

Guidance around contribution to care for Children Looked After by DCC under S20

In 2024 it was agreed that DCC would recoup a contribution from parents towards their child's maintenance, where it is considered reasonable to do so to further promote their parental responsibility and active involvement in the care of their child. The amount recoverable is set at 50% of the lowest foster care rate for the child's age band, which is considered fair and retrievable. The amount will be adjusted each year to reflect changes in the foster care rate.

ROLES:

- Team Managers and Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring this [policy and the procedure](#) is adhered to and for reviewing the financial assessment and confirming the decision.
- Head of Service will finish the workflow and allocate the next financial review to the social worker (within 12 months). This review will be brought forward if the parents' financial situation changes during the review period.
- Head of Service has authority to apply discretion and waive charges in exceptional circumstances, e.g. cases of extreme hardship. Legal Services may be called on for advice.
- The child's Social Worker has the key role of undertaking required tasks associated with implementing the procedure and liaising with the parent/s. They are also responsible for carrying out any requested financial assessment within the mosaic workflow. ***In all circumstances where a child under 16 is to be accommodated under Section 20, the Social Worker must consider whether recouping contributions from parent/carer is required.*** If any of these apply, the Social Worker should record this on the child's record (uploading evidence if applicable).
- Business services are responsible for setting up the direct debit, raising an invoice and tracking payments. The letter to parents be sent from the Head of Service by business services.

WHO CAN BE ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE:

Each parent of a child under 16 years old is liable to contribute save for exemptions listed below. This is irrespective of their involvement in the child's life, therefore absent parents are also liable. All parents are expected to protect and maintain their children by providing a home. Legislation stipulates that parents who do not have parental responsibility are still required to ensure their child is financially supported. The contribution should be paid by monthly direct debit, the parents need to be asked to sign the direct debit mandate, at the point they are asked to sign the s.20 paperwork. They will be sent a monthly invoice in advance of each direct debit collection.

EXCEPTIONS

- When in receipt of income support, any element of child tax credit other than the family element of working tax credit, income-based job seekers allowance, or income related employment support allowance. Any of the elements of the incoming Universal Credit which replace these Income related benefits. ***Parents need to produce a copy of their current welfare benefit entitlement to evidence they are in receipt of these funds and the Social Worker should upload this to e-casefile for the child's record.***
- The child is subject to an Interim Care Order, Care Order, Emergency Protection Order or subject to Police Protection.
- The child is remanded into Local Authority foster care, or subject to a Youth Rehabilitation Order with an attached Residence Order (Child Arrangement Order).
- The child is detained under S38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, or under S92 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (sentencing) Act 2000
- The accommodation is provided as part of an aftercare service under section 117 of The Mental Health Act
- The child is placed with parents under S22(c) of the Children Act 1989
- Parents who have relinquished their child to be adopted will not be charged.

If parents are separated and one is exempt due to any of the reasons above, the other parent will still be subject to financial assessment.

Children with disabilities may need to be considered separately in terms of the cost and benefits as a number of these children are in short breaks in excess of 75 days which will reflect different costs and potentially different care arrangements. However, for those children whose parents are eligible under the above requirements they could be charged for a contribution to the costs of care, subject to any policy agreed.