

Shropshire Council

Children's Placement Service

Payment Arrangements for Foster Carers

1) Introduction

This document outlines the scheme for payment to foster carers offering family-based care to children and young people looked after by Shropshire Council.

The arrangements outlined in this document represent a continued commitment by the Council to family-based care and a real attempt to recognise the skills and expertise of carers and reward them accordingly. It is also an attempt to reinforce the fair and transparent payment structure coupled with the Council's commitment to continue to pay foster carers children's allowance payments which are higher than the Department for Education recommended rates and in line with regional partners and payment for skills which are designed to both recruit new carers and retain existing carers by offering competitive payment amounts.

We believe that not only does the scheme afford carers the status they deserve by introducing a process whereby their expertise can be measured, but also raises the profile of family-based care in Shropshire and therefore renders us more effective in carer retention and recruitment.

More importantly, by constantly striving to increase the skill base of all our foster carers we should see a consequent improvement in placement stability leading to better outcomes for Shropshire's looked after children.

The scheme is only available to foster carers approved by, and registered with, Shropshire Council. It is designed to recognise the range of skills and experience that carers and prospective carers possess, as well as the time and commitment involved in caring for children who are looked after by this Council.

The scheme includes all approved foster carers, it does not apply to Supported Board and Lodgings carers, whose payments have been considered elsewhere.

2) Standards and Levels of Payment

Foster carer payments encompass two elements. First child allowances which are expected to cover the care needs of the child and second Payment for Skills which is the reward element paid to carers for being a foster carer. Rates can be reviewed annually. However, there cannot be a guaranteed increase in any allowance or fee. If there is to be an increase, new payment rates will be consulted upon with carers and new rates circulated to all foster carers at the beginning of each new financial year.

There will be 3 levels of payment for skills, all of which involve payment of a fee in addition to the child allowance. Child allowances are only payable if there are children in placement.

Care plus payments, which are fee payments are a higher rate of pay which will only be used in accordance with the criteria contained in this policy. This is paid alongside child allowance payments.

3) Outline of the Scheme

Fee payments – Payment for Skills

The basis of the scheme is that carers will receive a skills fee that is in line with an appropriate assessed and required level of skill and expertise and who are available to perform specific tasks to meet the needs of the child and \ or a range of children in their care as set out below. Essentially, carers will be paid in accordance with their experience, training, commitment to fostering and the number of placements they can offer.

Skill levels must be clearly demonstrated and evidenced by carers and will be assessed in accordance with the criteria below.

Payments for Skills Fees 1,2, and 3 are payable for 52 weeks per year subject to certain conditions being met. The weekly rates are set out in the table below. For new carers joining Shropshire, the fees will start once the first child is in placement. This 'open fee' approach is designed to protect carers income when they are without a placement subject to the conditions outlined in this policy.

For those assessed as operating as Care Plus carers to meet the needs of a specific child or children, the payment of the fee will be on a **fee per bed** basis for the duration of the placement of a child or young person, if this placement ceases or the child or young person becomes more settled in placement, the carers will move back down to their original skill level until such time that they are required once more to operate at Care Plus level for a different child or in some cases, the same child.

The acquisition and subsequent maintenance of the skill level payment will be checked by reference to detailed examination of the evidence through the completion of the relevant competency documents. This will enable carers to be able to progress through the scheme and conversely to move down a skill level if there is evidence to support they are not operating in accordance with their skill level. Movements both up and down the skill level scheme will only be agreed by Team Managers and the Service Manager either following an annual review, presentation to fostering panel or following completion of competency documents. In the event of carers not agreeing with their assessed skill level, carers can make representations through Shropshire's complaints process.

Children's fostering allowances

Carers in all placements will receive the basic fostering allowance for each child in their care, as set out in the table below.

Foster carer will be expected to maintain a child or children in their care on a day to day basis. The following lists the items that the allowance is expected to cover. It is a guide only and not an exhaustive list.

- Food costs

- School dinners/lunch money
- Clothing/footwear (including replacing regular school uniform items)
- Costs of clubs' clothing (e.g. Cubs, Brownies etc)
- Nappies and other baby items
- Personal self-care items
- Pocket money and savings
- Toys/books/games etc
- Education material costs
- Leisure/family day trips/hobbies/activities/entertainment
- School trips/activities
- Life-story work materials and costs
- Transport costs to attend school, support contact and attend meetings
- Household costs, utilities e.g. additional gas, electric, washing
- Household wear and tear e.g. to furniture, carpets and household items
- Luggage costs.

The general expectation is that the allowance will cover expenses related to clubs and activities but there may be situations where the needs of a child or young person are such that the care plan identifies that for a period of time additional financial support is needed to enable a child or young person to access a higher than average number of clubs and activities,, to promote a special interest or talent or to enable them to access additional educational experiences. In the first instance all additional funding streams should be explored. All decisions to provide additional funding must be addressed as part of a child's care plan and agreed by a service manager.

The amount of fostering allowance payments varies between local authorities, some are opting to pay the Department for Education recommended rates whilst others are setting allowance rates in line with partner agencies. Shropshire intends to pay an allowance rate that is similar to those of our neighbouring authorities in recognition of our regional permanency partnership with Telford, Stoke and Staffordshire. ***It is important to note that the new recommended fostering allowances are significantly above those recommended by the Department for Education.***

4.) The new payment levels

i) Payment for Skills

Level	Training (basic)	Assessment	Weekly Fee (1 child) £'s	Weekly Fee (2children) £'s	Weekly Fee (3children) £'s	Weekly Fee (4+ children) £'s
Level 1	Skills to Foster or Skills to Care training course Completion of training, support and development standards	Form C assessment as specified under the fostering regulations Form F assessment as specified under the fostering regulations	80	100	120	140
Level 2	Skills to Foster or Skills to care training course Completion of all induction training courses, as set out in training and support strategy and commitment to	Form F assessment as specified under the fostering regulations to determine suitability to care for any child requiring a foster	140	170	200	230

	attend Core Training courses. Progression of Personal Development Plan and successful completion of competency document	placement				
Level 3	Completed all above criteria Completion of all Core courses as set out in training and support strategy and at least two enhanced courses including the Solihull Trauma module and successful completion of the competency workbook	Form F assessment as specified under the fostering regulations to determine suitability to care for any child requiring a foster placement	250	280	320	360
Care Plus	Completion of above criteria Care Plus carers can and will offer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo placements for hard to place young people, • Parent and baby placements • Remand placements, • Placements 	Form F assessment as specified under the fostering regulations to determine suitability to care for any child requiring a foster placement	500			

	for complex young people as defined by Children's Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placements to divert from residential care • Step-down from residential care 					
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ii) The children's allowances will be as follows:

Age of child	Weekly Rate £'s
0-4	129.09
5-10	147.18
11-15	190.05
16+	225.39

The Payment for Skills Fees are weekly payments available to carers throughout the year, regardless of whether a child is placed with them. If a carer has a period with no placement, they will be paid at the lower end of the skill level for that period. This means level 1 £80 per week, level 2 £140 per week and level 3 £250 per week. This is not offered in most other local authorities or independent fostering agencies, most have now moved to a fee per bed approach where carers only receive payment if they have a child in placement. Shropshire have made the decision to retain their open fee approach as our experience is that very few carers have a vacancy for a period of time exceeding two weeks and therefore, we do not want to financially disadvantage our carers by losing their income when they have short breaks between placements.

As a minimum, all carers who are approved as foster carers for Shropshire Council will start at level One to reflect the role, expertise and skills required to care for any child for whom they are not the birth parent. It may in some situations be possible for carers to commence

their fostering career with Shropshire at Level 2 or in some situations Level 3 dependent on their experience of fostering elsewhere or previous relevant professional childcare experience. Decisions regarding this will be made by the Team Manager and the Service Manager prior to the applicants presentation to Fostering Panel and evidence of their experience will be detailed in their Form F assessment. If carers wish to challenge their skill level, they can do so via communication through their supervising social worker as part of their fostering assessment.

Following discussions at the annual foster carer review, the evidence for progression of Payment for Skills will be presented to the appropriate team manager in Children's Placements Service as this is an operational decision-making process. The final decision regarding approval, however, once all the required criteria have been met, rests with the Service Manager who will consider the evidence presented and the Team Manager's views. If carers are unhappy about their skill level, they can make representations through Shropshire's complaints process.

The payment for Skills is dependent on the type of assessment that has been undertaken and progression through the skill levels is subject to the conditions set out below.

5.) Progression through the Scheme

Progression from Level One to Two

Most carers will commence their fostering journey as level One carers, payment of the level One fee will be dependent on the assessment completed, either a connected Form C assessment to care for a specific child or children or a Form F assessment to care for non-specified looked after children. Completion of the Training Development and Support standards and completion of induction training modules must be completed within a set period of time, 12 months for in-house carers, 18 months for connected carers or the fee payment may be withdrawn.

To progress from Levels One to two, carers must have undergone a Form F assessment to care for non-specified looked after children and have been fostering for 12 months or more. Carers will be required to evidence completion of core competencies that demonstrates their skills and experience to enable them to operate as a level Two carer. Evidence of progression must be supported by and signed by the supervising social worker and the Team Manager. The decision regarding progression rests with the Service Manager who will have the responsibility to review the progression documentation in order to formulate a decision.

Carers offering a connected person's placement for a specified child can progress to level Two if they undergo a further period of assessment using the Form F assessment template to consider their skills and experiences to offer care for non-specified looked after children and if they have the space to accommodate another child. Any request to be considered to care for non-specified looked after children will be subject to the conditions of the Form F assessment, approval considered by the Fostering panel and decision by the Agency

Decision Maker. However, in almost all connected person arrangements, the expectation of the Local Authority is that a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) will be pursued and finalised within 6-12 months of placement. This does not preclude connected carers from undergoing a Form F assessment following the making of an SGO order, they would however have to meet the statutory requirements for the completion of a Form F assessment.

Progression from Level Two to Three

To progress from level Two to Three, carers must have undergone a Form F assessment to care for non-specified looked after children and been fostering for a period of **two** years or more. Carers will be required to complete a competency workbook that evidences their skills and experience to operate as a level Three carer. The progression document must be supported by and signed by the supervising social worker and the Team Manager, the decision regarding progression rests with the Service Manager who will have the responsibility to review the progression documentation in order to formulate a decision.

Supervising Social workers must stress that the competencies are only one element of the overall criteria that must be met for progression, and actual performance plays a significant part. 'Performance' will be measured by paying close attention to outcomes for children in placement.

Research indicates the following areas are crucially important in determining whether a placement has been successful and supervising social workers assessing the case for progression will pay close attention to these areas:

- Did the placement(s) last as long as needed?
- Did the child (ren) participate in decisions affecting their day to day care in placement?
- Was contact maintained with family, friends?
- Did the child's well-being improve as a result of the placement?
- Was the child supported to engage in a healthy active lifestyle?
- Were the child's health and educational needs met as well or better in the foster placement than before?
- Was the child's identity (racial, cultural, and religious) respected?
- Was the child able to move-on successfully with the minimum stress and disruption?
- Was the child generally satisfied with the placement?

Clearly, these factors are not solely in the hands of carers and other professionals need to play their part in contributing to a successful placement outcome. It is important, however, for assessing social workers to identify the role played by carers in attempting to deliver on the aforementioned outcomes.

In addition to the requirements for contact with birth families set out in Section 9, the following skills and duties are required of carers at the following levels (all the criteria must be fulfilled to achieve the relevant skill level) and all progression is subject to case by case decision making:

Care Plus Payments

To operate as a Care Plus carer to offer care for a complex child or complex sibling group,

carers must have fulfilled all of the above criteria and been fostering for a period of **two** years or more or have considerable transferable skills from a previous role that equips them for managing a complex child or sibling group. There must be confidence from the fostering service that carers have the skill and experience to manage a placement of this type. Payment at the Care Plus rate will remain under continual review by the fostering service and the children's social work manager and will only remain payable for the duration of that placement or until the child or children are no longer deemed to be in need of a care plus package.

Should an allegation that has reached the threshold for an investigation under s47, Children Act 1989, be made against a foster carer whilst being assessed for progression then the process would be suspended until appropriate investigations are completed.

Once the allegation investigation is completed the supervising social worker will complete a report of outcomes with a recommendation as to whether the next competency level of progression should continue or not and any relevant recommendations regarding the carers continued practice and level of competence highlighted as an issue in the complaint/investigation.

The Team Manager will have discretion to agree progression in such matters although foster carers can make a written representation to the Service Manager should they wish to challenge the decision of the Team Manager.

6.1 Level One

Carers at Level One are expected to have demonstrated the following competencies:

- Accept multiple child placements including where needed potential unplanned and unannounced placements. Age preferences will be considered carefully whilst carers become familiar with the role of fostering.
- Have completed the relevant training procedures for Shropshire Council foster carers and the Training Support and Development standards
- Care for children on both a short and long-term basis
- Assist in preparing for moving children on to further or permanent placements
- Attend support groups on a regular basis
- **may be expected to facilitate and may supervise** contact with birth family as part of a child care plan if the identified risks are minimal and can be managed appropriately

6.2 Level Two

Carers at level 2 are expected to have demonstrated the following competencies:

- Accept multiple child placements including where needed potential unplanned and unannounced placements. Age preferences will still be considered; however, the expectation is carers will extend their age preferences considerably to be able to move to level 2.
- A minimum of 12 months fostering experience or if skills assessed as having relevant child related professional experience at this level
- Completion of mandatory courses

- Completion of additional training courses as set out in the **Foster Carers Training and Support Strategy** (by both carers in a two-carer household) and any training as identified as part of annual review or safeguarding investigation
- Carer **will** facilitate contact and **may** be expected to supervise contact with birth family. This includes taking and collecting children from contact sessions and having direct contact with birth parents.

Competencies detailed for Level Two must be clearly understood and demonstrated in the care offered. The carer and Supervising Social Worker must produce evidence in the form of a written submission to support the successful achievement of each competency, this will need to be agreed and signed off by the Team Manager and the decision rests with the Service Manager.

6.3 Level Three

Progression to Level Three by a carer who has already achieved Level Two is when the following additional competencies are fulfilled: -

- A minimum of 2 years fostering, or relevant child related professional experience
- Flexible approach and commitment to the placement of children 0-18, this will mean carers accepting children 0-18 in order to operate as a level 3 carer.
- Completion of the eleven mandatory courses
- Additional training course as detailed in foster carers training and support strategy (by both carers in a two-carer household) and any training as identified as part of annual review or safeguarding investigation
- **Take children who have been in residential placements and are stepping back into a family care arrangement**
- Be available to offer care in an emergency and unplanned manner, preferably with one carer at home full-time
- Demonstrate an ability to work independently of the social worker in 'partnership' with other professionals responsible for delivering against the child's care plan
- Engage in regular mentoring or "buddying" and/or training of other carers
- **will supervise** contact with birth family as identified and within the child's care plan

NB: Mentoring or buddying can be defined as follows: The foster carers mentoring role as one in which the more experienced carer would support a more recently approved carer in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance and develop the less-experienced carers professional and personal growth.

As such they will provide guidance to their colleague about a specific issue, coach them in developing a particular skill, facilitate their development by sharing resources, contact and networks, challenge them to move beyond their comfort zone with particular issues that may arise in placement, help the carer to reflect and develop following challenging or difficult issues as they arise.

In this way they will act as an experienced and trusted colleague, guiding them on practice, acting as a confident or consultant when the carer doesn't wish to initially discuss particular

issues with their supervising social worker

6.4 Care Plus

Care Plus payments will be applied to any carer who is already operating as a level Three carer where it is identified that a placement is needed for a child or young person with particular needs, this may be but not exclusively be for mother and baby placements, remand placements, placement breakdowns to then prevent a move to residential care, complex presenting behaviour of a young person for example CSE or criminal exploitation or a step down from residential care. These can be solo placements, or they can apply to a situation where there is more than one child in placement and the needs of one child require a care plus approach. N.B if care plus payments are in place, this fee will cover care for all children in placement.

Care Plus payments will only be paid for the duration of the placement and whilst the child's needs are assessed to require it. If the placement comes to an end the carer will revert to their previous level and previous level of pay. If the child in placement settles over time and they no longer require the skills of a Care Plus arrangement, decisions about the need to revert to the previous skill level and previous payments will be made on an individual basis. There can be no expectation that care plus payments will continue for the duration of a placement.

7.) Exceptional Skills payment

We expect a high standard of care and commitment from all foster carers to enable children in their care to achieve outcomes against their care plan. Levels One, Two and Three skills payments are the financial reward given for this. However, we also believe that for certain children the level of skill and commitment required for a period of time may mean that a carer has to go "above and beyond". The request to pay an exceptional skills payment needs to be requested by the supervising social worker to the Team Manager. Decisions regarding payment will be made by the Service Manager in consultation with the relevant Team Manager.

It is anticipated that exceptional skills payment will relate to larger sibling groups, teenage placements or younger children with significantly challenging behaviours.

Requests for an exceptional skills payment will be made after each successful three-month period in placement.

These payments are discretionary and will be paid where the carer has been able to demonstrate care skills and commitment "above and beyond" that has met a child or young person's needs and has achieved excellent outcomes as determined by the child's care plan and placement plan

An exceptional skills payment of £250 can be made for a child covering a three-month period of outcomes achieved. If a second three months period of outcomes is achieved a new application and decision will be reached. The maximum payment for any single child in one year is therefore £1,000.

Criteria for exceptional skills: a child has been in placement for a minimum of three months and has achieved exceptional outcomes against their care plan sustained for a three-month period

AND

The skills and commitment of the carers have gone “above and beyond” good quality standard care and have they been a primary contributor to enabling the child to reach these outcomes

Example:

- School attendance has been below 60% and has increased in excess of 85%
- The child has for the first time engaged in a social or leisure activity that has significantly promoted their opportunity to develop peer friendships, age appropriate independence and to improve their self-esteem
- The child’s previous anti-social behaviour in school or the community has been seen to make significant improvements verified by external parties
- The child’s complex health needs have been attended to, including extended attendance at hospital.

8.) Demonstrating Competency: Examples

Use of existing processes as evidence e.g. Childs feedback to IRO and LAC reviews, foster carer agreement, diary, supervising social worker visits to carer - both announced and unannounced - Health and Safety checklist and supervision records.

Other sources of evidence e.g. use of feedback from child’s social worker via end of placement reports/review document and feedback from parents.

Portfolio approach by carer and completion of the competency workbook, other sources, videos, group discussions.

Other evidence-based assessment processes e.g. Ofsted, Training Support and Development (TSD) standards.

Standardised format regarding content and recording of supervising social worker visits to carers incorporating checklist against competencies/criteria, contact sheets, supervision records etc.

This is not an exhaustive list and carers can provide a range of evidence they feel reflect the work they have done and what they have achieved for children in their care.

9.) Contact with birth family and friends

Maintaining contact with birth family and friends is a duty of the Local Authority and an important part of the child’s life during separation, whether this is temporary or to be permanent in the long term. As corporate parent’s we will always seek to support a child to

maintain a level of contact so as to promote their welfare and their continuing relationship with their birth family and as such a carer, on behalf of the Local Authority, is expected to support the agreed plan of contact in a child's Care Plan. Observations of contact between children and their family members is often a fundamental aspect of court proceedings and ongoing care planning and as such all observations made by carers should be provided to a child's social worker.

We recognise however that supporting and facilitating contact with birth parents can be a challenge and below we identify core responsibilities that reflect the level of expertise of the carer.

Level 1: carer may be expected to facilitate contact with birth family as part of a child care plan if the identified risks are minimal and can be managed in agreement with all parties i.e. child's social worker, supervising fostering social worker, carers. This includes taking and collecting children from contact sessions and having direct contact with parents through a supervising worker (this is determined on a case by case basis and should take into account the situation and logistics of all placements in care at the time).

Level 2: carer will facilitate and may be expected to supervise contact with birth family. This includes taking and collecting children from contact sessions and having direct contact with parents or through a supervising worker if necessary (this is determined on a case by case basis and should take into account the situation and logistics of all placements in care at the time).

Level 3 and Care Plus: carer will supervise contact with birth family as identified and within the child's care plan (this is determined on a case by case basis and should take into account the situation and logistics of all placements in care at the time).

In all cases a risk assessment will be undertaken by the foster care social worker. Where the assessments identify risk, an action plan to minimise and manage any risk to the carer or the placement stability will be put in place and agreed by all parties i.e. foster carer supervising fostering social worker, and child's social worker.

10.) Training and Support

All carers will have the opportunity to attend carer forums. These forums offer the possibility for carers carrying out similar tasks to meet each other, share their experiences and learning. It is encouraged that all carers attend such forums and encourage new carers to do likewise.

Following approval from Panel, Foster Carers are expected to complete the Training and Development Standards (TSD's) which are set out by the Department for Education and show the areas of skills and knowledge that all carers need to achieve and evidence in the first 12 months of their Fostering journey (18 months for Connected carers). It is a statutory requirement that these are completed as set out in Fostering regulations for all foster carers.

Induction

During the first 12 months, carers will have the opportunity to attend a number of courses

which make up the induction training offer. Each of these courses will provide evidence to assist in meeting the TSD's as well as providing specific knowledge and skill development in a variety of areas. Inclusive of skills to foster there are 6 induction courses that must be completed by all carers and these should be completed within the first 12 months of approval.

Core

Once carers have successfully completed their induction and TSD's, core training courses will be available to attend. These core training courses are designed to further develop carer's skills and confidence within the role, these courses need to be completed within the second year of fostering.

Enhanced

These courses are designed to focus on specific topic areas and will not be applicable to all carers. If you feel that you would benefit from one of these courses at any point during your Fostering journey, then please book to attend.

Bespoke

Carers can use supervision with their Supervising Social Worker to discuss in depth their training needs and any Bespoke training will need to be identified on their Personal Development Plans.

It is the responsibility of the supervising social worker, in discussion with the carer, to identify each carer's training needs beyond the core training identified below. These needs will be discussed, agreed and updated at each annual review.

There are courses that all foster carers at Levels One, Two, Three and Care Plus are expected to attend. These are:

- First Aid
- Promoting Education
- Solihull Approach (parenting model) – Understanding your Child and Teen
- Child Protection basic Awareness
- Child Exploitation
- Loss, Grief and Bereavement
- Responding and dealing with behaviours
- Safer caring including Allegations against foster carers
- Attachment (part 1,2 and 3)
- Contact & Managing risks in contact
- Workshop to raise awareness of Prevent
- Looked after Children's health
- Recording and reporting

11. Headline additional payment information

In addition to any increase in allowances and the payment for skills levels the following additional payments will also apply:

Mileage: The child's allowance covers payment for the first 35 miles a week for a child 0-11 and the first 70 miles for a child 11 plus. Any miles on top of this can be claimed and will be paid at **0.45p** per mile. This can include travel school, contact, travel to health appointments and travel incurred in supporting the child to meet tasks and undertake activities within their care plan. This will include travel to clubs up to two per week per child. This does not include holidays, day trips or shopping expeditions.

There will also be a holiday grant of **£150.00** for each child under 14, and **£200.00** for each child aged 14 and over, payable during the first week of June.

A holiday allowance of **£300.00** will also be paid to foster carers payable during the first pay week in June. This is to be used to contribute to the cost of taking their looked after child on holiday.

Levels of payment for Birthday/Christmas or Festival/Holiday allowances for the child can be found at the end of this document in Appendix 1

12 Holiday arrangements for Carers

Please refer to separate Foster Breaks policy.

13. Ceasing the Skills based payment

The fee will be paid from the date of a foster carers' first placement, then paid 52 weeks per year irrespective of a child being in placement, including where it has been agreed that a carer needs a natural break in between placements. Longer breaks, unless agreed with the Children's Placement Team Manager, will result in skills-based payment being suspended (unless mitigating circumstances exist).

The other two exceptions to this rule are:

Firstly, when a carer refuses to take a placement on two successive occasions which has been deemed by the Children's Placement Service as a suitable match i.e. children and young people 0-18 in accordance with the criteria for each level unless unusual and mitigating circumstances are evident, the skills-based payment will be withdrawn

Secondly, where it is deemed that a carer is not operating at their assessed skill level, a recommendation can be made to move a carer to a lower skill level.

Decisions regarding a change of skill level are made by the Service Manager in consultation with the appropriate Team Manager.

NB: The offer of placement must be within the carers' registration criteria and deemed by the CPS duty system as appropriate. (Whilst age preferences will be considered, carers need to understand that this is a simply a preference and all our carers are approved as carers for 0-18) If refusal on two occasions occurs, this is likely to trigger an annual review. This will not apply in cases where a formal agreement has been made not to place to protect a child already in placement for a specific period.

If a carer remains without a placement for 12 consecutive months or more (for whatever reason), then a reassessment and panel re-approval must take place before caring can resume.

Ending of placements

All carers will be expected to give 28 days' notice of their intention to end a placement and (in exceptional circumstances 7 working days may be considered). No placement will end, irrespective of the time frame, without first having attended a placement consolidation meeting and having had the case presented to Placement Stability Forum and have the change of care plan agreed by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

Foster carers may be faced with suspension from caring and their fee payment temporarily withdrawn should they demand that a child be removed from their care with immediate effect. Removing children from foster placements in this manner is totally unacceptable and contrary to the best principles of placement stability. However, suspension will may not follow if there are serious and clearly evidenced health and safety and safeguarding issues.

14. Safeguarding Allegation against carers

If a carer is suspended and children removed following an allegation the skills fee will be paid for up to 8 weeks following the date of a strategy meeting recommending investigation. The allowance for the child will cease immediately.

Whether or not payments continue beyond the 8-week point is discretionary and will be decided on a case by case basis by the Team Manager who will consider any mitigating circumstances leading to a delay in resolution which may be outside the carer's control.

In cases where concerns have come to light regarding a Foster Carers' practice which do not meet the more serious allegations threshold then CPS reserve the right to suspend the fee until such issues are investigated and addressed. However, every effort will be made to prioritise completion of any such investigation and it is expected this will be completed in no more than 28 working days

15. Carer ill health

If a carer is unable to take a placement on the grounds of ill health, we would need this certificating within 7 days by the family doctor. If the certification is not provided, the fee payment will cease. After receipt of certification up to or on the 7th day the fee will be paid at the full rate for the first two months of sickness absence; half-rate for the following two months at which point payments would cease until a resumption of fostering occurred. The fee would be reinstated at any point during this four-month period should fostering resume. On returning from a break due to certified sickness the foster carer in question must foster for an unbroken period of four months before gaining entitlement to these arrangements for a further period. If a carer remains inactive due to ill health for a period of twelve months or more a re-assessment, plus a medical will need to take place before they can resume their fostering career.

16. Implications of a Reward Element

Receiving a reward element as a carer can be of concern to some people, in relation to tax and benefits. It is hoped the following notes will be of help: -

16.1 Income Tax

When you start fostering there is no one to tell HMRC about your income, **except you.** You will need to complete a Self-Assessment tax return each year and send it to HMRC.

The quickest and easiest way to register your self-employment is online. When you use this method, you will also automatically be signed up for the Self-Assessment Online Service. Alternatively, you can register by telephone by calling the HMCR newly self-employed helpline on 0300 200 3504.

The simplified income tax scheme for foster carers is called 'qualifying care relief' by HMRC. Foster carers who are full time or part time, such as day carers and respite carers, can all use qualifying care relief. The scheme uses an income threshold to work out how much tax, if any, is due. As long as your total income from fostering is below the threshold, there is no tax due on fostering income.

If you have income from fostering above the threshold, you can choose to work out your taxable profit in the normal way for self-employed people (by setting allowable expenses against your income from fostering). Alternatively, the simplified method means you can simply treat the amount by which your income from fostering is above the threshold as your taxable profit.

The threshold for the foster care tax relief scheme has two elements

- A fixed amount of £10,000* per year. This is applied pro-rata if you were approved part-way through the year.
- Additional amount per child depending on age: £200* per week for every child aged 0-10 and £250* per week for every child aged 11- 18. Part of a week counts as a full week

* These figures may be subject to change from year to year.

At the end of each financial year, Shropshire Council is responsible for providing carers with a statement of their reward element. This statement will be made minus the agreed costs of providing a service.

16.2 National Insurance

All foster carers have to register as self-employed with HMRC and as a result have to make provisions for Class 2 National Insurance Contributions which are set at £3 per week (2019/20). If a foster carer has no taxable profit from their fostering (their fostering payments are below their tax threshold), or if they have taxable profit (the amount over their tax threshold) by up to £6,365 (2019-2020) – called the 'small profit threshold' - automatically they will not have to pay Class 2 National Insurance Contributions. The individual circumstances of the foster carer will determine if this is the best option for them

or whether they have to make other arrangements to maintain their national insurance record, for example apply for national insurance credits (a Class 3 contribution) or opt to pay the Class 2 contributions voluntarily. Maintaining a national insurance record is really important in order to make sure that person builds up enough contributions to be entitled to the full state pension once they reach retirement age. Also, some welfare benefits require the claimant to have a certain number of national insurance contributions, sometimes within a recent time period.

Although quite rare, a foster carer may need to pay Class 4 National Insurance Contributions, when they make a lot of profit from their self-employment, in addition to the Class 2 contributions above. A foster carer would pay 9% on profits between £8,632 and £50,000 and 2% on profits over £50,000 (2019/20).

Foster Carers are able to find out more about this subject by contacting The Fostering Network's member helpline on 020 7401 9582 open Monday-Friday, 10 am - 3 pm and email info@fostering.net

Foster carers can also contact HMRC's National Insurance Helpline on 0300 200 3500 Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm, Saturday: 8am to 4pm, closed Sundays and bank holidays. You can find more information about national insurance on the Government's website www.gov.uk/national-insurance

Reminder: The fostering service has a responsibility to inform their foster carers of the requirement to register as self-employed and to remind foster carers to think about their national insurance contributions. However, the fostering service are not tax and national insurance experts and will signpost accordingly e.g. to The Fostering Network, HMRC etc. It is the foster carer's responsibility to make sure they register with HMRC and arrange national insurance contributions accordingly, taking into account their individual circumstances. The Local Authority holds no responsibility for notifying HMRC about self-employment, national insurance or other related areas relating to a foster carer.

16.3 National Insurance Credits and Home Responsibilities Protection (HRP)

Prior to 6 April 2010, you could claim HRP to protect your state pension. This has now ended, replaced by a system of national insurance credits (NI credits) for parents of children under 12 and foster carers. Since 6 April 2010, you have been able to build up qualifying years for the basic State Pension and additional State Pension through new weekly NI credits. If you are a foster carer or parent, you can get an NI credit for each week in which any of the following apply:

- You are the parent of a child aged under 12 and care for them, but don't receive Child Benefit for the child
- You are an approved foster carer.

Advice can be gained on this matter by calling 0300 200 3500

16.4 Foster care and Tax Credits

Working tax credit (WTC) tops up the income of low paid workers. Fostering counts as self-employment, so you might be entitled to WTC, as your profit from fostering, for tax purposes,

is nil or very small. If you have children of your own, you are possibly entitled to child tax credit (CTC) too. Fostered children do not count for CTC and cannot be included in your claim.

You can check your entitlement and claim tax credits by phoning the Tax Credits Helpline on 0845 300 3900. There is more information about WTC in the Fostering Network's Signposts in Fostering booklet Benefits. From October 2013, as part of a bigger welfare reform plan, WTC and CTC will begin to be replaced by a new benefit called Universal Credit although this will take around 4 years to be fully implemented. Foster carers may be able to get additional financial help through Universal Credit, as it removes the distinction between being 'in-work' (and claiming working tax credit) and out of work (and claiming income support, ESA, JSA, etc). Those benefits, as well as housing benefit, will also be incorporated into Universal Credit, paid by the DWP.

Fostering Network provide helpful information leaflets on national insurance, tax, benefits and pension contributions.

DRAFT

(Birthday allowance will be paid one week in advance of the birthday.)

(Allowances are paid fortnightly unless alternative arrangements are made in exceptional circumstances.)

Festival Allowances

0 - 4 years	£57.00
5 - 7 years	£59.00
8 - 10 years	£62.00
11 - 13 years	£64.00
14 – 15 years	£66.00
16+	£68.00

Birthday Allowances

0 - 4 years	£44.00
5 - 7 years	£48.00
8 - 10 years	£54.00
11 - 13 years	£62.00
14 - 15 years	£68.00
16+	£74.00

Holiday Allowance

The carer/s should be able to evidence how this grant contributes to either a family holiday with the young person/s or additional holiday activities for the child or young person.

These can be applied for at the following rates:

A grant of £150.00 for each child under 14, payable during the first pay week in June.

A grant of £200.00 for each child aged 14 and over, payable during the first pay week in June.

A Holiday Allowance of £300.00 to foster carers payable during the first pay week in June.

A Holiday Allowance of £110.00 to Shared Care and Respite Carers payable during the first week in June *if they take the young person on holiday to support the adult costs.*

School Uniforms (where required and agreed with the supervising social worker and team manager)

Children starting infant or junior school	£87.00
Children transferring to secondary	£222.00

(Payable in August, or the month prior to the child starting school)

Guidance for Pocket Money and Savings

Please refer to separate policy.

Initial clothing

This is a discretionary allowance and applications should be made to the relevant Team Manager. Case Managers should seek the co-operation of those who hold parental responsibility to make sure that the child has adequate personal clothing and personal effects collected from home to take with them when they are looked after. In relation to the revised allowances structure, an initial clothing allowance may not be required in each case but can be applied for up to a maximum amount of:

0 - 4 years	£100.00
5 - 7 years	£100.00
8 - 10 years	£150.00
11 - 13 years	£150.00
14 - 15 years	£200.00
16+	£200.00

Mileage Allowances

The weekly allowance includes an amount to cover the transport costs of each foster child for things that are child related such as school or attendance at leisure activities. For a child up to the age of eleven this equates to 35 miles each week, for a young person eleven to fifteen it is 70 miles each week.

Where a carer can show over a four-week period that they have exceeded this then the additional mileage will be paid at the rate of 0.45p per mile.

NB: Carers can't claim for car travel to a holiday destination or shopping expedition.

Young Persons in work-contribution to care

When a young person is over the age of 16 and is working, they are expected to contribute towards their maintenance. The young person will be expected to contribute directly to the carers in this way unless in full-time education, or when it can be proven that they cannot secure a job, grant or benefits.

The boarding out allowances will be reduced by this amount accordingly. It is essential therefore that the Link Social Worker (CPS) is informed if a young person is working.

£10 per week for young people on a youth training scheme or one-third of the young person's wage income

Allowances for working young people in lodgings or with foster parents or in community homes

The following payment can be made to young people from allowances made in lieu of pocket money and in recognition that the young person may not receive any benefits. If working or unemployed through no fault of their own:

Age 16: £10.50
Age 17: £13.00
Age 18: £15.50

If not working through their own fault:

Age 16: £7.60
Age 17: £7.60
Age 18: £13.00

Community Homes: Birthday and Christmas Allowances

Festival Allowances

Birthday Allowances

0 - 4 years	£57.00	0 - 4 years	£44.00
5 - 7 years	£59.00	5 - 7 years	£48.00
8 - 10 years	£62.00	8 - 10 years	£54.00
11 - 13 years	£64.00	11 - 13 years	£62.00
14 - 15 years	£66.00	14 - 15 years	£68.00
16+	£68.00	16+	£74.00