



PAYMENT FOR SKILLS FOSTER CARER FEE LEVELS

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1. INTRODUCTION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Statutory Guidance for Fostering and Standard 28 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering (NMS) require the fostering service to provide foster carers with a clear information on the fees and allowances that are paid to them.

1.1 FOSTER CARE ALLOWANCE

Worcestershire Children First Fostering (WCFF) pays a Foster Care Allowance (FCA) to all foster carers to enable them to look after the child or children placed with them. It varies according to the age of the child and is in line with the National Minimum Fostering allowance which is set by the government each year.

1.2 FEES

In addition WCFF has a payment for fees scheme which pays a weekly fee per child to foster carers, including family and friend foster carers, who have a child or children placed with them; this is paid on one of four levels, or as a part of specialist fostering schemes. The criteria that foster carers must meet for each of the fee levels is set out below.

2. PAYMENT FOR SKILLS

Foster Carers will be paid a fee if they are able to demonstrate that they have the required skills and knowledge to foster and that they are committed to developing these further through training. Foster carers approved by WCFF are paid fees in respect of children placed with them on a four-tier system, with Contract Carers and Placement Plus Carers paid according to a separate system.

2.1 FRAMEWORK

When foster carers are approved on a temporary basis under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, pending an assessment of their knowledge and skills and evidence of their commitment to training they will be appointed to a Foundation Level.

Approval on a temporary basis often happens in an unplanned way and carers will not have had the opportunity to meet the criteria set out for Level 1

Therefore, carers who are appointed on a temporary basis and placed on the Foundation Level can be considered for Level 1 if they are able to demonstrate through the completion of 2 Standards from the Training and Development Standards workbook that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to foster and completed the kinship preparation training.

For other applicants following a full assessment and approval they are appointed to Level 1 (subject to 6.2 below).

Applicants who have previously actively fostered for another fostering service provider within the past five years can be considered for appointment to level 2 or 3. This would be dependent on the criteria set out below.

After a minimum of 3 years' active fostering experience, foster carers may be considered for Level 2, and after a minimum of 5 years' active fostering experience, foster carers may be considered for Level 3.

The relevant Fostering or Kinship team manager will make the decision with regard to progression according to the criteria below. This decision will be put in writing to the foster carer.

In the case of a foster carer who does not continue to meet the requirements of Levels 2 or 3, the Team Manager may decide on a move to a lower level. In the case of a foster carer who does not continue to meet the requirements of Level 1, the Team Manager in discussion with the Registered Manager may request a full review to consider termination of approval.



3. PROCESS FOR PROGRESSION

The decision concerning progression through the levels will rest with the relevant Team Manger (Fostering and Kinship).

The Supervising Social Worker (SSW) will complete form FCL1, FCL2 or FCL3 demonstrating the criteria set out below and including a recommendation stating whether or not the foster carer should progress within the scheme.

When progression to Level 2 or 3 is being considered FCL2 or FCL3 will be forwarded to the Team Manager at least 28 days before the completion of the third or fifth year of fostering as appropriate.

The Team Manager will reach a decision and will notify the outcome to the foster carers in writing, copy to the SSW.

4. PROCESS OF MANAGING LACK OF AGREEMENT ON FOSTER CARER'S LEVEL

The expectation is that any issues of concern relating to standards of care or failure to meet the criteria will be fully discussed with the foster carer at the time they arise, thus offering the foster carer the opportunity to reflect on and alter their practice. Consequently, if matters of concern still remain unresolved, the foster carer will be made by their supervising social worker aware that progression to a further level may not be recommended.

If Foster Carers on Foundation level are unable to demonstrate that they meet the criteria to progress to Level 1 then this will be dealt with through the approval process. This would include access to the appeal process.

If the SSW is unable to recommend progress to level 2 or 3 or is recommending a move down a level the reasons for this will be clear in the documents sent to the Team Manager. The Team Manager will write to the foster carer with her decision concerning progression to Level 2 or Level 3, or that s/he does not agree to progression.

If the SSW is unable to recommend progression or is recommending a move down a level because of concerns around the level of care then the Team Manager must consider whether the matter should be referred to the fostering panel.

4.1 APPEAL

If the foster carers are not in agreement with the decision they will have 28 days in which to make written representation to the Registered Manager

If no written representation is received within 28 days the Registered Manager will proceed to confirm the decision.

If the foster carers make written representation to the Registered Manager will consider this alongside the most recent review papers and any other relevant documents and will proceed to a decision.

The foster carers will be notified in writing of the final decision of the Registered Manager.



5. CRITERIA FOR PROGRESSION

5.1 FOUNDATION LEVEL

Approval as temporary foster carers under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations.

Engagement in the assessment of their skills, knowledge and suitability to be foster carers. For family and friends carers this will be an assessment relating to a specific child\children.

Evidence of commitment to training by completion of two of the TSD standards.

For Family and Friends Carers this will be two Standards from the workbook for family and friends carers

- Standard 1: Understand your role as a family and friends carer
- Standard 5: Keep children and young people safe from harm
- For non-related carers this will be two standards from the workbook for non-related carers
- Standard 2: Understanding your role as a foster carer
- Standard 6: Keep children and young people safe from harm

When carers are approved on a temporary basis they will receive the age-related foster care allowance for each child from the date the child was placed with them.

When carers are able to demonstrate that they are meeting the criteria set out above they will receive the Level 1 payment which will include attendance at the kinship preparation training.

5.2 LEVEL 1 AT APPROVAL

Completion of required pre approval preparation of all those to be approved as foster carers.

Completion of a fostering assessment which has been presented to fostering panel and approval has been agreed by the Agency Decision maker.

Availability: Carers are required to be available to meet the needs of the child placed with them whether this is a preschool or a school age child in education. Carers would need to have some flexibility to cover for the child being ill, school holidays and some unexpected events.

Agreement that they will complete the TSD Standards for Foster Carers in the set time scales. (12 months following approval for non-related carers, 18 months following approval for family and friend carers)

For those carers who received the Level 1 fee while temporarily approved, to continue to receive the Level 1 fee they must meet the criteria for Level 1 set out above.

WCFF recognises that for family and friends carers who have children placed with them under Regulation 24 it may not always be possible to complete the kinship preparation training prior to presentation at panel. In this situation with the agreement of the Team Manager family and friends carers may receive the Level 1 fee following approval.

5.3 LEVEL 2

In addition to the requirements of Level 1:

Minimum of three years active experience as foster carers. Carers should demonstrate that they have been actively caring for a significant proportion of available time.

Competence across the range of the following, as demonstrated as part of their review:

Ability to provide a good standard of care to children, which promotes healthy emotional, physical, sexual and intellectual development.

Ability to ensure that children are cared for in a home where they are safe from harm and abuse.

Ability to collaborate with other professional workers and to contribute to the departments planning for the child.

Ability to appreciate and understand how personal experiences have affected themselves and their families and the impact that fostering has had on them all.

Completion of the TDS Standards for Foster Carers and mandatory training within the required timescales

Willing to consider emergency placements, if approval is not Family and Friends, respite or permanency fostering. Emergency does not imply out of hours, but rather an unplanned placement without the placement agreement meeting having taken place.

Availability: as level 1.

Demonstrated commitment to development of fostering practice by attendance at Learning and Development events. These could include training, support groups or the Foster Carer Forum. Where a single carer is approved the minimum requirement will be attendance at three events in any one year. Where couples are approved together the minimum requirement will be four events with each carer expected to have attended at least one event.

We would encourage carers to attend social events such as ISL fun days or celebration events however these will not count towards this criterion

Each annual review must consider whether the foster carer continues to demonstrate the skills and competencies required for Level 2

5.4 LEVEL 3

In addition to the requirements of Level 2:

Minimum of 5 years active fostering experience. Carers should demonstrate that they have been actively caring for a significant proportion of available time.

Availability: as Level 1

Demonstrated commitment to development of fostering practice by attendance at Learning and Development events. These could include training, support groups or the Foster Carer Forum. Where a single carer is approved the minimum requirement will be attendance at three events in any one year. Where couples are approved together the minimum requirement will be four events with each carer expected to have attended at least one event.

We would encourage carers to attend social events such as ISL fun days or celebration events however these will not count towards this criteria

Each annual review must consider whether the foster carer continues to demonstrate the skills and competencies required for Level 3

6. CONTRACT FOSTER CARE SCHEME

The Contract Foster Care Scheme is a historic scheme that WCFF no longer recruits to. The Foster Carers who remain approved under the scheme are paid the contract fee per week per child, and the age-related foster care allowance.

7. PLACEMENT PLUS

Placement Plus is a fostering scheme for children and young people who have a range of complex needs. Many of them will have experienced a number of placement moves and will be at risk of being placed in residential placement. Alternatively, they will be young people who are in residential placements and although their needs continue to be complex the assessment is that they could be met in a family placement with a high level of support.

Placement Plus carers will receive the Placement Plus fee and the age-related Foster Care Allowance for the child or young person.

8. PAYMENT OF FOSTER CARER ALLOWANCES (FCA) AND FEES

The FCA and the fee is paid fortnightly in arrears. These are reviewed annually.

Information on the fees and age related FCA will be sent to carers at the beginning of each financial year.

Foster carers receive payment through the BACS system, which allows for transfer of the payment directly into the recipient's bank account. A mandate to set up payment through BACS is available from the finance department.

For other payments relating to the child or young person please refer to WCFF's Financial Support to Foster Carers.

8.1 EMERGENCY PAYMENTS.

In some circumstances it will be possible to make an emergency payment to foster carers at the start of a placement. This must be agreed by a Fostering and Kinship Team Manager and should not exceed one week's fee plus FCA. Any amount paid by emergency payment will be deducted from the first standard payment.



