

## **Financial Support to Foster Carers Policy on Payments 2022-23**

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### **Introduction**

This document sets out the allowances, fees and other payments provided to foster carers together with detailed guidance on how they are applied.

Leeds City Council operates a Payment for Skills (PFS) model. Payments to foster carers are made up of two main elements; a **Maintenance Allowance**, paid on a weekly basis depending on the age of the child placed, and a weekly **Fee Element**, which is determined by the Payment for Skills level of the carer and related to the number of children in placement.

(The current Rates for Maintenance Allowance and Fee Element are detailed in the *Appendix A*)

### **Authority to make payments**

Payments to foster carers can only be made where Foster Carers have been formally recommended for approval via a Fostering Panel and approval ratified by the Agency Decision Maker, or under Regulation 24 (Care Planning Regulations) where the approval is for Kinship Care.

### **Scope of this document**

This document provides detailed information in relation to:

- Maintenance Allowances and related guidance
- Additions to Maintenance Allowances and related guidance
- Fee Element and related guidance
- Other financial and material support for foster carers
- Payment's procedures, decision making and related guidance

### **Weekly Maintenance Allowance**

- 1 A weekly maintenance allowance is provided to cover the routine day to day care costs of looking after a child / young person in foster care. The amount of the weekly maintenance allowance is child age related and is calculated on a weekly basis, with sevenths being paid for part weeks. When a child becomes

an age where the maintenance payment increases, this will take effect from the beginning of the week in which the child's birthday falls.

## Allowance Amounts

- 2 Weekly Allowance amounts are detailed in *Appendix A* to this document.

## Breakdown of the Weekly Maintenance Allowance:

- 3 The following % category breakdown is provided as guidance to support Foster Carers for utilising the weekly allowance. Foster Carers are expected to exercise some discretion and allocate proportions of the allowance depending on individual needs of children / young people placed:

| Child Age | Food & Household | Clothing | Transport | Personal | Total |
|-----------|------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-------|
| 0-4yrs    | 70%              | 15%      | 8%        | 7%       | 100%  |
| 5-10yrs   | 68%              | 15%      | 7%        | 10%      | 100%  |
| 11-15yrs  | 65%              | 15%      | 6%        | 14%      | 100%  |
| 16-17yrs  | 65%              | 15%      | 4%        | 16%      | 100%  |

## What the Weekly Maintenance Allowance covers:

- 4 The following list is provided for guidance and this is not exhaustive:
- Food costs
  - Household Costs: utilities e.g. gas / electric / washing & wear and tear: e.g. furniture / carpets / household items
  - School dinner / lunch money
  - Clothing / Footwear (including replacing regular school uniform items)
  - Organisational / Clubs clothing (e.g. Cubs / Scouts / Brownies)
  - Nappies / baby items
  - Personal Self Care items
  - Toys, Books, Games etc.
  - Education materials costs
  - Leisure / hobbies / activities / entertainment
  - School trips within the UK / activities
  - Life Story Work materials / costs
  - Transport costs to support and achieve placement commitments
  - Luggage costs associated with children's placement moves
- 4.1 Foster carers providing Supported Lodgings placements for young people age 16 years and above will receive the 16+ age related weekly allowance less the equivalent basic benefit rate which is paid directly to the young person by the local authority. For the current allowance rate, please see Appendix A.
- 4.2 Foster Carers undertaking certain agreed additional tasks to their normal placement commitments (e.g. 'childminding' / outreach support) these are paid at an hourly rate. Hourly rates are detailed in the Appendix A.

## 5 Guidance on specific items within the allowance:

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| <p><b>Pocket Money</b></p> <p>(included in Personal %)</p> <p>Suggested Amounts<br/>Age:</p> <p>10yrs: £5.00<br/>11yrs: £6.50<br/>12yrs: £7.50<br/>13yrs: £8.50<br/>14yrs: £9.50<br/>15yrs: £10.50<br/>16yrs+ £12.00</p> | <p>Pocket Money weekly amounts suggested are for children and young people aged 10yrs and over for their general and personal requirements. The amount of pocket money to be given should be discussed at the outset of the placement with the child's social worker. It is acknowledged that the amount given needs to be equitable for all children within the household, including birth children.</p> <p>It is suggested that for young people aged 16yrs+ the amount of pocket money agreed should not exceed the element for personal needs within any benefit payment a young person could expect if they were in receipt of welfare benefits. This encourages realistic expectations and assists with transitions to adulthood.</p> <p>Foster carers with children under ten may use the pocket money allowance to cover the costs of activities, comics, etc.</p> |
| <p><b>Clothing and Footwear</b></p> <p>(included in Clothing %)</p>  | <p>The Clothing and Footwear element should be used flexibly to purchase / replace items directly by foster carer/s as necessary for young children and can be provided to older children and young people as required. The weekly allowance should enable foster carers to maintain and increase the level of clothing over time. When a child is changing placement, it is expected that they will move with a reasonable amount of clothing that fits and is in good condition and appropriate to seasonal conditions.</p>  |
| <p><b>Savings</b></p> <p>£5.00 per week minimum</p>  | <p>The Fostering Service oversees a centralised saving scheme for all children and young people who are looked after to ensure equity for all children and young people across a range of settings. A weekly amount of £5.00 will be added to a Junior ISA or Child Trust Fund for each child. For Children placed with Leeds Foster Carers this amount will be deducted at source prior to the weekly maintenance allowance being paid.</p> <p>Short-term saving for items should be supported by foster carers to encourage children and young people to develop skills in managing finances.</p>  |

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|  | <p>Young people (16+) who are receiving income from employment should be encouraged to save some of their clothing and pocket money allowance.</p> <p>The young person's social worker, with support from the supervising social worker (fostering) and foster carers should assist a child/young person to open a bank account in the name of the child/young person.</p>   |
| <p><b>Travel / Mileage</b><br/>(From Transport %)</p> <p>Weekly Allowance Transport % covers the first 25 Miles of Transport.</p> <p>Additional Mileage claims will be paid at @ £0.45p per mile <i>(the current rate set by the Treasury and HMRC above which is taxable)</i></p> <p>Public transport</p> <p>School Plus Metro Card</p> | <p>The Weekly Allowance provides for the cost of 25 miles of travel per fostered child / young person per week related to supporting the following placement commitments:</p> <p>It is an expectation that carers support young people to travel to and from school, family time; health appointments; court attendance; supporting a child / young person's agreed specific leisure activity / hobby.</p> <p>If carers incur additional mileage costs (for supporting commitments identified in the Placement Plan) over the 100 miles per month allocated in the allowance, then these can be claimed on the appropriate monthly claim form detailing the journey reason and mileage incurred. Claim forms are forwarded to the foster carers SSW and agreed by the Fostering Team Manager.</p> <p>Claims must be submitted within 3 months of the journey, any claims over four months will not be paid.</p> <p>Carers should discuss any issues or queries regarding mileage claims / journey reason with their SSW before submitting the claim form.</p> <p>There is an expectation that young people aged 16-17 have a weekly travel pass and that the use of public transport is encouraged for the majority of journeys.</p> <p>All young people under the age of 18 who are in full-time education are entitled to a School Plus Metro Card. The Metro Card enables access to reduced price bus travel. For young people placed outside of the Leeds area a bus pass relevant to his/her locality should be provided. In exceptional circumstances where an annual 'school only' pass is required, this will be funded by the area social work team.</p> <p>Taxi fares will be reimbursed only in exceptional</p> |

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| Taxis   | circumstances. Disabled children may have transport provided to access school, play schemes etc. according to the same criteria as other disabled children who are not looked after.   |
| <p><b>Leisure / Activities</b></p> <p>Exceptional Leisure / Learning / Activities costs not covered in the Allowance</p> <p>School trips outside of UK</p> <p>MAX Card / Breeze Card / Junior Bodyline Card</p> <p>Corporate Offers and Discounts for Foster Carers &amp; Foster Families</p> | <p>Foster Carers should support and enable children and young people to take part in regular appropriate agreed leisure activities and take part in educational day trips etc.</p> <p>A proportion of the Allowance should be used to pay for these and for the membership of a regular hobby or leisure club and/or contribute towards the cost of a social activity at least weekly.</p> <p>Some children may have an interest / hobby where the cost is significantly higher than provided for in the allowance. For example, weekly horse-riding lessons are expensive, so carers may need to consider fortnightly or monthly sessions. Some children may have music lessons, and the foster carer may ask for a contribution to the lesson costs or rental / purchase of an instrument.</p> <p>Foster Carers can apply for extra funding towards exceptional costs in order to support leisure / learning / activities. This should be discussed with the foster carers SSW and child's SW to establish agreement before applying via the child's SW to the Children's Service Delivery Manager (CSDM). Any decision to provide financial assistance should be time limited and reconsidered at each Child Care Review.</p> <p>If during their time at Senior School a young person would like to go on a non-educational school trip abroad, a contribution towards funding will be provided for one trip during the school years 8-11, this may be up to full costs where alternative fund raising (through school activities etc.) is not possible.</p> <p>Foster Carers should assist school age children in obtaining both a Breeze card and a MAX Card allowing affordable leisure and educational opportunities. Junior Bodyline cards are available from Leisure Centres for children looked after living in Leeds.</p> <p>A range of offers and discounts for Foster Carers and their looked after children are available via the Council and partner organisations, including free swimming sessions and lessons, Child Friendly Leeds events and other benefits designed to maximise looked after children's leisure</p> |

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| <p>Mobile phone allowance</p> | <p>opportunities. Information on offers and discounts is sent periodically to foster carers and is also available via SSW's.</p> <p>Up to £100 can be requested towards the cost of a mobile phone for a young person, it will be agreed in conjunction with the social worker and foster carer as to whether the young person is ready for the responsibility of having a phone. Should the phone be lost a maximum of £30 would be paid to cover the cost of a replacement. The costs for having a phone need to be covered on a pay as you go basis, phone contracts should not be taken out to cover the costs of phones or data usage.</p> |
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## 6 Items paid in addition to the Weekly Maintenance Allowance:

| Item   | Guidance  |
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| <p><b>School Clothing</b></p> <p>Primary School: £100<br/>High School: £200</p> <p>(up to maximum amounts)</p>                     | <p>Ongoing School Clothing / Uniform needs are provided for within the weekly allowance. However, additional expenditure on school clothing may be required principally for purchase of particularly expensive school uniform requirements when starting Primary or High School, or in the event that all the items of uniform have to be purchased at one time (such as upon the child becoming looked after).</p> <p>Foster Carers should discuss with their SSW who will then make an application to the Fostering Team Manager for a decision, these authorisations will be monitored by the SDM Fostering.</p>   |
| <p><b>Initial Clothing Grant</b></p> <p>Age Range:</p> <p>0-12yrs: £200.00<br/>13yrs+ : £250.00</p> <p>(up to maximum amounts)</p> | <p>The Initial Clothing Grant is provided for essential items and will be paid where children/young people are in placement for the first time with insufficient clothing for their needs. (15 % of the weekly allowance is designated to meet ongoing clothing needs – see 'Clothing &amp; Footwear' above).</p> <p>The Initial Clothing Grant will be paid only upon the child/young person becoming looked after for the first time or in exceptional circumstances where all clothing has been lost/destroyed/misplaced between placements. The full amount should not be spent until it has been confirmed in discussion with the SW/SSW that the child/young person will continue to be looked after if the placement is made on an unplanned/emergency basis, with only essential items being purchased initially.</p> <p>Foster Carers are responsible for maintaining a <i>Clothing Inventory Form</i> for purchased essential items of clothing via</p> |

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|   | <p>the Initial Clothing Grant and subsequent purchases and the child's SW and carers SSW should ensure that this is completed and reviewed every six months. When a child moves placement, the inventory form should go with the child. The child's SW should keep a copy of the form.</p> <p>(Support Care Scheme foster carers do not access the Initial Clothing Allowance but can discuss alternative funding arrangements with the Support Scheme Co-ordinator).</p>   |
| <p><b>Clothing for special occasions</b></p> <p>Up to £150</p>  | <p>There will be some occasions which require formal clothing to be worn such as attending the senior school prom, family wedding or funeral or interview. In these circumstances a grant of up to £150 may be provided to cover the cost of purchasing clothing/shoes suitable for the event. Foster Carers should discuss with their Supervising Social Worker who will confirm eligibility and administer payment.</p>   |
| <p><b>Birthday Allowance</b></p> <p>1 Weeks Allowance</p>       | <p>A grant equal to one week's maintenance allowance appropriate to the age of the child will be made automatically for a child's birthday. The Birthday Allowance is provided to support the carer in purchasing a gift or gifts and to provide a contribution towards the cost of celebrations.</p>   |
| <p><b>Festival Allowance</b></p> <p>1 Weeks Allowance</p>       | <p>A grant equal to one week's maintenance allowance appropriate to the age of the child will be paid at the appropriate time of the year. For a majority of children/young people this will be Christmas, payable automatically for all children in foster placements. If the allowance is required for an alternative religious festival, a request should be made via the child's SW, and can be taken in up to two equal amounts across the year.</p> <p>The Festival Allowance is provided to support the carer in purchasing a gift or gifts and to provide a contribution towards the cost of celebrations.</p>  |
| <p><b>Annual Holiday Allowance</b></p> <p>2 Weeks Allowance</p> | <p>The Annual Holiday Allowance equivalent to two weeks Maintenance Allowance per child will be provided as a contribution towards a major holiday or for an equivalent number of day trips. For children aged 0-10 this will be paid at the rate of the applicable weekly allowance. For those aged 11 plus this will be paid at the 16+ weekly allowance rate.</p> <p>The Allowance is normally paid to the foster carer annually in the first week of July and will be paid where the child/young person has been with the foster carer during the 8 weeks prior to the payment being made.</p> <p>If the child/young person is not going to accompany the</p> |

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| <p><b>Holiday supplement allowance</b></p>      | <p>foster carers on holiday then the allowance may be transferred to support the cost of an activity holiday such as a trip with scouts/guides or towards the cost of a planned residential school trip. The expenditure will be monitored by the child's social worker.</p> <p>Where a child or young person moves between placements in the summer months then consideration will be given to the payment of one weeks allowance to the new foster carer to fund activities during the school holidays. This is at the discretion of the SDM and needs to be requested via the supervisory social worker.</p> <p>If payment has been made to a carer and the child subsequently has a change of placement in the period July-October resulting in the allowance not being spent, the costs will be recouped.</p> <p>The Annual Holiday Allowance is paid in addition to the weekly allowance and should be used to contribute towards expenses associated with taking the child or young person on holiday.</p> <p>If carers are undertaking overseas travel, adequate travel insurance must be obtained, and a copy of the policy provided for the child's SW. Appropriate consent is required for all trips where children will be taken out of the country (as detailed in Children's Procedures). The Local Authority will meet all associated costs of purchasing a passport for a child and any Visas which may be required for holiday travel.</p> <p>(Support Carers would not normally receive Annual Holiday Allowance. Alternative funding for day trips / activities can be discussed with the Support Carer scheme coordinator)</p> <p>Where foster carers wish to ensure that children placed with them can accompany them on planned holidays but the cost to achieve this would be prohibitive a supplement of up £300 may be approved by the SDM fostering.</p> |
| <p><b>Spectacles/Contact Lenses</b></p>         | <p>Support for costs additional to NHS provided spectacles and contact lenses may be approved by social worker.</p>  |
| <p><b>Supporting Family Time</b></p>            | <p>As part of our commitment to support families our carers are expected to promote and directly support family time. Foster Carers are able to claim up to £15 per child per session to cover reasonable expenses incurred such as funding a child/young person to take part in an activity or the purchase of a snack. Additional cost of supporting family time, i.e. the carer entering the activity venue may also be claimed.</p>  |
| <p><b>Outreach -support with activities</b></p> | <p>Foster Carers supporting Out-reach and support activities are able to claim up to £15 to cover associated costs. The rate paid is intended to cover the purchase of a drink/small</p>   |



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|  | snack for the child/young person. Additional costs for higher cost activities should be discussed with the SSW prior to them being arranged. |
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## Foster Carer Fees

- 7 Payment for Skills (PFS) Level 2, 3 and 4 foster carers are paid a weekly fee, dependent on the PFS level for which they are approved. The fee levels reflect the PFS Tasks, Skills and Competencies (TSC) requirements for that level. Level 1 approved foster carers receive a weekly maintenance allowance only.

The PFS fee structure and weekly fee amounts are detailed in Appendix A.

- 7.1 Fees are distinct from weekly maintenance allowance payments. Fees provide financial 'reward' to foster carers following a matching of their skills and competencies and their ability to undertake specified tasks to agreed levels within the PFS framework. (Specific fee arrangements for Parent and Child foster carers and Mockingbird are published separately).

### Financial Enhancement

- 8 The fostering service recognises that some children/young people have very complex needs which may change over time. Exceptionally, there may be circumstances that require financial enhancement to fees or allowances. For example maintaining a placement as a solo placement, when consideration will be given to paying for the vacant/void placement. This would be subject to regular review every 12 weeks and approval by the SDM.

### Fees and Payments to Out of Hours Emergency (EDT) Foster Carers

- 9 Foster Carers providing EDT placements receive a disruption fee rate of £40 per placement per day for up to 7 days. This fee is payable irrespective of the Foster Carer PFS level. Placements made through the Emergency Duty Team outside of core office hours may include children and young people coming into care, children and young people detained under the 'Police and Criminal Evidence Act' provisions and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- 9.1 Fee and maintenance allowance payments for the foster carers' substantive placement/s continue unchanged.

(Allowances are paid for EDT placements on a 1/7<sup>th</sup> per day basis).

### Fees and Payments for Same Day Placements

- 10 On occasion placements are made on the same day, in these situations' carers are responding at very short notice. Where Foster Carers agree to support a placement commencing on the same day for children aged 13+ years carers will receive an additional payment for the first 8 weeks. In agreeing to take the placement the carer is committing to taking the placement for a minimum of four weeks. Where it is known at the outset that the placement will not extend beyond 14 days then the same day placement fee will not be triggered or paid. ( Payment is detailed in the appendix.)
- 10.1 The additional weeks (5-8) will only be paid when the placement runs continuously with no break as the intention is to reduce the number of placements moves which children and young people experience.
- 10.2 Payment arrangements are based on a seven-day week. At the end of the eight weeks the payments will revert to existing costs.
- 10.3 Carers will be paid at their existing PFS level throughout the placement.
- 10.4 The payment is based on the presumption that a foster carer is committing to offer a placement for a minimum of 4 weeks whilst the care planning continues to be pursued for children and young people to ensure stability.

#### **Placement Retainer Fees (PFS Level 2-4 only)**

##### **Existing Level 4 Carers approved prior to November 2014:**

- 11 In the gap between placements, carers registered for one placement, will be paid one full fee per household per week for a maximum of 52 weeks (except for unpaid leave and sickness arrangements) in any one financial year.
- 11.1 For carers approved for two or more placements, they will receive one full placement fee per household per week for a maximum of 52 weeks, in addition a 2<sup>nd</sup> placement retainer paid at 50% for one ten week period **only** in any one financial year. This will not be paid if the vacancy is a room share with another child in placement.
- 11.2 In exceptional circumstances, the SDM Fostering may exercise discretion to retain highly specialist second placements for periods in excess of the ten weeks outlined above.

##### **Level 4 carers approved after November 2014**

- 12 In the gap between placements, all level 4 foster carers will be paid one full fee per household per week for a maximum of 16 weeks (except for unpaid leave and sickness arrangements) in any one financial year. All level 4 carers approved for two or more placements will be able to claim an additional second placement retainer fee at a rate of 50% for up to one 5-week period in

any financial year. This will not be paid if the vacancy is a room share with another child in placement.

- 12.1 In exceptional circumstances, the SDM Fostering may exercise discretion to retain highly specialist second placements for periods in excess of 16 weeks.
- 12.2 A retainer for newly approved level 4 carers can be paid during the introductory period following matching. In exceptional circumstances and subject to SDM Fostering approval, the retainer can be paid from the point of approval until the point the first placement is made.

### **Level 2 and 3 Carers**

- 12 In the gap between placements, there will be the discretion to pay foster carers one full fee per household per week for a maximum of 16 weeks in any one financial year. This would be considered when in discussion with the SSW it is considered that it would be beneficial for the fostering household to take a planned break, this may be due to critical health issues which would extend beyond the period of sick leave, or due to the impact of major life events or bereavement.

### **Breaks between placements**

- 13 It is recognised that carers may wish to take a break between placements, the duration of this will be agreed with their SSW but it is expected that this would not be longer than 3 weeks, with no more than two breaks in a year. After the planned break, proposed placements will be discussed. It is anticipated that carers will not decline more than three successive proposed matches, the aim being to ensure that we can maximise the fostering placements which are always actively available for our looked after children. During these breaks the relevant retainer would be paid.

### **Annual leave and agreed planned respite payments**

- 14 Paid leave entitlement (also sometimes referred to as 'Holiday') is available for PFS Level 2, 3 and 4 foster carers to take in any one financial year period (April – March) outside their fostering placement commitments. If approved for two or more placements carers will receive two fees at the respective PFS level. Carers approved for one child will receive one fee.
  - 14.1 Carers registered for one placement will receive leave paid at the rate of one placement fee level.
  - 14.2 Annual leave will be paid as an annualised amount, level 4 carers approved prior to November 2014 will receive 28 days leave, level 4 foster carers approved after November 2014 will receive 21 days leave, Level 3 carers 14 days and Level 2 carers 7 days leave.

- 14.3 Annual leave entitlement is not available for those level 2 or level 3 carers who are only approved to provide short break placements only.
- 14.4 Carers wishing to take a holiday or short break which will not involve the child/ren or young person who is placed with them can continue to use their identified Holiday carers or request that alternative carers are identified to provide care during the period of the planned holiday/break. Six weeks notice of the intended leave should be given to the SSW.
- 14.5 The receiving foster carer taking the child for leave / holiday or planned respite purposes from the substantive carer will receive the relevant fee rate, minus the clothing element of the allowance.
- 14.6 Approved Relatives / Friends providing leave cover (also termed 'Holiday Carers') will receive the Level 2 first placement rate.

### **Kinship Care (Level 1) Respite payments**

- 15 In exceptional circumstances, consideration can be given to waiving the normal deduction of the weekly allowance (less clothing allowance) for respite if this negatively financially impacts on the primary Kinship Carer. Applications to consider this should be made following financial assessment by the relevant Kinship Team Manager to the SDM Fostering.

### **Part Week Payments – Fees and Allowances**

- 16 Where placements last for less than a week (7 days) or where they start or end halfway through a week, the rates are paid on a daily basis, pro-rata. So, for example, if a child / young person is with another carer for respite from Friday to Sunday, this counts as 3 days even though they might arrive at Friday tea time and leave before lunch on Sunday.
- 16.1 Each day is calculated as 1/7 of the fee normally paid to the carer, plus 1/7 of the weekly maintenance allowance for the child. The primary carer in this situation would also get the maintenance allowance on the Friday and the Sunday

### **Payments Procedures**

- 17 Fees and allowances are paid to foster carers on a weekly basis for all placement types.
- 17.1 All payments for foster carers are generated by notification to the Placements Service who then informs the Carer Payments Team.
- 17.2 All payments are made to foster carers via the direct bank credit system.
- 17.3 If a request for payment is to be acted upon by Carer Payments in a particular week, notification must be provided by 12 noon of the Friday of the week before. The payment will then be made on the subsequent Thursday.

- 17.4 Changes in fee level will relate to changes in approved PFS level. Notifying Carer Payments is the responsibility of the SSW with authorisation from the Fostering Team Manager following ratification.
- 17.5 The Placements Service should be informed by the child's SW of changes in circumstances of looked after children that affect the payments made. For example, when children leave school, commence work, receive income support etc.
- 17.6 An Annual Financial Statement is sent to foster carers by Carer Payments at the start of each financial year. The statement provides carers with details of all allowance and fee payments made to them during the previous financial year.

### **Payment arrangements for Placement Introductions**

- 18 Where the child is visiting a foster home for introductions and has a primary placement elsewhere, the new carer will be paid 1/7th of their appropriate fee level, and 1/7th of the maintenance allowance for each day that the child is in placement with them.
- 18.1 Where placement introductions extend beyond 14 days, discussions should take place between the Fostering Team Manager and Social Work Team Manager with a view to suggesting a structure of payment. Any exceptional financial arrangement must be approved by the Service Delivery Manager.
- 18.2 Where foster carers are supporting children to move to an adoption placement and overnight accommodation is required away from their home area, this will be booked and paid for by the local authority. Carers can claim an allowance for meals in line with the rates agreed by the NJC. Mileage will be claimed to cover all journeys required to support the introductions.

### **Payments if Children and Young People are absent from placement**

- 19 In situations where a child or young person is absent from a placement the Allowance and Fee will continue to be paid for up to 7 days.
- 19.1 Where exceptional cases of unusually high dependency on hospital care exist, the SDM & Team Manager (Fostering) will discuss payment arrangements with the relevant Head of Service.
- 19.2 Any decision to continue allowances and fee payments will be taken following an assessment of need and will consider whether the child/young person is still being supported by the carer/s. For example, whether a child or young person is in hospital and carer/s are visiting daily and providing ongoing practical, emotional, and financial support.

- 19.3 If a child is away at a residential school, the carer will receive their relevant PFS fee plus 1/7th of the maintenance payment for each night that the child stays in the foster home.

### **Payments during periods of carer illness**

- 20 During periods of carer illness (definition – where children cannot be maintained in the carer household), carer's may receive in any one financial year up to 3 continuous weeks fee payments per household at a level equivalent to the fee rate being paid to them in the week immediately preceding the period of illness, plus the clothing element of the maintenance allowance, calculated on a 1/7<sup>th</sup> basis.
- 20.1 At the end of the 3 week period the situation will be reviewed and may be extended for a further period, the length of which and level of fee will be determined by the Service Delivery Manager. This will be for a period up to a maximum of 16 weeks. In making a decision to extend sick leave payments, consideration will be given to the carer's service record and sickness history.

### **Benefit Payments / Carers for Children with Disabilities**

#### **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)**

- 21 All children and young people who are eligible for a specialist foster care placement for disabled children will, in principle, meet the eligibility criteria for middle or higher rate Disability Living Allowance (DLA). There will be some children placed with non-specialist foster carers who will also meet the criteria for DLA. At the point of becoming looked after and being placed, both the statutory review and placement planning meeting should clarify matters relating to the child's DLA claim. If the DLA is being paid to a parent the claim should be transferred to the foster carer who will become a 'Benefit Appointee'.
- 21.1 At the initial placement planning meeting the Supervising Social Worker will assist the foster carer to make a claim for Disability Living Allowance, if not previously completed. The DLA is intended to meet the additional cost of caring for a disabled child/young person.
- 21.2 DLA is paid in addition to the weekly maintenance allowance and should be used to meet the child/young person's additional needs accruing from their disability. The foster carers should set up a bank account in their name for the specific purpose of managing the child's DLA and any other financial support and in order to provide an audit trail of income and expenditure. DLA which is not spent on the needs of the child should be saved in the bank account for the child or a savings account (e.g. Junior ISA). Foster Carers should keep a record of large expenditure items related to the child's DLA. Support will be provided through the Children's Service's Benefits and Welfare Rights team.

#### **Carer's Allowance**

- 22 If the child/young person receives middle or high rate DLA the carer may be eligible to claim Carer's Allowance from Welfare Benefits. There is only one claim paid, regardless of how many eligible people they care for and only one person can claim even if more than one person is providing care. From the age of 16 yrs, eligible disabled young people can claim benefits and where appropriate should be assisted and encouraged to do so. When these benefits are claimed, the Personal Allowance element will be deducted.
- 22.1 Details on other Benefits for disabled young people 16 years plus (Including Employment and Support allowance and Vulnerable Young Persons Education bursaries) are included in the separate policy 'Transitions to Adulthood – Disabled Young People' (see 97).

### **Foster Carer Training Expenses**

- 23 Transport costs to attend prior approved carer training and professional development activities over the 25 miles per week allocated via the weekly allowance can be reimbursed via a mileage claim form (see Travel / Mileage above) or via production of bus / train ticket. Parking costs can also be reimbursed.
- 23.1 Travel expenses should be submitted by the foster carer to their Supervising Social Worker (SSW) and must be supported by relevant car mileage journey record / travel tickets and attendance certificate copies if available.
- 23.2 Subject to prior approval via a SSW and Team Manager (Fostering), foster carers can be reimbursed for expenses incurred whilst attending other training courses and professional development activities approved by the Department. This can include travel (as above) and childcare costs (to a maximum of the current child-minding rate per hour).
- 23.3 Subject to prior approval, expenses incurred on other approved courses can be reimbursed when authorised by a Fostering Team Manager. Carers should send all requests for expenses through their SSW who will verify and forward to the appropriate section for payment.

### **Holiday Vehicle Hire**

- 24 Carers can apply via their SSW to have up to 2-week large vehicle hired in any one financial year, plus a further 1-week in a half term, where they are taking their foster children on holiday. Vehicle hire will only be agreed if the foster family (to include members of the fostering household only – not other friends and relatives) and foster children cannot travel safely in a family car.
- 24.1 It is essential that requests are booked as far in advance as possible, particularly if a request is for a multi-person vehicle (MPV), or a minibus. The latter will require the foster carer to take a minibus test and in order to achieve

this requires considerable advance booking. If taking the hired vehicle abroad, any additional insurance costs incurred are payable by the carer.

- 24.2 Where a child placed with a carer is a wheelchair user, the DLA mobility allowance will not always cover the cost of purchase or hire of an adapted vehicle. In these situations a top up payment will be considered.

### **Equipment and Furniture provision**

- 25 The intention of this set budget is to support newly approved carers with initial set up costs for essential furniture and equipment. The identification of any required equipment will be undertaken during the initial assessment. Sometimes an existing carer will need additional essential equipment for a new placement e.g. a car seat. (Essential furniture and equipment items provided include: beds / bunk beds / mattress / mattress protector/ bedding / cot / chest of drawers / wardrobe / car seat / baby equipment / safety gate).
- 25.1 Furniture and equipment is supplied via the Department's approved contractors. Furniture and equipment orders are processed by Fostering Administration via the foster carers SSW, authorised by a Fostering Team Manager, Placements Service Manager or SDM Fostering. All equipment should be regarded as on loan. For more details regarding essential equipment (including full baby equipment list), authorisation and purchasing, foster carers should contact their SSW.
- 25.2 Following the provision of any initial equipment foster carers are responsible for maintaining the overall condition and furnishing of the home to an acceptable standard. This includes the security and maintenance of the garden or outside area. It is an expectation that carers take out household insurance. Foster Carers who use CCTV recording equipment are to refer to the fostering policy regarding their use.
- 25.3 The need for additional furniture, equipment or the replacement of any equipment, furniture or furnishings will be assessed during supervision visits and if any replacement is required, agreement will need to be sought from the Service Delivery Manager prior to any purchase. Receipts must be retained and passed to the SSW for processing.
- 25.4 Children with Disabilities carers may require additional specialist equipment to meet the needs of a disabled child. Specialist equipment for disabled children will normally be provided following an OT assessment.

### **Property Adaptations**

- 26 The funding of any property adaptations and installations for foster carer households will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.
- 26.1 Requests for adaptations to rented property should first be made through the landlord / existing protocol for Leeds City Council housing. If appropriate a



joint approach to LCC Housing Services by the SSW, Childs SW and SDM Fostering to support facilitating adaptations may be made.

- 26.2 Where funding is requested, the child's SW and the carer's SSW will show evidence of discussion with their respective managers, and to make a joint written submission to the SDM (Fostering), copied to their Team Managers and the SDM. Any requests for funding up to £20,000 will then be presented to Finance Panel for consideration. Amounts over this figure will be presented to the Chief Officer.
- 26.3 Children with Disabilities carer's homes may need adaptations to meet the individual needs of disabled children. The service will support foster carers to access Disabled Facility Grants and other sources of funding to meet the needs of the child following an OT assessment.

**Key Documents for Looked After Children**

- 27 The Department will pay for a passport and birth certificate for all children and young people looked after. These items are essential and assist with opening bank/savings accounts and provide identification verification, including when young people move to independence.
- 27.1 It is the responsibility of the child's SW to obtain these key documents on the child's behalf when placed in care or as soon as possible thereafter.

**Foster Carer Long Service Awards**

- 28 Awards are made available to foster carers as a result of length of service. Vouchers with values dependent on length of service are made available via the Fostering Service (Admin), following completion of the Foster Carer Review and the approval of a Fostering Team Manager.
- 28.1 Long service or retirement awards should not generally be made where the carer is deregistered for matters associated with quality of care and/or carer conduct.

Length of Service awards values:

| <b>Length of Service</b> | <b>Long Service Award</b><br>(Certificate + Vouchers to the value of): |
|--------------------------|--|
| 5yrs:                    | £100 + Flowers   |
| 10yrs:                   | £150 + Flowers   |
| 15yrs:                   | £200 + Flowers   |
| 20yrs:                   | £250 + Flowers and letter from the Deputy Director                     |

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Retirement after 10yrs + service: | £300 + Flowers and letter from the Deputy Director |
| Other length of service awards:   | At the discretion of the SDM Fostering             |

### **Payments when Allegations against Carers are under investigation**

- 29 Payment of fees will continue, for 16 weeks initially, if a child is withdrawn from placement because of an allegation against a carer. The payment will be reviewed at this stage and may be extended for a further 10 weeks at the discretion of the SDM to allow time for the matter to be resolved, or a decision made to review a carer's registration and return to the Fostering Panel. No weekly allowances will be payable.
- 29.1 Payment will be paid at the fee rate being received by the carer at the time the suspension took place.
- 29.2 Fee Payments may be suspended immediately by the SDM (Fostering) or Head of Service / Assistant Head of Service where there is clear supported evidence of and / or carer admission of serious malpractice.
- 29.3 All payments during the investigation of allegations are subject to full co-operation of the carer in the investigation. Failure to co-operate may result in the withdrawal of all payments. In such circumstances, the Head of Service should be asked to make the decision, based on information provided by the Fostering Team Manager and SDM Fostering.
- 29.4 Recommendations to terminate a carer's registration are taken by an appropriate Fostering Panel and ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 29.5 Should the carer successfully appeal a de-registration, reimbursement will be made only if the original decision is overturned.

### **Overpayment of Allowances and Fees**

- 30 The Department will make every effort to ensure overpayments of fees or allowances do not occur. However, the foster carer has an individual responsibility to check all payment information received and to contact Carer Payments immediately if an overpayment does occur. In the event of an overpayment, the Department will seek to recover the full amount.
- 31.1 Recovery of up to 8 weeks overpayment can be identified by the payments system and is recovered automatically.
- 31.2 Where significant overpayments are identified (overpayments more than an 8-week period) these will be notified by the Carer Payments Team / Finance to the SDM Fostering. The Fostering Team Manager will liaise with the SDM

Fostering, SSW and the foster carer concerned on arrangements for recovery of the full amount.

- 31.3 Prompt arrangements for repayment should be formally agreed as soon as possible. A maximum of up to 25% of the carer's current weekly payments will be deducted to recover any overpayments. (Agreement to overpayment arrangements is included in the signed Foster Carer Agreement document following carer approval).
- 31.4 If a member of Carer Payments disputes any payment requested, they should return the request to the person who approved the expenditure, together with an explanation of why it contravenes the guidance given. If the two parties cannot resolve the dispute, the case should be passed to a Senior Manager for a final decision.

### **Implementing this document**

- 32 This document may not cover all possible situations. CSDM's, the SDM Fostering, and Head of Service are empowered to interpret and consider exceptional individual circumstances on a case by case basis, subject to the guiding principles on which the funding of foster care provision is based.
- 32.1 Exceptional decisions should always be supported with the written authority of the Head of Service, subject to review on an agreed date and recorded as an exceptional decision for the purposes of monitoring the effective application of this document.

### **Monitoring Decision Making**

- 33 This guidance is part of a range of measures designed to support consistency, coherence and transparency in decision making. From time to time a retrospective moderation exercise may take place where consistency in decision making across individual officers and teams will be considered as part of a key aim to ensure across city consistency and compliance with funding structures and processes.

### **Who can make what decision?**

- 34 The detail in this document is explicit about who can make what decision and who should inform the Placements Service and the Carer Payments Team. Carer Payments staff have no authority to process an instruction to pay a carer from a SW, SSW, Team Manager, CSDM, FSDM, Assistant Head of Service or Head of Service if it is not supported with a written decision.
- 34.1 A "reported authority" to pay (i.e. saying that a more senior officer has agreed, but providing no written evidence of this) will not be acted on by Carer Payments. If professional staff do not send written authority, or if they do not provide the required information, then the carer concerned will not be paid.

- 34.2 For the purposes of guidance in this document, a 'written authority' is the required form where this exists, or an email from the personal mail box of the officer empowered to make the decision. Increasingly, the Department is moving to electronic notification for payment.

### **Importance of updating information held by Carer Payments**

- 35 Carers will continue to be paid according to the most recent instruction by a member of staff until notified those circumstances have changed.
- 35.1 NB: It is essential when predictable patterns of care (e.g. Respite) change, or when a child moves placement, or any other relevant change takes place that Carer Payments are notified immediately. It causes difficulties for carers and for the fostering service when notification is not made promptly.

### **Income Tax, Welfare Benefits**

- 36 Foster carers are reminded that fee and allowance payments can impact on their Income Tax and Welfare Benefits (where relevant). Foster Carers should familiarise themselves with HMRC guidance on tax and relevant guidance on Welfare benefits or seek individual advice from HMRC, Welfare Benefits service or from the Leeds Foster Carer Association (LFCA).
- 36.1 The Carer Payments Team send an annual financial statement annually (April) to foster carers which should be used for fulfilling HMRC Tax return requirements.

### **Other Policies and Information relating to Financial Support:**

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#### **37 Financial Support for Looked After Children 2022**

#### **38 Policy: Staying Put**

Policy, procedures and guidance regarding young people remaining with former foster carers age 18 – 21 years.

#### **39 Leaflet: Staying Put / Guide for Foster Carers**

Guidance for foster carers making a Staying Put commitment including information regarding financial support.

#### **40 Policy: Transitions to Adulthood – Disabled Young People:**

Policy regarding transitions to adulthood / staying put for disabled children / young people.

#### **41 Policy: Leaving Care Finance Policy:**

Detailed information on financial support, incentives and welfare benefits entitlements for relevant and qualifying young people age 16 -17 years and 18 years and above where the Social Work Service has continuing support commitments assisting young people towards independence.

**42 Policy: Supported Lodgings**

Details of supported lodgings provision for young people age 16 years +

**43 Policy: ‘Rent a Room’**

Details supported living provision for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People

**44 Leaflet: Mockingbird Family Model**

Details the specific support, allowances and fees for this scheme

**45 Leaflet: Caring for Children and Young People with complex needs**

Details the support, allowances and fees for this scheme

**46 Leaflet: Parent and Child Carers**

Details the support, allowances, and fees for this scheme

**APPENDIX April 2022 – end March 2023**

**1. Weekly Allowances amounts**

Child Age: Amount:

|           |         |
|-----------|---------|
| 0-4 yrs   | £152.86 |
| 5-10 yrs  | £174.12 |
| 11-15 yrs | £216.76 |
| 16yrs+    | £263.69 |

**2. Weekly Allowances amounts – other provision:**

Supported Lodgings providers: £201.84

Rent a Room providers:

£135.89

### 3. Foster Carers (including Support Care Scheme & Children with Disabilities Short Breaks)

#### Hourly Payment rates for additional tasks:

**Rate 1: £9.83** (linked to national minimum wage rate and undertaken in carers own home); e.g. child care / childminding / child sitting service / agreed oversight for children / young people

**Rate 2: £11.97** (tasks undertaken outside carers home): e.g. sessional outreach / agreed individual support for carers / overseeing 'home alone'

#### 4. Payment for Skills (PFS) fee structure and weekly fee amounts:

| PFS Level | 1 <sup>st</sup> Placement | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Placement | Subsequent Placements |
|-----------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1         | n/a                       | n/a                       | n/a                   |
| 2         | £128.53                   | £128.53                   | £128.53               |
| 3         | £182.09                   | £182.09                   | £182.09               |
| 4         | £235.64                   | £235.64                   | £235.64               |