBS, Local Authority checks, medical/health, employment, schools and the connected carer will be asked to provide referees to provide information about them. The Family and Friends assessment is presented to the Independent Fostering Panel, who will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker on whether the carer should be fully approved as a foster carer. In most instances for kinship carers, their terms of approval will be linked to care for their connected child.

The assessment is an in-depth assessment that explores the carers strengths, looking at their role and position within the family, their previous caring experiences and information pertaining to their own personal circumstances. It is acknowledged that this assessment process requires a high level of sensitive and personal information to be shared by the potential carer. Support is provided by the assessing social work and additional emotional support can be provided by to the carers by colleagues in the Children in Care Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Consideration must also be taken from the wishes and feelings of the child and the capacity of the carer to meet that child's needs.

Support

Connected Persons and Kinship carers will form part of the key network around the child and be involved in all processes that are in place to ensure the child receives the appropriate care and support. They will be expected to contribute to child in care reviews, pupil education plans, health reviews and care plan reviews.

Connected Persons and Kinship carers, once approved as foster carers will receive support from the Fostering Support Team and be allocated a Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker will support the carer in ensuring that there is a clear plan of support available for the carer to meet the child's needs, eg. Training plan, safer care policy etc. The carer will be supported with an induction into the fostering service and be connected with a mentor who is an experienced foster carer. They will be supported to join a Mockingbird Constellation which is a wider community of carers and children to create a greater sense of support for them and the children in their care.

As children who are living in Connected Persons foster carer arrangements are still in care, the child will continue to have an allocated social worker to ensure that their needs are being met. The supervising social worker working with the connected persons carer will be focussed on providing support and guidance for the carer, including regular supervision and home visits. Home visits include both announced and unannounced visits and they may ask to see all rooms within the carers household.

An approved connected persons foster carer will receive a child allowance that will cover the costs for caring for the child/children in their care. The fostering allowance includes elements of Child Benefit or Child Tax Credits and therefore connected persons foster carers will not be eligible to claim such benefits. Connected Persons foster carers will continue to receive this allowance for as long as the child is in their care. There is an additional foster carer fee that is paid once a carer has been approved at panel.

Connected Persons and Kinship carers who are undergoing an assessment and temporarily approved under regulation 24/25 as well as fully approved carers are entitled to access support and training. The supervising social worker is responsible for planning and overseeing the training, support and supervision provided for connected persons carers.



Reviews

Once Connected Persons carers are approved foster carers, they will have their first annual review within the first year of approval. The review will be booked within 10 months of their approval to ensure that it meets the 12 month timescale. The discussions in preparation for this review take place during the supervision with their social worker. It is the carers responsibility to ensure that paperwork is completed in a timely manner for their review and they will be supported by their supervising social worker in how to complete this paperwork.

The Foster Carer Annual Household Review will be chaired by the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer. The review will cover an appraisal of the connected persons carers training and development needs, an evaluation of the training received and the carers views on the service and support provided. Following the completion of the review, the report must go to the Independent Fostering Panel for recommendation and sign off by the Agency Decision Maker. Subsequent reviews will be held annually and presented to panel at least every three years. A review may be brought forward should there be any significant changes or incidents within the home during this period.

Care planning and alternative arrangements to children being cared for

Permanency planning

Permanency planning is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving home to support them through their childhood and beyond. This is achieved by creating a home where a child or young person's emotional, physical and legal conditions allow them to feel secure; they have commitment from their carers and their identity is supported.

Not all children we engage with will need to be in Merton's care, however all of the children we work with will need to have their permanence needs considered and addressed. This may be remaining in staying with or returning to their family; living with extended family, friends or connected persons through a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangement Order; long term foster care; Adoption; or residential care if this is necessary to meet the child's needs. The Merton Permanency Strategy sets our Merton's priorities to ensure that all children are in safe and stable homes within a timely manner.

Merton will review the child's plan through the care planning processes to ensure that plan adequately and actively progresses the child's needs for permanence. This will be review by the Independent Reviewing Officer. In addition to this, the Permanence Lead will chair permanency planning meetings to ensure that the objectives of permanence does not drift for children and families.

Child Arrangements Order

Where a relative, friend or other connected person proposes to make a long-term commitment to caring for a child, they may apply for a child arrangements order. A person with a child arrangements order is responsible for making decisions about the child's day-to-day care and upbringing, though they share parental responsibility with others who have it. 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.

Where Merton is involved a support plan outlining the needs of the child and carers is compiled and submitted to court. This support plan requires sign off by the Corporate Parenting Head of Service. It will outline support from a range of areas, including family time, health, education, financial, emotional, social development and the needs of the wider family.

Special Guardianship Order

Special Guardianship offers a unique means of achieving permanence for a child. A Special Guardianship Order is made by the court to determine that a child or children can live with an assessed person. It invests the guardian with shared Parental Responsibility, along with the child's parent, but enables the guardian to exercise parental responsibility without reference to the parent. The Special Guardian has the primary role for the care of the child.

Special Guardianship applicants (both private and public) require an assessment completed by the Special Guardianship and Fostering Recruitment Team. Where Merton is involved a support plan outlining the needs of the child and carers is compiled and submitted to court. This support plan requires sign off by the Corporate Parenting Head of Service. It will outline support from a range of areas, including family time, health, education, financial, emotional, social development and the needs of the wider family.

Adoption

If some circumstances, it may be required for the Merton Children's Social Care to explore adoption as a potential permanence plan for a child. In these instances, Merton will make a referral to Adopt London South so they can be involved in the permanency planning meetings.

When a child is adopted, the child's birth parents lose their parental rights and responsibility for the child. The adoptive parents then become the child's legal parents, with the same rights and responsibilities as if the child was born to them. In most circumstances, depending on the child's situation, birth parents are able to maintain contact with the child often through indirect and sometimes face to face contact.

Merton's adoption services are run through Adopt London South who offer support for adopted children and adults and their adoptive and birth families. Information relating to support from Adopt London South, including if you are considering adoption, can be found here: [Adopt London South Support - Adopt London](#)

Care Experienced Young People and Staying Put

For children who remain in care, Merton is committed to ensuring that they are able to remain with their connected persons carers after the age of 18 years old and has a Staying Put policy. Staying Put was defined by the government and covers the living arrangements for children who turn 18 years old to remain living with their former foster carers. It has been strongly communicated by Care Experienced young people the cliff edge they experienced at 18 years old, and therefore staying put is to help young people transition to independence in line with their personal and development needs, rather than when they reach the age of 18.

Discussions and planning for Staying Put should start when the child reaches the age of 16 and a half and included within their Child in Care review. The child's social worker will have initial discussions with the child's carer to confirm the option of staying put and will then meet with the child/young person regarding their wishes. A Staying Put meeting will occur before the child is 17 years old, with both the child and the carer to discuss the plans post 18 years old. The supervising social worker will support advice to the carer in relation to any significant changes and will be involved in the Staying Put planning meetings.

Complaints

Carers who are providing care to children under Special Guardianship Orders can contact the Team Manager for the Special Guardianship and Fostering Recruitment Team if they wish to discuss concerns in relation to the level of support or to raise an issue on the duty number 020 8545 4070.

Connected Persons Foster Carers are supported through the Fostering Support Team and can contact the Team Manager for this time through the duty number 020 8545 4347.

All carers can contact Merton's complaints team if they feel this required, either by contacting 0208 545 3060 or emailing complaints@merton.gov.uk



Useful organisations and information for Kinship Carers

Merton specific

Merton Family Information and Support Hubs

Help and advice from specialist advisor to access relevant services for children in your care.

Local Directories | Family Information and Support Hubs

Merton Family Support and Parenting programmes

Full directory of family support and parenting programmes for Merton families.

Family support and parenting | Merton Council

National

Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC)

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

www.childlawadvice.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 330 5480.

Family Lives and Gingerbread

Family Lives, in consortium with Gingerbread, offer free online and phone support for parents and carers on various topics, such as mental health, behaviour, bullying, divorce, finances, welfare rights and more.

Website: www.familylives.org.uk Telephone: 0808 800 2222.

Website: www.gingerbread.org.uk Telephone: 0808 802 0925.

Children's Legal Centre

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

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Telephone: 01206 877 910

Email: clc@Hertfordshire.ac.uk

Child Law Advice Line: 0808 802 0008

Citizens Advice Bureau

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Telephone: **0808 278 7831**

Merton address: 7 Crown Parade, Crown Lane, Morden, London, SM4 5D

Kinship

A national organisation that provides support and advice for Kinship carers, including free training available for carers

Support and advice for kinship carers - Kinship

Family Rights Group

Provides advice to parents and other family members whose children are receiving services from children social care.

Helping families Helping children - Family Rights Group.

Telephone: 020 7923 2628.

Advice line: 0800 801 0366.

Email: advice@frg.org.uk

The Fostering Network support foster carers, including confidential support following allegations and complaints, financial matters and concerns regarding a child.

The Fostering Network

Email: info@fostering.net

Telephone: 020 7620 6400

Fosterline: 0800 040 7675

Email: fosterline@fostering.net

Appendix

Appendix 1: ASGSF Eligibility Guidance

ASGSF

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

What is the ASGSF?

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) was set up to provide funding for therapeutic support, initially just for adopted children and now also for children with Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Orders.

Who is the ASGSF for?

The Fund is available for children living in England up to and including the age of 21 (or 25 with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education Health & Care Plan) who:

- are adopted and were previously in local authority care in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- are adopted from overseas.
- are under a Child Arrangement Order (CAO) to enable the assessment of a potential special guardian, while the CAO is in force.
- are subject to a Special Guardianship Order and were previously in care.

How does it work?

The local authority's Adoption or special guardianship support team can apply for ASGSF funding for therapeutic support for your child.

First, they will give you an assessment of your family's support needs.

The local authority that places the child with you is responsible for assessing your needs for three years after the Special Guardianship Order. After three years it becomes the responsibility of the local authority where you live (if different).

Funding

Then the funds are sent to the local authority for them to pay for the therapy needed.

There is a limit of £3,000 per child for therapy per financial year, as well as a separate amount of up to £2,500 per child if specialist assessments are needed. Therapy and assessment above these amounts and up to a limit of £30,000 per financial year require match funding from the local authority.