

Special Guardianship Questionnaire 2023

Context of the survey

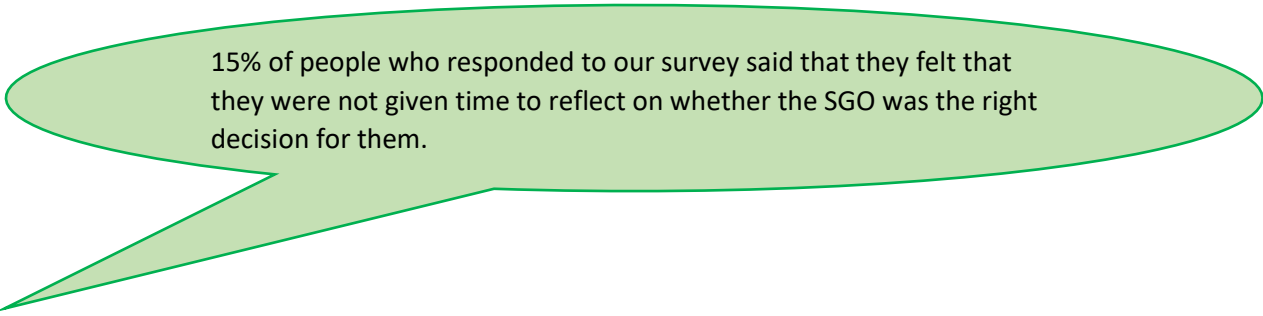
The survey was designed to better understand the effectiveness of the current Special Guardianship support offered by Shropshire Council and to assist in review and development of special guardianship support provision.

The survey was sent on the 2nd October 2023 to all households of the 141 children with Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) being offered support by Shropshire Council. Repeated reminders to complete the survey were also sent and the closing date for the survey was 13th November 2023.

We received responses from 27 households, which represents 39 of the 141 children cared for under an SGO.

In the following report we have attempted to provide information in response to the matters raised by these 27 households. As issues and circumstances can be very individual, the survey gave the option of including contact details so that private responses could be made. None of our respondents requested this, therefore we have not included these in our open response, but we are able to be contacted should anyone have any queries or concerns.

Information and support ahead of SGO and time to reflect on the decision



15% of people who responded to our survey said that they felt that they were not given time to reflect on whether the SGO was the right decision for them.

We already:

Allow for reflection on whether an SGO would be the right plan and take some time to explore the realities of a permanent placement during our initial SGO advice call. The thoughts of the potential Special Guardians (SGs) including any doubts or concerns are fed back to the child's social worker and others involved in the child's plans for permanence.

We have a mid-point review during the SGO assessment which is held with all professionals involved. This is an opportunity for the supervising social workers to update professionals regarding doubts and worries raised by the prospective SGs, especial those raised in the SGO advice call, so that these issues are not overlooked.

We have written a good practice guide for social workers to assist with the completion of SGO assessments and this is available on the Professional Development Hub (our internal training resource). This guide addresses potential issues relating to SG's feeling pressurised to take on the care of a child. It acknowledges that once a process is started it can be hard to raise

doubts. It reminds social workers that the potential SGs must be provided with opportunities to reflect upon their motivation and commitment to what is potentially a lifelong undertaking at different stages of the assessment journey.

- ★ **To improve** – We will resend our Good Practice Guide for Special Guardianship Order assessments to all teams who deal with these and to any new staff.

Pupil premium & the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

(previously known as ASF)

54% said that they are aware of the Pupil Premium entitlement being used by the child's school, while 17% said it is not, and 29% said they don't know whether the entitlement is being used by the child's school

50% of the 20 individuals responding to the question about the ASF said that yes, they are aware of this fund, and 50% responded that they are not aware of it.

We already:

Ensure that Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) and the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) are discussed, in all cases where a child has been previously looked after, during SGO pre-order advice calls to prospective SGs. It is revisited in our annual review calls, where appropriate, and can be discussed at any time by contacting the SGO support team.

We include PP+ and ASGSF entitlement and provision within the SGO Support Plan, which is shared with SGs prior to the order being made.

Information regarding both PP+ and ASGSF is also included on our SGO web page. [Tier 1 advice and support | Shropshire Council](#)

★ **To improve**

Whilst we have had ASF as a topic on some previous newsletters we will make sure that PP+ and ASGSF are now a standing topic on all future newsletters.

We will try to arrange for someone from virtual school (who support schools use of PP+) to attend a coffee morning to give a short presentation and answer questions about PP+. A member of the SGO support team could do the same regarding ASGSF.

Contact with the SGO support Team

You told us that the areas of dissatisfaction were:

- 1: Accessing ASF
- 2: Financial support
- 3: Mediation
- 4: Lack of clarity about Shropshire's Support Offer

What we do already and what we could improve:

1: Accessing ASF – We were uncertain if the responses related to dissatisfaction with accessing ASGSF, was because it is limited to children who were previously looked after. Sadly, this is beyond our control as it is a Government provision and they set the eligibility criteria.

We already discuss the ASGSF during pre-order SGO advice calls, in instances where the child is or has been previously looked after by the Local Authority. We detail this within SGO support plans and revisit it as appropriate during annual reviews.

★ **To improve** - We will ensure it is a standing topic in future newsletters, offer to do a short presentation at a future coffee morning regarding eligibility, access and assessments for referral to ASGSF funded support services. ASGSF is applicable only to providing therapy relating to the child's early experience of trauma and, unfortunately, is only for children who were previously looked after by the Local Authority. Understanding causes of developmental trauma could also be included in a presentation at a coffee morning.

2: Finances – Shropshire Council's SGO finance policy is discussed during the initial SGO advice call, as well as any individual aspects relating to a family's specific financial position. We continue to review finances annually and SGs can raise queries with SGO Finance via the SGO support Team at any time.

The finance policy (which is being reviewed currently) is shared as a document following a pre-order SGO advice call and is also available on our web page [Finances | Shropshire Council](#)

★ **To improve** – We will resend the latest finance policy document where SGs request this at their annual review.

Our limitations – As the SGO support team, we are bound by the Local Authority finance policy and cannot make any funding decisions ourselves. We can, and do, raise your queries and requests to the decision makers and make sure that individual

circumstances are fully explored and considered. All financial requests will be considered on a case by case basis, subject to an assessment of need and where required a financial means test. The request will then be presented at the Local Authority funding panel to seek the decision of the budget holders.

The SGO support team will always provide information and signposting to any relevant benefits and welfare support provisions.

3: Mediation – We currently offer to speak to all parties involved and/or provide guidance to help resolve issues causing conflict. Relationship based practice and restorative practice are the models Shropshire social workers work by and both are relevant to supporting with mediation.

We recognise that there are limits to what we can do in this area and remind all parties that they have recourse to seeking their own legal advice, if agreement or compromises cannot be reached with our support. We do not have the authority to direct people to behave in certain ways and so recognise that this may be an area of frustration.

The pre-order SGO advice call is an early opportunity to consider if relationships between birth parents and SGs could be a source of potential difficulty. The assessing social worker can then seek to address these issues pre-order and detail the agreed arrangements within the SGO support plan.

★ **To improve** – We can be clearer with potential SGs during the SGO advice call about what we can do with regards to mediation between family members, and importantly ensure they understand the limitations.

We can also update our tiered support information on our website and leaflet, to ensure the legal limitations of our role post order are clear.

4: Lack of clarity about Shropshire’s SGO Support Offer – We currently discuss Shropshire Council’s SGO Support offer during pre-order SGO advice calls and provide prospective SGs with a leaflet detailing our post order tiered support. SGs can contact the SGO team by telephone or email during office hours to seek clarity about available SGO support specific to their situation.

We have a webpage which details this support [Support services for special guardians | Shropshire Council](#)

We provide links to Kinship and Family Rights Group within the email sent to prospective SGs following the SGO advice call, these are agencies independent of the Council.

Specific individualised post order support is identified in the Special Guardianship Support Plan.

★ **To improve** – We can ensure that we raise the profile of the Shropshire Kinship peer support group, which provides support in addition to that offered by the Shropshire SGO support team. We can do this by ensuring that their contact details are included in our newsletters and that we distribute their flyers for peer group meetings.

Some individual comments you made and our thoughts on these:

1: "Service users (SGs) appear not to be considered important enough to be kept informed of developments/changes in the local authority's services in Children's Services... changes which may affect special guardians."

2: Individual consideration needed about the level of contact and support post order e.g. "tapered reduction in support and contact

Comment 1:

When we are notified of confirmed changes to Local Authority service provision, which we believe directly affects SGs, we try to inform via email or in our newsletter. SGs can keep themselves updated on all matters within the local authority via the council website [Home page - Shropshire Council Newsroom](#), where there is the option to sign up for email alerts.

All SGs and connected carers can also sign up to Kinship, and this will give updates on all relevant national developments. [Homepage - Kinship - The kinship care charity](#)

Comment 2:

The majority of SGOs are granted at a point where families no longer require ongoing social work intervention. Therefore, for many families, they welcome local authority involvement closing and visits and contact from social workers stopping. However, we acknowledge that this is not true for everyone, and some may feel the impact

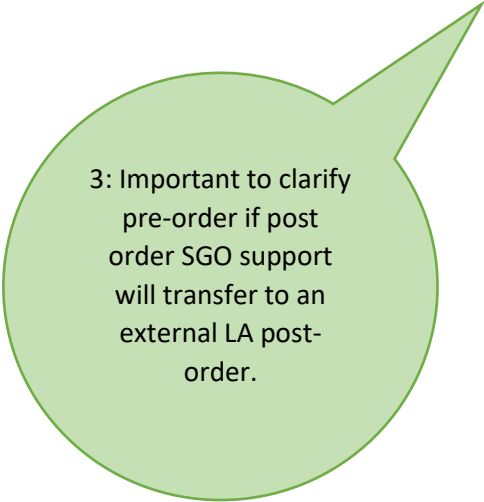
of this change in a negative way. One of the key purposes of the pre-order SGO advice call is to ensure that individual support needs are identified and addressed within the SGO Assessment and SGO support Plan. The SGO Assessment should explore whether ongoing social work or early help intervention is required and how this might look e.g. a Supervision order, Child in Need Plan or Early Help Plan.

Special Guardians are contacted by the SGO Support Team following the SGO being granted and then they are contacted annually to offer a review of the SGO Support Plan. In the meantime, SGs are able to contact the SGO Support Team by telephone or email during office hours to seek advice and support.

The development of the coffee mornings (see separate section) was an attempt to try to build an additional informal support structure but this has had limited success to date.


Our SGO post order support team is small, and we do not have capacity to implement a phased step down of visits and regular contact for all new SGs. We could consider a 'buddy' type scheme where (if wanted) a new SG could be 'buddied' up with a more experienced

one. This would however only be possible if we had volunteers for this. Perhaps we could gauge people's feelings about this in the next few months?



3: Important to clarify pre-order if post order SGO support will transfer to an external LA post-order.

Comment 3: We have updated our pre-order advice call guidelines to ensure that this is covered in the call and documented in the follow up email for all potential SGs who live out of county. If we are notified of a move out of county post order, we speak to the SG direct to inform them of the change. This transfer to the new authority would only be applicable 3 years after the granting of the SGO for children previously looked after. Where children were not previously looked after, should a family move out of county, then SGO support transfers at that time to the new Local Authority. We would advise the SGs of this at the time that we are made aware of the move



4: Work with neighbouring counties to explore support available.

Comment 4: The Shropshire SGO support team do attend regional network meetings during which support services are discussed. We have access to contact details for SGO teams in different counties but not all counties offer the same support services and so individual enquiries would need to be made. Funding restrictions can mean that services are restricted to residents of that county. We understand that this can be frustrating for those who live near the borders, but it is a result of unitary authorities having separate budgets and service provisions.

When families move outside of Shropshire, the SGO Support Team will assist SGs to link in with the resident services if requested to do so. Where children have been looked after by the local authority prior to the SGO, Shropshire council retain responsibility for SGO Support for three years post order regardless of where they live. After 3 years, the SGO Support Team will contact SGs regarding transferring their support to the resident Local Authority. Any financial agreement made by Shropshire Council at the time of the SGO, remains the responsibility of Shropshire Council for the length of the SGO and does not transfer to the new authority.

Coffee Mornings

You suggested:

- We have a mixture of in person and virtual coffee mornings.
- That we consider avoiding school run times and for those who work we arrange meetings outside of the working week.
- That these should be spread these out more over the county.
- That the coffee mornings should be clearer about their purpose and have more structure.

We asked for your ideas for guest speakers or themes to discuss in the coffee mornings and you came up with the following:

- “Additional support and legal advice.”
- “16-18-year olds, finance and university.”
- “Strategies on dealing with rejection and introducing the family tree to very young children.”

★ **To improve:** We will arrange coffee mornings from May 2024 onwards to be every second month. These will include some face to face and some virtual ones.

We will arrange for an informal outdoor event in the summer holiday – a walk and talk meeting where whole families can attend and bring a picnic.

We will explore if the subjects suggested could be given as short presentations by members of the SGO Support Team or if guest speakers could be approached.

Limitations - We will try to hold these in different locations around the county, but we are limited to council or free of charge premises only, as currently we are not authorised to rent spaces. There are no council buildings with public access that we can book now in Ludlow, Bridgnorth, Oswestry or Craven Arms. We will be looking into any free venues in these areas.

Practical issues – We are committed to providing a resource for informal get togethers for Special Guardians across the county however these have been poorly attended in the past. If we are to try to book guest speakers again, we may need to introduce an RSVP system to ensure that we know we have people coming to listen and thus make it worthwhile for the guest.

Newsletters

You said:

Consider inviting Special Guardians to contribute to Newsletters – to share knowledge and tips and stories and events?

Include information about SGO developments and policy changes and changes in LA provision.

★ **To improve**

We will have a rolling programme of updates in newsletters on matters relating to ASGSF and PP+ as previously mentioned.

We are willing to consider contributions from Special Guardians where appropriate, as a way to share therapeutic parenting tips, useful resources and positive messages to help our SGO community. For any other correspondence with our team please contact us directly. We could perhaps trial this in the autumn newsletter

Thank you for taking the time to read our response to the survey. We appreciate that the views expressed represent a minority of the total number of SGs we have in the county, but their thoughts and comments have been helpful.

Please feel free to contact the SGO support team if you have any further thoughts regarding any of the matters discussed or any other ideas or suggestions.

Our contact details are as follows:

Email - SGO.duty@shropshire.gov.uk

Telephone – 01743 250100 (office hours 9-5pm Monday to Thursday and 9-4pm Friday)