



ROCHDALE
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Rochdale Guide to Foster Carer Allowances 2017 -2018

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Introduction

Rochdale Council values the skills, knowledge, experience and commitment of Foster Carers who provide care and support to Cared4children and young people. This document outlines the schedule of weekly payments made to foster carers and the foster carers “skills scheme”. The skills payment scheme will replace the previous year’s payment arrangements.

Foster Carers provide an ‘alternative’ family environment and care for children who are unable to live with their parents for a variety of reasons. The financial cost of caring for a Cared4child is recognised in the form of an allowance paid. Recommendations for the minimum allowance paid by Local Authorities are set by Government. Fees are determined by each Fostering Service and are payments for expertise, training and experience, which are over and above the skill needed for ‘ordinary parenting’ and are paid in recognition of the fact that fostering is complex and specialised work. Inclusive of:

- Foster Carers working with the Fostering and Children’s Social Care Services and have to adhere to the standards and regulatory frameworks which underpin this area of work. This includes Care Planning and Fostering Regulations.
- Foster Carers are part of the child or young person’s multi-agency team and contribute to this professionally. They are expected to take on a range of responsibilities, including ensuring that children have contact with their families, attend and contribute to children and young people’s reviews and care planning meetings, record keeping and training.

This guide is for Foster Carers including Connected Carers (Family & Friends) and Finance Officers in the Commissioning team who authorise payments. It is also relevant to Supervising Social Workers and staff involved in the supervision of children in placement to ensure that there is a clear and transparent approach to financial arrangements.

Rochdale Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring that carers receive the correct payment in respect of the cared4children placed with Foster Carers.

Principles of Payment to Foster Carers

Payments to Foster Carers are divided into 2 categories as follows:

- Fostering Allowances - These are remuneration and reimbursement payments. They are paid to cover the daily costs of caring for a child or young person and other payments made to cover specific costs they incur.
- Fees - Fees are professional payments, paid to carers recognising their skills in caring for children and young people placed with them. This is based on the Foster Carer’s registration status.

Fostering Allowances

Standard Fostering Allowance

This is a weekly allowance paid for all children who are looked after in foster families, which varies according to the child’s age.

The Fostering Allowance covers:

- Food including school lunches
- Personal and household expenditure
- Toys and play equipment

- Activities - including clubs, hobbies and family days out
- School activities - including trips, holidays and associated equipment
- Bedding and replacement bedding
- Pocket money and savings
- Day to day transport by car or public transport
- Clothing and school uniform
- Attendance at review meetings etc.
- Keeping a record of events and memories about the child for the child

This list is not exhaustive and further guidance can be obtained from the Fostering Service.

Age related Fostering Allowances are based upon the Department for Education Fostering Allowances. In addition there are payments made annually towards the cost of holidays, birthday and festivals. These rates are free from income tax, as long as they do not exceed the qualifying amount. Information regarding tax and allowances are available from the Department of Education link. <https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

There is an expectation that Foster Carers will encourage young people of an appropriate age to manage some of their own finances in line with their plan for independence.

Payment is made one week in arrears and one week in advance. The last day paid is the last night a child or young person stays (i.e. if they leave on the 11th of the month then the last date of payment will be the 10th).

Oversight of allowances

The Supervising Social Worker and the Child's Social Worker are to ensure that the Fostering Allowance is spent appropriately on the placed child in a manner, which meets the child's needs. This will be monitored through statutory visits for the child and supervisory visits for the carer.

Foster Carers are expected to help children manage money and save. There is an expectation that each child will have their own bank account.

Overpayments

If Foster Carer's continue to receive payments after a child has left their care, Foster Carers must contact their Supervising Social Worker or the Finance Officer immediately. When a child leaves a Foster Carer's care, payment of fees and allowances will end on that day.

Overpayments will be dealt with in one of the following ways:

- If the Foster Carer has other foster children, the overpayment will be deducted from future payments in respect of those children.
- If the overpayment cannot be deducted from any payments the Foster Carer is currently receiving, Rochdale Council will ask carers to provide a cheque for the outstanding amount. Foster Carer's are advised to contact the Finance Officer, if they are unable to pay the amount in full, to arrange repayment by instalments.
- If the Foster Carer is made aware of the overpayment before it is received, then there is an expectation that the overpayment will be returned in full, immediately.
- If the overpayment cannot be deducted from any payments and the Foster Carer does not agree to payments by instalments then the overpayment will be referred to the Corporate Debt

Team and recovered in line with the Corporate Debt Policy.

Retainers

The majority of foster carers will have the opportunity to have children in placement for 52 weeks a year, this reinforces the child's right to a family life.

Payments may be made, in exceptional circumstances, prior to the planned start date of a placement or end of placement, to support introductions or doing other pre-placement preparatory work or transition periods.

Where carers support a young person who is in the army (under the age of 18) then a retainer payment of 50% of the Basic Allowance and Fee will be paid.

Payments during introductory visits/rehabilitation plans

During introductions to a foster placement and where an overnight stay is undertaken, payments will be made at the pro rata allowance.

Where foster carers are supporting a child to move on to adoption then payments will be made to support this, in line with the local authority's substance allowances for staff. If accommodation is required, then this should be discussed and agreed with the fostering service, prior to any bookings to make sure the most appropriate accommodation is provided.

Holiday Allowances, School Organised Holidays and Trips:

Cared4children and young people are provided with a holiday allowance **once** in a financial year (April – March). This is the equivalent of two weeks Basic Fostering Allowance. The holiday allowance would normally be authorised for payment via your Supervising Social Worker following agreement for particular holidays. The holiday allowance is paid to allow carers to take a child on a family holiday or to be used for holiday activities.

Essential Holiday Considerations

- Foster Carers are **not** permitted to take children out of school for holidays. Permission will **not** be provided by Children's Social Care for term time holidays.
- For holidays abroad, permission must be sought from a Delegated Officer within the service. It is essential to seek permission prior to booking any such holidays.

School organised holidays and trips may be identified through the Personal Education Plan (PEP) for the child. The costs can, in some instances, be applied for through the Pupil Premium Plus, (this is discretionary, depending on the specific needs of the individual child). The Foster Carer should discuss these needs with the child's Social Worker.

All costs for clothing/ equipment, holidays and trips must be met via the weekly allowance and/ or the annual holiday allowance.

Carers Holidays

All children have a right to a 'family life' and children need to feel part of the family where they are living. To support family life and consistency Rochdale fostering Service have an expectation that a cared4 child is included in the fostering family holidays. There are occasions when this might not be possible, these are in specific or exceptional circumstances.

Foster Carers will be supported to access breaks from caring, if appropriate and part of the child's

plan, particularly if this meets the needs of the child to sustain the placement, this may be achieved through existing support networks and will continue to provide consistency to children. However, all holidays without children must be agreed in advance with both the children’s social worker and carer’s Supervising Social Worker. Attention must be paid to the child’s needs and arrangements to support them must be appropriate, arrangements for care and support must be set out in the safer caring policy, child’s care plan and placement plan.

Where carers request to take a holiday and have arranged under pre-approved ‘delegated authority’, for a suitable third party, to look after the foster children, the normal fee and allowance will be paid to the carer. It is the carers’ responsibility to arrange appropriate financial support, for the suitable third party they have chosen, from the fee and allowance paid by the Local Authority. This applies even if the third party is also an approved Foster Carer. Once again all support arrangements must be agreed and detailed within the safer caring policy, child’s care plan and placement plan. Where a cared4child is accommodated under Section 20 then parental consent must be sought in all instances.

Foster Carer Support

Breaks from caring can be a valuable support for carers who are caring for children and young people who are facing challenges in their lives. Regular support may be considered and should be agreed at the start of the placement in line with the Cared4child or young person’s plan.

Support can be provided from the carers own support network made up of friends and family that they use to help them foster such as provide babysitting, occasional childminding and emergency assistance (see delegated Authority Section). These breaks are aligned to ordinary family life breaks and is the advantage of using the foster carer’s own family and friends to provide this support.

When cared4children and young people are receiving planned breaks away from the fostering household, the Carers' Skill fee, but not the basic fostering allowance is paid to the carer for a maximum of 14 nights a year, this total also takes into account any requested holiday dates for carers.

Any support arrangements must be kept under careful review in terms of the impact of the arrangement on the cared4child and whether there is a continuing need.

Equipment

Newly approved Foster Carers are provided with ‘setting up equipment’ needed for the cared4children that carers are registered for. This would include items such as a bed, wardrobe, car seat, cot, buggy, sterilizer, highchair and bedding. There is however a price limit on what the Local Authority will pay and this will also be dependent upon the registration of the carer and the assessed needs of the child upon placement. Speak to your Supervising Social Worker about arrangements for purchasing items.

The amount payable will be paid at the following rates for the following age ranges each cost is a maximum payable and it is not intended that the full amount will be payable in all instances, payments are discretionary and based on need.

Age	Amount (max)
0-4	£800
5-11	£450
12+	£300

Replacement equipment should be purchased from the basic allowance. However, request to support payments may be requested and again this payment is discretionary; replacements will only be provided where necessary and appropriate to meet the cared4child's needs. All replacement equipment, where financial assistance is needed, **must** be agreed to, prior to purchase.

Rochdale Borough Council will replace mattresses for all cots for a new placement.

All equipment purchased is the property of Rochdale Council and if and when a child or young person moves on, then equipment should be returned to the fostering service, if this does not move with the child or young person to their new placement.

Clothing Allowance

An initial allowance can be paid for each child to provide clothing. This payment is discretionary and based on an assessment of the child's needs at the time of placement. This payment is only paid once as the Basic Fostering Allowance contains an element for clothing replacement, etc. This fee is paid when a child or young person first becomes cared4, and will be agreed within the initial planning meeting. The maximum amount payable is £300 and will only be paid within the first 3 months of becoming cared for. However, it is not intended that the full amount will be payable in all instances, the needs of the child at that time will determine the level of allowance.

It is important that cared4 children are provided with appropriate, well-fitting, seasonal clothing and an appropriate holdall or case. This will be monitored by the child's Social Worker during visits. If, when a child moves to a new carer, it is found the clothing is not adequate, then the previous carer will be expected to reimburse the costs of the shortfall. Carers should keep receipts for all clothing and a record of items purchased.

School Uniforms

Foster carers can seek an allowance of up to £160 to assist with the purchase of badged items of uniform only when a cared4child is starting school or has to change schools due to their care plan. This is discretionary and will depend upon the age of the child and necessity of items.

Foster carers should keep receipts for all expenditure and pass these to the fostering social worker, who will arrange for reimbursement. Failure to provide receipts may mean repayment is delayed or not agreed.

Where uniform is only available from the school e.g. sweatshirts with the school logo, a copy of the order form should be given to the fostering social worker. This should show the total amount spent.

Replacement school clothing is covered by basic fostering allowances and will not be reimbursed as a separate or additional amount each year for the cared4child if they remain at the same school.

All other costs and replacement are expected to be met through the clothing element contained within the basic fostering allowance. The same applies to sports equipment and sports clothing.

Travel/ Mileage & Telephone Expenses

The basic Fostering Allowance includes an element for travelling costs which are part of the normal pattern of expenditure incurred in caring for a foster child. One journey will be classed as for example home to school. Examples of travel which the Foster Carer would be expected to absorb within the fostering allowance would include:

- Normal trips for medical appointments if local to the Foster Carer.

- Transport to and from school
- Taking and collecting the child from social activities.
- Transport to and from contact sessions.
- Attendance at reviews, case conferences, child protection meetings and care planning meetings.
- The cost of travel to and from hospital and hospital parking charges where the child has a regular appointment with a hospital consultant or specialist
- Attendance at a training session provided by Rochdale Fostering Service.

Additional travel costs above those listed above will be paid on journeys which are above 5 miles and the payment will **only** be for any additional mileage over the 5 miles. Mileage will be paid at the rate as per HMRC <https://www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-business-travel-mileage/rules-for-tax> , based on taking the shortest route possible. All travel expenses should be itemised and submitted using the appropriate form. All submissions must be in within the previous three months any claims outside of this timeframe will not be reimbursed.

Reimbursement will only be made for public transport costs if this is over and above the cost of the equivalent mileage and the deduction of 5 miles.

Pocket Money & Savings

The weekly allowance includes pocket money which is to be given to a cared4child or young person. All school age children must have a savings account and receive pocket money; this is inclusive of younger children and babies for which carers should add to the cared4child's saving account

Pocket money can either be given to them as cash each week, or some can be given to the child and the rest saved. Savings accounts and any saved pocket money must go with the cared4child if they have to move placement or if they return home.

Pocket Money **must not** be withdrawn from children in placement.

Suggested Minimum Pocket Money Amounts

Age	Weekly Amount
5-8	£3.50
9-12	£5.00
13-16	£10.00
16 +	To be agreed in pathway plan

Passports and Documents

The cost of obtaining birth certificates (and copies) and passports will be met by the local authority. The costs of photographs will be met by the Foster Carer as part of the basic allowance.

Sitting

Foster carers may require the occasional support of sitting and day care to manage the everyday demands of family life/work requirements alongside their child care/fostering commitments.

Child care needs, and how these will be met, should form part of the discussion between fostering social workers and foster carers during assessment and supervision, and at the placement planning meeting with a child's social worker. When a cared4child is placed this will be incorporated into the placement plan (inclusive of delegated authority) and with your safer caring policy.

Foster carers are encouraged to identify members of their own support network (family and friends and foster care colleagues) who can provide sitting/day care.

Foster carers will be expected to pay for baby-sitting arrangements which are made for their own leisure or social arrangements. This should be agreed through Delegated Authority support networks.

Hospital Stays

If a cared4child has a hospital stay for any period of time whilst placed with foster carers, the basic fostering allowance and skills fee will continue to be paid in full. This is in recognition of the continued care and support given daily to the child in hospital by the carer.

If for any unusual reason the daily support is not needed or given i.e. parents providing this, the fostering allowance will cease, and the fee will also cease at a time it is considered appropriate.

Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independence Payment

Children under the age of 16 years cannot claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA) themselves. Foster Carers are the most appropriate person to make a claim for a cared4child who is entitled to this benefit but is under 16 years old. However, this must only be claimed in consultation with and following approval from the child or young person's social worker and the fostering service.

Foster Carers who receive DLA for a fostered child have the responsibility to use the benefit appropriately to support the practical and emotional needs of the child. This must be reflected in the child or young person's placement plan and form part of the overall care plan for them and will also be addressed within reviews for both children and foster carers. Your supervising social worker and the child's social worker will look at the how this money has been used for the child/young person.

The use of the DLA will depend on the individual child's needs. The Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) expect the award to be used for extra support for the child and to save any surplus for the child to use in the future. This cannot be used for anything already paid for through Foster Care allowances. Foster Carers should open a separate bank account for the child if they do not already have one. Money in this bank account must go with the child if they move. Your supervising social worker with

The misuse of DLA money is taken very seriously, and can be considered a criminal offence.

N.B For young people over the age of 16 Personal Independence Payment (PIP) may be claimed, all points above apply to this payment.

Insurance

As a foster carer it is very important that your insurance policy covers your foster children. Rochdale Fostering Service strongly recommends that foster carers have the following cover:

- Household and contents insurance cover
- Buildings insurance for owner occupiers
- Fully comprehensive motor vehicle insurance to keep within the law, including a valid licence and MOT
- Holiday insurance which includes foster children's holidays abroad

You should notify your Insurance Company(ies), in writing of your fostering activities and ask for confirmation that children placed will be considered members of the family.

You should make sure your household policy gives you cover to pay all sums for which a member of

the family is legally liable in respect of accidents which result in bodily injury or illness to any person, or loss or damage to property (public liability option).

Insurance Claims

Liability to Users of the Scheme

- a) You should notify your Insurance Company(ies), in writing of your fostering activities and ask for confirmation that children placed will be considered members of the family.
- b) You should make sure your household policy gives you cover to pay all sums for which a member of the family is legally liable in respect of accidents which result in bodily injury or illness to any person, or loss or damage to property (public liability option).
- c)

Car Insurance

You should inform your insurers of your fostering activities and any car that is used to transport children should have fully comprehensive insurance.

Personal Accident Including Assault

Rochdale Borough Council holds a personal accident policy for Carers for certain circumstances.

Staying Put

Staying Put describes the situation when young people over 18 who were previously cared4 children and in training or education wish to stay with their foster carers. When a young person reaches the age of 18 they are no longer regarded as being cared4 children as all Care Orders cease and the Local Authority parental responsibility ends.

Full policy details are available (ask your supervising social worker) and Staying Put carers become entitled to a Post 18 Providers Allowance. The amount paid will depending upon the payments made to the foster carers at that time and in line with the Staying Put policy. The amount paid will cover heating, lighting, rent and food. The carers are not expected to provide the young person with a personal allowance.

Young people are expected to apply for housing benefit once they are 18 and they will be given help with this. If the claim is successful, the amount received is deducted from the carers Post 18 Providers' allowance.

If a young person is in employment they will be supported to remain with their ex-foster carers, a financial assessment will be undertaken to determine if any contributions may be payable this will be based on their earnings and other entitlements.

Carers should seek independent advice about their income tax as this is not with in their foster care status.

Young people who remain in foster homes after they are 18 years old need to have a DBS check if there are cared4 children within the home or likely to be placed in the foster carers home.

Where carers support a young person who is away at university, they will receive support in line with the councils Staying Put policy. This states that a payment fee will be paid at 50% of the Staying Put allowance by Rochdale Borough Council.

SKILLS BASED ALLOWANCES

Skills based allowances are based on the foster carers skills required to enter an allowance level; once attained the skills must be evidenced for that allowance level to continue. If the skills are not evidenced or attained then skills evidenced are matched to the lower skills level in determining the

skills payment. Your skills level will be reviewed on an annual basis this is a separate assessment to your annual foster carer review.

Level 1	Basic Allowance	Skills Payment
0-4	128	0
5-10	141	0
11-15	161	0
16+	188	0
Level 2	Basic Allowance	Skills Payment
0-4	128	75
5-10	141	75
11-15	161	75
16+	188	75
Level 3	Basic Allowance	Skills Payment
0-4	128	140
5-10	141	140
11-15	161	140
16+	188	140
Level 4	Basic Allowance	Skills Payment
5-10	141	280
11-15	161	280
16+	188	280

	Level One Skills Base	R/E/M
1	Approved foster carers – permanent or temporary approval	R/E
2	Personally transport and/or ensure children are able to get to where they need to be, in line with their agreed needs.	E
3	Support – Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children have full attendance at school and are not taken out of school for appointments/meetings that should be scheduled for outside school hours Support children with homework and promote an active learning environment at home, celebrating educational achievements. 	E
4	Encourage – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage children’s talents and their interests and hobbies. Encourage the personal growth of children, in relation to taking appropriate and calculated risks in line with their development and age. 	E
5	Working in partnership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to Personal Education Plans, Leisure Plans, Health Plans, Care Plans, Health and Social Care Plans (EHCP). Complete tasks identified as the responsibility of the Foster Carers in all plans concerning the child, e.g. Personal Education Plans (PEPs), Leisure Plans, Health Plans and Care Plans. Participate in Life Work with children – including the taking and storing of photographs of important events. Work positively with children’s families and other significant people involved with the child or young person, building relationships and supervising contact as part of the child or young person’s plan. 	E

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	
6	Promote <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote healthy lifestyles; including social and physical activity and healthy foods. • Promote independence skills and help them to learn new skills such as budgeting, opening a bank account, preparing meals, shopping and compromising skills. 	E
7	Safeguard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set appropriate boundaries and forge positive relationships with children and young people built on mutual respect and understanding, without the use of physical or other inappropriate techniques. • Provide a safe, caring and nurturing environment where children feel valued and included. • Provide access to a computer and make arrangements to ensure that the child cannot access inappropriate material via the computer and is appropriately supervised. • 	E
8	Fostering role <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain an accurate daily log, which is of a good professional standard, demonstrating and reflecting upon the views of children and young people. Log records may be requested by courts. • Keep information confidential • Use training opportunities and to improve skills in fostering. 	E

Level Two Skills Base		R/E
9	To have completed skills to foster training at approval	R
10	All core training and Training Support and Development Standards Completed	E
12	All requirements of Level One Skills Based	E
12	Providing care to a child unknown to them who has been matched to them	E/M
13	A proven track record of providing a good standard of care to Cared 4 Children which promotes their holistic development, including health, leisure, emotional and educational achievement and also promotes children's cultural/ethnic and identity needs.	E/M
14	Attendance and contribution to relevant training	E/M
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of providing care and support to children in line with their care plan • Attendance and contribution to the care planning processes for children 	E/M

Level Three Skills Base		
Carers with a minimum of 2 years' experience and are able to demonstrate they have the knowledge, experience and skills at an appropriate level, to enable them to meet the challenges, and needs of children they will be expected to care for.		
16	All requirements of level One and Two	E/M
17	If fostering for longer than 12 months, they must demonstrate they have consistently developed their abilities as foster carers, through training and experience.	E
18	Must have successfully completed the Level 3 Diploma or hold an equivalent qualification (there will be an expectation that this will include completion of the 3	R

	specific fostering diploma modules).	
19	All carers registered as skill level 3 are able to have children placed who need carers skilled at this level.	E/M
20	<p>Child specific support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for and provide a varied and appropriate routine for children which set clear and achievable goals in order to enhance their development. Attend any set meetings independently and ensure professional participation and contribution about the child's needs. Short Break Scheme for children with disabilities who have substantial needs.<i>[evidence only if relevant to approval]</i> Challenge, appropriately and advocate on behalf of children in a manner which promotes their rights whilst supporting good multi-agency working Work as part of the child or young person's multi agency team to undertake individual work with children as part of their overall care plan and developmental needs. 	E/M
21	<p>Assessment and representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe and assess children, record observations and assessments on a regular basis and where appropriate escalate any concerns. Observations and written information to be provided to the child's social worker to contribute to their overall care plan. Identify any issues presenting to the child or young person that may be impacting on their development and seek resolutions and or solutions to help them. 	E/M
22	Monitor and support educational attainment and ensure appropriate targets are set in order to ensure children and young people reach their full potential	E/M
23	Support children and families to understand issues around attachment, loss and bereavement – this may be because of life-threatening illnesses, separation through adoption, or loss of their family.	E/M
24	<p>Additional fostering role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify own training needs, complete all identified training requirements or learning and demonstrate how this has been applied to practice. Willingness to assist at training events and foster carer recruitment events. Support the fostering service and contribute effectively to the development of the service. 	E/M

	<p>Level Four Skill Base</p> <p>Carers with a minimum of 3 years' experience and are able to demonstrate they have the knowledge, experience and skills and will have substantial relevant experience, and training. They will have demonstrable ability to manage and meet the needs of children, who may be facing challenging situations.</p>	
25	All level 4 Foster Carers must meet the requirements as set out in levels 1, 2 & 3.	E/M
26	Skill Level 4 carers are expected to be available to care for a child at any time, i.e. any employment they may have, would not prevent them from caring for a child when required to do so.	E/M
27	<p>Knowledge/Experience and required skill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have proven relevant child care experience which would include fostering, or employment in working with children. Have an awareness and understanding of current legislation and current issues 	E/M

	<p>in child care and good practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake the role of an ‘Appropriate Adult’ (as defined by The Police and Criminal Evidence Act) when a child has been arrested, and is being questioned under caution at a police station – training is provided for this • Accept and manage children/ young people assessed as presenting with complex needs arising out of social, developmental or disability. • Participate in delivering intensive therapeutic work to children and young people in line with their agreed plans. • 	
28	<p>Addition to fostering role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a key role in training other carers and developing programmes of training for carers. • Offer support to carers e.g. mentoring • Continue to evidence self-learning and development and the impact of this for children and young people in their care 	E/M
29	<p>Additional Matching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being receptive to being matched with children from returning from residential placements • Being receptive to being matched with mother and baby placements • Being receptive to being matched with older children • Being receptive to having sibling groups more than three children 	E/M

Key to allowance table		
R=required	E=evidenced	M=maintained evidence

How does the ‘skills based model’ work?

Foster carers can progress through the levels or may find that they wish to reduce a level or it may be that you need to reduce a level. You will need to consider your fostering role, training, development over the course of the year and keep the skills evidence matrix up to date. Your supervising social worker will be able to discuss this with you at your supervisory visit.

Progression

Carers can progress through the skills levels as they acquire the relevant skills, experience and qualifications. Any carer wishing to progress should discuss this with their Supervising Social Worker.

Experience of carers will be assessed and determined from the first date of placement by the supervising social worker as part of their continued role and development.

When considering progression through the skills levels, the local authority will take into account the number of carers eligible to progress will also be informed by the complexity of needs of the children requiring placement and also where there is a shortage of placements.

Any application for progression will be considered and assessed against the set criteria for each skill level, the needs of the service and any other circumstances that may contribute to the decision

making process. Applications would normally be accepted following a Foster Carers annual review where their suitability to foster is approved with no concerns or issues identified.

If the applicant is successful in evidencing their increased skills and knowledge then the increase in payment will commence from the date of approval by the designated officer. Backdated skills payments will not be made and payment will only be approved once all evidence to progress has been considered and approved through due processes.

In relation to level 1, 2 & 3 the fostering practice manager will consider the assessment of the skills matrix and recommendation by the Supervising Social Worker for approval. Where applications are made for skill level 4 the Head of Service will also consider the assessment alongside the Fostering Practice Manager. Such application will only be considered if a proven track record of fostering demonstrated and/or there is acquired the appropriate skills and knowledge relating to fostering from their professional capacity.

Where an application to progress through the payments scheme is not supported by the Supervising Social Worker or relevant manager, the foster carer has the right to appeal this decision if they feel they meet the criteria. Appeals must be in writing, where appropriate this appeal will be considered by the Fostering Practice Manager for skill level 1,2 & 3 and Head of Service for skill level 4.

All recommendations for progression must be via discussion with your supervising social worker and presented to the Fostering Practice Manager.

Reduction of a skill level

The Fostering Service will reserve the right to transfer a foster carer to a lower skill level where the foster carer has not been able to evidence continuing/maintaining the requirements of that particular level. Examples of this may include, non-attendance at meetings, training/development events identified through supervision, ceasing to contribute to the fostering services, lack of professional insight and not being receptive to being matched with level 4 criteria.

On the rare occasion where this action may be considered, any concerns will be raised and recorded in supervision with the foster carer and subsequently in the foster carers' annual review. This review can be 'brought forward' if appropriate. The Fostering Practice Manager and Head of Service will make a decision based on the evidence presented and may also consider the review report. The foster carer has the right to make a representation to the Fostering Practice Manager and/or Head of Service.

If a Foster Carer declines to undertake this training required for their skill level within the agreed timescale, a review will be carried out in order for an opinion to be informed. A report should be submitted with a recommendation for evaluation of the skill payment for the Foster Carer. This will then be considered by the Fostering Practice Manager and or Head of Service.

If a Foster Carer is reduced from a skill level the Fostering Service will support the carer to meet his/her training and development needs within the agreed timescales set by the service in order for the skills payment to be reinstated.

If a Foster Carer disagrees with the decision, they can put their reasons for their disagreement in writing to the Fostering Services, within 28 days of receipt of the letter confirming reduction of the skill level.

All appeals against the decision for reduction of a fee and move to a lower skill level will be considered by the Fostering Practice Manager and or Head of Service.

Voluntary Removal from a Skill Level

Each Foster Carer has an annual review, which is the carers opportunity to show how well they are doing and in particular how they are fulfilling their role and responsibilities.

Foster carers may ask to be moved to a lower skill level at any point during their career, if they feel that they are unable to fulfil the duties required of them on their present level. This request will be presented to the Fostering Practice Manager and or Head of Service.

Children with Disabilities

All Foster Carers will be approached to care for children with disabilities and will be provided with the appropriate support to do so depending upon the needs of the child/ren placed.

Personal Development Plan

All foster carers must have a Personal Development Plan (PDP), this is usually undertaken around the time of a carer's annual review. The PDP will be discussed at supervision with the Supervising Social Worker. The PDP identifies training / learning carers will complete.

In order to maintain their approval, all Foster Carers are required to complete core training in the following areas [course titles may change but not the topic area] within one year of approval:

- First Aid
- Safer caring
- Safeguarding
- Recording - Best practise booklet/ online training
- Managing Behaviour
- Food hygiene
- CSE
- E-Safety
- Training Support and Development Standards Foster Carer Workbook.

There may be other identified mandatory courses required in this first year depending upon the age range of children Foster Carers may be caring for. Your supervising social worker will discuss this with you.

After the first year and each subsequent year, Foster Carers must complete at least five training sessions, or learning opportunities, demonstrate how that learning has been applied to fostering practice. There are also additional mandatory training courses that must be completed every 3 years.

A Foster Carer who does not fulfil the training / learning requirements could have their skill level reduced. The Supervising Social Worker will identify at an early stage through supervision if there is any risk of the Foster Carer not completing the required training, which will result in reduction from a skill level. If necessary an action plan will be agreed with the Foster Carer, supported by the Supervising Social Worker (see 'How does the skills based model work?')

Allegations against Carers

If a foster carer becomes the subject of allegations that leads to a child being removed from their care, pending the outcome of an investigation, they will still be able to receive their skills payment but the allowance for the child will cease for as long as the child is not with them. This payment will continue until the investigation into the allegation is concluded or the carer is deregistered/approval terminated.