

## **Children's Services**

### **Additional Guidance for Special Guardianship Order Assessments**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 Core guidance on Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Assessments and the associated court procedures are given in the following documents in the CS Procedures Library:

[Applications for Special Guardianship Orders](#)

[Court Reports in Adoption/Special Guardianship Guidance](#)

- 1.2 The purpose of this document is to set out Dorset Council's additional requirements in respect of first, an initial Viability Assessment and secondly, the delegation of the full SGO Assessment to ASPIRE Adoption Agency. It also sets out the timescales within which practitioners should carry out key elements of the assessment process, and the events that must be notified to the council's Legal Department.
- 1.3 Additional guidance in respect of financial support for Special Guardians is given in our [Special Guardianship Orders Finance](#) document.

#### **2. Responding to notification of intention to apply for a Special Guardianship Order**

- 2.1 An intention to apply for an SGO may either arise during the course of proceedings to which Dorset Council is already party, or in relation to a child who is not in the care of the council and may not be known to it.
- 2.2 Where the child concerned is already subject to proceedings to which Dorset Council is party, the Child's Social Worker and a Fostering Social Worker should carry out a Viability Assessment with the proposed carer(s) within 10 working days of notification of the intention to apply for an SGO.
- 2.3 Where the child is not subject to proceedings, a Social Worker and Fostering Social Worker will be allocated and undertake a Child and Family (CAF) Assessment with the proposed carer(s). The CAF Assessment should form part of the Viability Assessment, which should be completed within 10 working days of notification of the intention to apply for an SGO.

#### **3. Requirements of a Viability Assessment**

- 3.1 The Viability Assessment should cover the following areas:

**Statutory checks**<sup>1</sup> – you should find out whether the applicants are known to any Local Authorities with regard to any care they have provided to children. You need to advise them that you will check their address history with the relevant Local Authorities. Good practice would be to cover this for at least 7 years, but you may need to look further if this is relevant.

**Do they have any criminal convictions?** A full DBS will be needed but a PNC (Police and Criminal Evidence computer system) check should be completed prior to any placement of a child if a DBS has not been completed.

**Relationships are going to be key.** After all the reason for placing children within their family is so they can benefit from those relationships and develop a sense of their family identity.

The **prospective carer's relationship with the child is crucial.** What is their existing relationship and why have they come forward? What do they know about the child? What about family relationships? What is their relationship with the child's parents?

**Do they understand what the Local Authority's concerns are?** This is often a difficult one for family members. Some family members will understand the worries that are held, others may not have reached this stage as yet. It may be hard for them to understand and believe, for example, that their family member has caused harm to a child.

**The Health of the Carer(s).** You should assess whether the health of the carer(s) will permit them to undertake the caring role. Could they quickly remove a child from danger if necessary? Are they a smoker (this could affect their approval)? How much alcohol do they drink?

**Suitability of Accommodation.** You will need to look around the accommodation and see the room identified for the child/ren. You will need to assess what changes they would need to make in the home, to make it suitable for a child/ren, especially if the placement is to be imminent or the children are already there.

**Obtain a brief account of their own childhood and experience of being parented.** What was childhood like for them? Was it positive or not and would they be willing to discuss this more fully in the SGO assessment?

**If they have parented before or are parents,** you will want to find out about their experience of this. You will need to talk to schools and any professionals involved with their own children. Advise them that the full assessment will need to talk to adult children even if living away from the home.

**The support network is another key factor** at play. Do they have enough people to provide as personal referees? Who would support them with any practical help? Who could they turn to emotionally?

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<sup>1</sup> This section drawn from [SG Info](#), which also references the Family Rights Group, Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment

**Impact on the family.** You will need to find out if they have thought about any changes that they will need to make in their home and lifestyle. How will they balance the practical day-to-day care responsibilities alongside working? What will the impact be on their own children?

**Possibility of the arrangement becoming Long-Term.** Family members often put themselves forward with a view that a child will return to their parents in a few months or a few years' time. It is important to remind them at this early stage that the Local Authority is care planning for the long term for a child until they are 18 years of age.

**Ex-partners and seeking references.** Another area that should be raised is that of ex-partners, especially where there are children involved. They will need to be contacted as part of the further assessment. In most instances, the ex-partner reference will be required, and this should be made clear early in the process.

- 3.2 The carer(s) should be notified of the outcome of the Viability Assessment within 10 working days.
- 3.3 If the Viability Assessment is positive, the Fostering Social Worker will make a referral to ASPIRE using the correct referral form and attaching the completed Viability Assessment and PNC check.
- 3.4 The child's Social Worker should notify Dorset Council's Legal Department of the intention to apply for an SGO.
- 3.5 The child's Social Worker will notify the Finance Department Payments Officer, who will send Finance Assessment forms for the prospective carer(s) to complete.

#### **4. The SGO Assessment process**

- 4.1 The main steps in the SGO Assessment process are set out in [Applications for Special Guardianship Orders](#). This section sets out our additional local requirements.
- 4.2 The Fostering Social Worker will invite the allocated ASPIRE Special Guardianship Assessor to a planning meeting within 5 working days of referral to ASPIRE. The Assessor will also be invited to all Permanence Planning Meetings (PPM) that take place during the assessment period. Ideally a PPM will take place during weeks 4-6 of the assessment period.
- 4.3 The SGO Assessment must be completed and filed within 12 weeks. The child's Social Worker should maintain contact with the ASPIRE Assessor throughout this period to help them ensure that the assessment is completed on time.
- 4.4 The child's Social Worker should notify Dorset Council's Legal Department promptly if any legal difficulties arise.

- 4.5 The ASPIRE Assessor should send their completed draft assessment including the S21 Report and child's Support Plan to the child's Social Worker not less than 10 working days before filing is due.
- 4.6 The child's Social Worker should review the draft assessment and suggest any amendments they believe are necessary. The ASPIRE Assessor should complete any amendments and send the completed assessment to the child's social worker at least 5 working days before filing is due.
- 4.7 On receipt of the completed assessment, the child's Social Worker should send it immediately to the Change in Placements and Allowances Group ([gapaudits@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:gapaudits@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)) and to the Legal Department for each to approve.
- 4.8 The Change in Placement and Allowances Group and the Legal Department should notify their approval (or any changes required) to the child's Social Worker not less than 2 working days before filing is due.
- 4.9 The child's Social Worker should submit the approved/amended assessment to the Legal Department for filing at least one working day before the deadline.