

Family, Friends and Connected Person Policy



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Purpose of the Policy

This Policy is a refresh of the Family & Friends Policy 2011 and Kinship Strategy 2012, and outlines how children and young people who are unable to live with their parents will be supported as either “**children in need**” cared for on a voluntary basis through an agreed family arrangement as part of a Child In Need plan or Child Protection Plan or as “**looked after children**” cared for by “friends, family or connected persons” who have been assessed and approved as a foster carers.

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Principles of this Policy:

The central principle of our policy is that, wherever it is safe, appropriate and in the child's best interests to do so, children should be enabled and supported to live with their families or with a connected person.

One of Worcestershire Children's Services values is to “**value family life**” and this means we will support all children and young people to have a family life lived experience.

Ultimately the needs and welfare of the child are paramount to us when facilitating or supporting any caring arrangements.

This Policy is underpinned and supported by a suite of Worcestershire Children's Services and stakeholder strategies and policies, including:

- *Worcestershire Children's Services Sufficiency Policy*
- *SGO Financial Policy 2021*
- *Worcestershire Children's Services Business plan*
- *Worcestershire Children's Services Strengthening Families First services*
- *Worcestershire Children's Services Safeguarding Families project*

Family & Friends Policy October 2024

- *Worcestershire Children's Services Early Help and Family Support offer*
- *Children and Young People Strategic Partnership plan in association with Health and Well-Being Board and ICS priorities*
- *Worcestershire Adoption Agency and Adoption Central England (ACE) strategic plan*
- *Worcestershire Council Corporate Parenting Strategy*
- *Worcestershire Children's Services Permanency Policy*

Legal Framework

A key principle of the *Children Act 1989* is that children and young people should be enabled to live within their families unless this is neither in their best interests nor consistent with their welfare.

The phrase "family and friends care" refers to arrangements for a child to be cared for full time by a relative, friend or other person connected to the child.

It can include:

- A voluntary agreement by family members
- Foster placement with a Connected Person
- Private Fostering by a person who is already known to the child.
- Child Arrangements Orders.
- Special Guardianship
- Adoption

The differences between these, and the powers and duties of Worcestershire Children's Services in each case are explained within the policy

Children In Need – The Legislation

Where a child is assessed as being "in need"; support may be provided under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

A child shall be taken to be in need if:

- (a) s/he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for her/him of services by a local authority
- (b) her/his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or
- (c) s/he is disabled.

'Family' in relation to such a child, includes any person who has parental responsibility for the child and any other person with whom, s/he has or will be living.

How does this work in practice for those children in Need of support or Protection?

Where children are open to children's social care and safeguarding services an assessment of their needs, including any risk of harm they are exposed to, will be undertaken and a plan put in place that brings together the professionals, family and child / young person to ensure all are working together to promote the welfare and if necessary, the protection, of a child or young person. **These are called Child in Need or Child Protection plans.**

As part of such a plan it may be identified that for a period of time a child cannot live with birth parents and an alternative family arrangement can be made.

Worcestershire Children's Services can support these **voluntarily agreed family arrangements** with advice, guidance's and financial support under S17.

Such an arrangement will be reviewed on a regular basis taking into account the outcomes being achieved by the child and the views of the child, family carers and parents. The vast majority of these agreed family arrangements will be short term and any longer term arrangements will be for older children where their wishes and those of their parent and carer are all agreed this is the best care arrangement for them.

Children Looked After – the legislation

Legal arrangements for children looked after by the Local Authority are set out under Section 31 of Children Act 1989 (courts make these decisions about children being in care) or children are accommodated by the Local Authority under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 in agreement with birth parents or those holding parental responsibility.

Where a child is brought into care, we (Worcestershire Children's Services) have a duty to see if we can place them with a "connected person".

These are connected persons who are putting themselves forward to care for a child they already have a relationship with, and they become carers formally caring for a looked after child on behalf of Worcestershire Children's Services

In such cases children may be cared for by family and friends **only** if the carers have been approved as Local Authority Foster Carers under the Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, Fostering Regulations (England) 2011 and where they meet the requirements of the National Minimum Fostering Standards 2011.

Further legal arrangements for children to live with family and friends include Adoption or Placement Orders under the Adoption and Children Act 2002; Special Guardianship Orders under Section 14A of the Children Act 1989, Child Arrangement Orders under the Children Act 1989 and Private Fostering under Section 66 of the Children Act 1989.

How does this work in practice for those Looked After and in care of the Local Authority ?

Where it is assessed that a child or young person cannot safely remain within their birth family and a decision is made that they need to come into the care of the local authority, the first consideration will be to identify a “friend, family or connected person” (often referred to as “Kinship” carers) to care for them on behalf of the local authority.

Once a potential carer has been identified a suitability assessment will be undertaken.

Following a positive Suitability Assessment, a connected persons carer can be **temporarily approved as a foster carer**. This temporary approval is valid for a maximum of 16 weeks. The local authority must immediately refer the carer for a full fostering assessment. If this assessment cannot be concluded before the **temporary approval expires, an extension of up to eight weeks can be given following agreement by the Fostering Panel and endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker**. At any time during the 16 weeks (24 weeks if an extension is granted), the local authority can decide not to progress with the assessment and must remove the child from the placement.

Once approved, connected persons’ foster carers **will have a supervising social worker, whose job it is to support them and ensure they have access to ongoing training for foster carers**. The supervising social worker will provide visits as a minimum every 4-6 weeks and will support the carer to work alongside the child’s social worker and the multi-agency group in delivering the child’s care plan.

Family & Friends carers who are temporarily approved, will initially only be paid the allowance for the child, and will only receive the Level 1 professional fee and upwards post approval, or upon the completion of the training and development standards and the kinship induction training.

Weekly Foster Care Allowances and Fees from April 1st 2024

Foster Care Allowance	
Age of Child	£
0 - 2	165.00
3 - 4	170.00
5 - 10	187.00
11 - 15	213.00
16 -17	249.00
Above includes clothing and pocket money	
Foster Care Fee	
Level 1	£102.00
Level 2	£153.00
Level 3	£204.00

In addition, extra payments are made to all foster carers for:

- Holidays (2 weeks foster care allowance per year)
- Birthdays (1-week foster carer allowance per year)
- Religious Festivals (1-week foster carer allowance per year) paid once per year
- Initial Clothing allowance (depending on age)
- School Uniform allowance (depending on age)
- mileage is also paid to foster carers for some transport costs

The Foster carer age allowance is a government recommended national minimum allowance.

Level 1, 2 and 3 payments reflect the length of service and the successful completion of the Training Standards Development and foster carer core training.

Training Advice and Guidance

Family and friends and Connected Persons carers may be caring for a child for the first time, or it may be some time since they cared for their own children – in either case they may not be familiar with the services on offer locally.

The details of the support offer and training programme can be found
[Foster carers training and development | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Additional support for Carers of children in need or those in care

Supporting Family Time for children living away from birth parents

Even if they cannot live with their parents, children often benefit from spending good quality time with them. Where there is a pre-existing close relationship between family, friends and connected person carers and parents this can sometimes be arranged between the carers and the parents with little difficulty.

However, this is not always the case. Even those parents who have asked family or friends to care for their child can find it difficult, as it can be very hard for parents to see their children being cared for by someone else. As well as this, any difficulties (for example mental health difficulties, or substance misuse) which led to the parents being unable to care for the children may not change just because the children are no longer with them. This can mean that family time sessions can be a tense time for carers, parents and, most importantly, children.

When children are in care, the local authority is responsible for making sure there are safe and suitable contact arrangements in place. These will be reviewed regularly as part of reviewing the child's care plan.

For children subject to child in need it is expected that in most cases the family carer will lead on contact arrangement and supervise contact and we will provide support and training via our core mandatory training: Family Time (Contact) which is a training requirement for all our carers.

In Child Protection and Care cases each case will be assessed to determine what the appropriate level of support is required to promote birth family contact that is in the interests of the child's welfare and safety.

Working with Partner Agencies : For all Children in Need, those subject Child in Need, Child Protection and Care plans there will be a multi-agency professional groups support the child, family and carers to work together to the child's agreed plan

Worcestershire Children's Services will work with its partner agencies in health, including mental health and wellbeing services, education providers, housing and in the voluntary sector to ensure that their staff are aware of the needs of children and young people living with family and friends' carers and the challenges facing those carers. They will work with partner agencies to ensure that they are clear about what services they provide and how family and friends carers can access these.

For children living away from their birth parents and their usual family home on a temporary basis their school and other social activities are very important to maintain so carers, parents and agencies will work together to find ways to ensure as much stability and continuity in these arrangements can be maintained as possible.

Moving on from Care to Permanency

For all children in care we want to ensure they have permanence and for most children this means leaving the care system to a different permanency care arrangement that will see them through childhood. The most common permanence arrangements are Special Guardianship, Adoption and Child Arrangement Orders. Details of each are set out below

Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

A Special Guardian (or someone who has applied for a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) may ask us to assess their need for support including financial support and, if the child was looked after by us, or another local authority, immediately before the Special Guardianship Order was made, the appropriate local authority must carry out an Assessment of Need and give a copy of the report to the Special Guardian. When the local authority carries out an assessment it must decide what support, if any, it will offer.

Relatives, friends, or foster carers may apply for an SGO after living with the child for one year, or sooner with the leave of the court. As Special Guardians, they will have parental responsibility for the child which, while it is still shared with the parents, can be exercised with greater autonomy on day-to-day matters than where there is a Child Arrangement Order.

An SGO may be made in private family proceedings, and we may not be a party to any such arrangements. However, the local authority must be given three months' notice of intention to apply for a special guardianship order and we will be responsible for sending a report to the court regarding whether a Special Guardianship Order is in the child's best interest. A Special Guardianship Order can be made in favour of a relative or foster carer with whom a child is living and may be an appropriate outcome as part of a permanence plan for a Child in Need or a 'Looked After' child. A Special Guardianship Order can also be granted as the outcome of care proceedings for a child.

If the child was Looked After before the Special Guardianship Order was granted, they will no longer be a "Looked After Child" and the responsibility of the Local Authority.

Where the Special Guardian was a Kinship Foster Carer prior to being appointed as a Special Guardianship Carer, the financial loss of the foster carer paid "age allowance and professional fee" may act as a barrier to this route of permanency for some children. Worcestershire Children's Services recognise that a foster carer might be able to provide permanency which is in a foster child's best interests but be deterred from applying for Special Guardianship because of the loss of the fostering allowance and any reward (fee) being paid in respect of the child.

The ***Worcestershire Children's Services Special Guardianship Financial Support policy 2021*** ([Policy for Special Guardianship Financial Support \(sharepoint.com\)](#)) sets out the parameters of financial support for Special Guardianship Carers **and seeks to address that concern by ensuring that a former foster carer has financial stability upon becoming Special Guardian to a former looked after child.**

Where more specialist support is required to support the health and wellbeing needs of a child who was previously looked after, and is subject to an SGO, then the Special Guardian can request an Assessment of Need to be completed.

This assessment is completed by Worcestershire Children's Services Permanency Planning and Support Team. Through this assessment Special Guardians can gain access to a referral for the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic support.

The Adoption Support Fund is not available where the child was not looked after prior to being made subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

Special Guardians can seek therapeutic financial support through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). An Assessment of Need will be undertaken to assess and identify the child's therapeutic needs, and this will be set out in the SGO Support Plan. Applications to the ASF will be completed by the allocated social worker.

Carers are also expected to claim all other benefits and tax credits they may be entitled to when they assume parental responsibility for a child.

Children who were looked after prior to the SGO being made are entitled to:

- Extra support with education
- Priority school admissions (additionally their school can claim Pupil Premium Plus between 5 and 15 years)
- Worcestershire Children's Services will pay for the first 3 years of the Special Guardianship Membership for Foster Talk.
- Leaving Care Support.

Child Arrangement Orders

Child Arrangement Orders were introduced in April 2014, by the Children and Families Act 2014. They replace Contact Orders and Residence Orders which amended the Children Act 1989.

A Child Arrangement Order gives parental responsibility to the person named in the Order as the person with whom a child is to live. Parental responsibility remains shared with the parents following the making of a Child Arrangement Order.

In the case of a child who was looked after by the same carer immediately prior to the making of a Child Arrangements Order, there is currently no specific statutory guidance regarding any assessment which should be undertaken by us for support services, which may include financial support.

The local authority has aligned payments to carers with a Child Arrangement Order where this is a direct alternative to the child being looked after.

All Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Order Allowances are considered under the *Special Guardianship Finance Policy 2021*, [Policy for Special Guardianship Financial Support \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Adoption

Adoption is the process by which all parental rights and responsibilities for a child are permanently transferred to an adoptive parent by a court. As a result, the child legally becomes part of the adoptive family. Once a child is adopted, adopters can also claim child benefit and child tax credit.

An Adoption Order in favour of a relative or foster carer with whom a child is living may be an appropriate outcome as part of a permanence plan for a Child in Need or a Child in Care. Children who have been adopted and their families are eligible to receive adoption support services.

Worcestershire Children's Services is part of Adoption Central England (ACE). ACE has the responsibility of assessing people applying to adopt and provides post order support to adopted children. They will review the adoption support plan and if appropriate following assessment will apply to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of adopted children. Information on the services provided can be found on their website at www.aceadoption.com

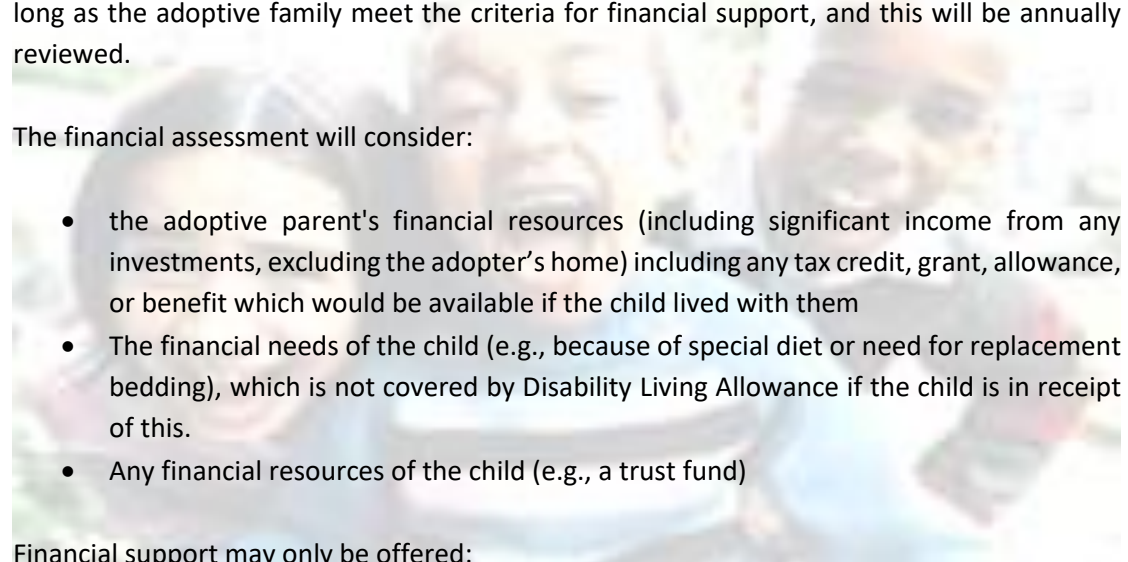
Adoption Central England (ACE) is the Regional Adoption Agency that provides a range of adoption support services on behalf of five Local Authorities in the region: Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull.

Families who adopt children can request an assessment for adoption support services at any time. ACE and the Locality Safeguarding Social Worker will carry out this assessment and will work with families to provide the adoption support that they need. If it is agreed that support is needed, an Adoption Support Plan will highlight what this support will be and how it will be delivered.

Adoption support can include a range of services such as advice and guidance, additional training, support groups, therapeutic support, and financial support. If therapeutic support is needed, ACE can make an application to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of the family.

Worcestershire Children's services remain responsible for any financial support to adopters including any assessment for an adoption allowance. Prior to the making of an Adoption Order a financial assessment will be undertaken and if financial support is agreed it will be paid as long as the adoptive family meet the criteria for financial support, and this will be annually reviewed.

The financial assessment will consider:

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- the adoptive parent's financial resources (including significant income from any investments, excluding the adopter's home) including any tax credit, grant, allowance, or benefit which would be available if the child lived with them
 - The financial needs of the child (e.g., because of special diet or need for replacement bedding), which is not covered by Disability Living Allowance if the child is in receipt of this.
 - Any financial resources of the child (e.g., a trust fund)

Financial support may only be offered:

- where it is necessary to ensure that the adoptive parent can look after the child.
- where the child has been assessed as having care needs which requires greater expenditure of resources.
- where it is necessary for the local authority to make any special arrangements to facilitate the placement or the adoption by reason of the age or ethnic origin of the child, or the desirability of the child being placed with the same adoptive parent as his brother or sister or with a child with whom he has previously shared a home.
- where such support is to meet recurring costs in respect of travel for the purpose of visits between the child and a related person.
- expenditure on legal costs, including fees payable to a court in relation to an adoption.
- expenditure necessary for the purpose of accommodating and maintaining the child.

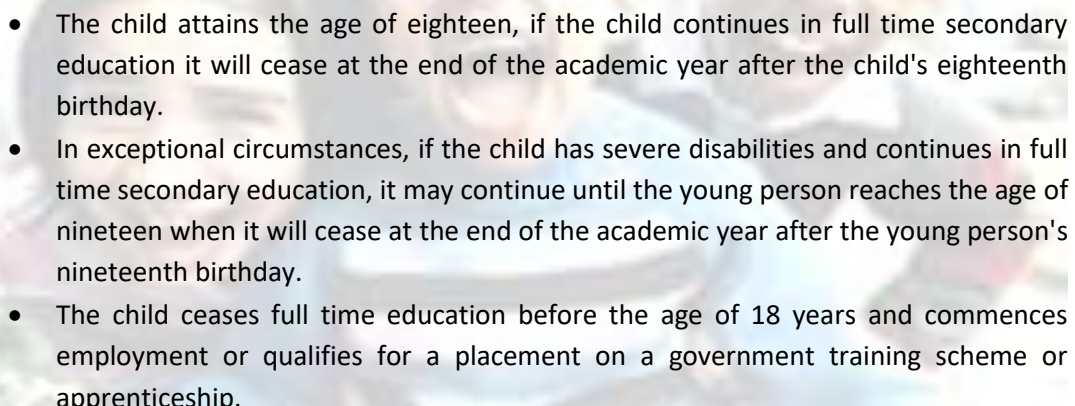
Financial support can be a single payment or a periodical payment to meet ongoing costs.

When adopters have previously been a child's foster carers, Worcestershire County Council may consider continuing any payments received by foster carers, from the date of the placement and for up to 2 years from the date of the Adoption Order. This will be possible regardless of the outcome of their financial assessment, where the child's specific needs would indicate that this is justified and where without such payments, adoption would not be possible.

The Adoption Regulations allow the Local Authority discretion to offer this to foster carers for the purpose of a two-year transitional provision to give the family time to adjust to their new circumstance. This arrangement would be reviewed after the first year but will not normally be subject to change unless there is significant change in the financial situation of the adopter or child.

After the two-year transitional period the adopter would need to request a further assessment of support needs and any financial support would be determined as outlined previously in this document.

Financial support ceases to be payable to an adoptive parent if:

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- The child attains the age of eighteen, if the child continues in full time secondary education it will cease at the end of the academic year after the child's eighteenth birthday.
 - In exceptional circumstances, if the child has severe disabilities and continues in full time secondary education, it may continue until the young person reaches the age of nineteen when it will cease at the end of the academic year after the young person's nineteenth birthday.
 - The child ceases full time education before the age of 18 years and commences employment or qualifies for a placement on a government training scheme or apprenticeship.
 - The child qualifies for Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance in his or her own right.
 - The child attends a residential or boarding school; in these circumstances the assessed financial support will be reduced by at least 60% of the figure assessed.
 - The child becomes looked after by the Local Authority.
 - The child ceases to have a home with them.
 - The child dies.
 - The child receives a custodial sentence. The Authority will consider continuation of some payment, depending on individual circumstances.

The agreement to pay financial support based on the outcome of the means test and assessment of need lies with the Assistant Director - Permanency, Worcestershire Children's Services.

Other types of Family Care arrangements

Private Fostering

In some cases where the children are cared for by someone other than a close relative these arrangements may fall under private fostering regulations and we may be involved with providing services to these children and families to support the arrangements, to promote and safeguard the child's welfare and prevent the children becoming "looked after".

A privately fostered child is one who is under the age of 16 (or 18 if disabled) who is cared for by an adult who is not the child's parent, a person with PR for the child, nor a relative of the child – where the child is accommodated in the adult's home for 28 days or more.

"Relative" is defined as 'a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent'.

In a private fostering arrangement, the parent still holds parental responsibility and agrees the arrangement with the private foster carer and is responsible for any financial payments in respect of the child. Child benefit and child tax credits can be claimed by the private foster carer. You can read Information on our Private Fostering Procedures via this link.

[Private fostering | Worcestershire County Council](#)

We have a duty to confirm suitability of private foster care arrangements and monitor the welfare of all privately fostered children. These duties are set out in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

The local authority may also become involved with a child in a private fostering arrangement where the child comes within the definition or is assessed to be a Child in Need.

Useful Contacts

Worcestershire Children's Services provide an Advocacy Service for children and young people who can support children and young people at any stage;
www.coramvoice.org.uk

Worcestershire Children's Services Fostering service has a contract with FosterTalk to provide an Advice and Mediation service, offering independent support and advice to foster carers.

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Appeals

Where family and friend's carers are not satisfied with the level of financial or non- financial support provided, an appeal may be made through the Group Manager Worcestershire Fostering:

County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
Worcestershire
WR5 2NP
Telephone Number 01905 766321

Email Kwakefield@worcestershire.gov.uk

Assistant Director Permanency

County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
Worcestershire
WR5 2NP
Telephone Number 01905 846009
Email mwhite1@worcestershire.gov.uk

Feedback and Complaints

In accordance with the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure Regulations 2006, we operate a Complaints procedure.

Any family and friends' carer, or child or young person who feels they have grounds may make a complaint in accordance with this procedure. Please Contact:

Group Manager for Worcestershire Fostering

County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
Worcestershire
WR5 2NP
Telephone Number 01905 766321
Email KWakefield@worcestershire.gov.uk

Further Action you can take?

Children and young people who are looked after or adults representing them can also contact The Office of the Children's Commissioner for advice about the services provide at:

The Office of the Children's Commissioner, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street,
London, SW1P 3BT

Tel: 0800 578 0731

Or email advice.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

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If a child, young person, their carers or any member of the public is unhappy with the services provided they are also able to complain to:

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

Or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

The Office of the Local Government Ombudsman

Tel 0300 061 0614 or online at www.lgo.org.uk/complaint-form.

These agencies will have expected you to have gone through the complaint's procedure with Worcestershire County Council before contacting them.



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Appendix 1: General Information:

Early Help: www.worcestershire.gov.uk/earlyhelpfamilysupport

Early Help Family Support Teams can be contacted on:

1. Bromsgrove Team: 01905 845154
2. Malvern Hills Team: 01905 843961
3. Redditch Team: 01905 846783
4. Worcester Team: 01905 843339
5. Wychavon Team: 01905 844229
6. Wyre Forest Team: 01905 846210

Here2Help: a service that offers support for people of all ages and is available for both residents and organisations to access information, advice, tools, guidance, and local support available to them or others in the local community based on their needs.

If you need help with paying your household bills, need advice about managing your debt or finances, emotional support or getting back into work please contact **Here2Help** on 01905 768053 then press option 3. The Here2Help opening hours are Monday to Thursday 9.00am to 5.00pm and Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm.

Access to training and support for Special Guardians can be found here:

[Foster carers training and development | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Starting Well Partnership: [Starting Well Partnership | Worcestershire | Starting Well \(startingwellworcs.nhs.uk\)](#)

[Kinship carers - Family Rights Group \(frg.org.uk\)](#)

Worcestershire Virtual School - [The Virtual School | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Green Fingers Project in Worcestershire - [Green Fingers Project | A healthy lifestyles project for 'Looked After Children' and carers.](#)

Foster Talk - [Foster Care Support | Fostering Support | FosterTalk](#)

Appendix 2: Special Guardianship Order Financial Policy 2021:

[Policy for Special Guardianship Financial Support \(sharepoint.com\)](#)