

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIRECTORATE

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO HEREFORDSHIRE'S
FOSTER CARE
FEE PAYMENT
SCHEME**

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	PAGE 3
2.	TYPES OF PAYMENT	PAGE 3
3.	OUTLINE OF THE LEVELS	PAGE 4
4.	OVERVIEW OF THE REQUIREMENTS	PAGE 5
5.	PRINCIPLES OF THE SCHEME	PAGE 6
6.	PROGRESSION THROUGH THE SCHEME	PAGE 6
7.	DEMONSTRATING COMPETENCE	PAGE 7
8.	OTHER SIGNIFICANT FEATURES	PAGE 8

An Introduction to Herefordshire's Fee Payment Scheme for Foster Carers

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out some of the main features of the new fee paying scheme for foster carers in Herefordshire, which will be implemented from April 2009. It is intended to form the basis of consultation with foster carers and others who support and work with the fostering service in Herefordshire.
- 1.2 The basis of the scheme is that payments should be related to skills and competence evidenced by foster carers.
- 1.3 The scheme follows recommendations made by the Fostering Network, and is informed by detailed analysis of similar 'payment for skills' systems in a number of other local authorities across the country.
- 1.4 The scheme relates to the requirements of the new Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Standards for foster carers. The CWDC standards are expected to be incorporated into forthcoming revisions of the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care, and will therefore form the basis of future inspections by Ofsted.

2. Types of Payment.

- 2.1 There are two types of payments made to foster carers:
- Allowances: covering the cost of caring for a child;
 - Fees: paid in recognition of a foster carer's skills.
- 2.2 From April 2009 the allowances paid by Herefordshire have been in excess of the government's recommended minimum rates. The 2009-10 figures (subject to inflationary uplift) are set out below.

Age Range	New Allowance Rate
0-4	105
5-10	116
11-15	168
16-17	200

- 2.3 An additional age appropriate weekly allowance will be paid for the birthday of any child in placement when their birthday falls, and for Christmas or other annual religious festival.
- 2.4 Financial support for holidays and changes to clothing allowances are described in section eight of this paper.
- 2.5 Fee payment will be dependent upon progression through a series of levels as set out below.

3. Outline of the Levels of Payment.

There will be five main levels of payment for foster carers in Herefordshire:

- Foundation Level** for those carers who have been approved as foster carers but have not attended preparation group training. Generally speaking, only kinship carers are approved as foster carers without attendance at preparation groups.
- Level 1** for newly approved foster carers who have attended preparation group training.
- Level 2** for carers who have been on the scheme for at least twelve months.
- Level 3** for carers who have demonstrated specialisms required by the fostering service.
- ARC (Alternative to Residential Care) Fostering Project** In addition, Herefordshire is introducing a standalone specialist project for those foster carers able to care for individual young people who would otherwise require placement in a children's home.

Payment levels for each of these levels in 2009-10, subject to inflationary uplift, are set out below.

Level	Fee Payment
Foundation Level (for those carers who have not attended preparation group training)	Allowance only
Level 1	£100 pw + allowance
Level 2	£125 pw + allowance
Level 3	£175 pw + allowance
ARC Fostering Project	£450 pw + allowance

4. An Overview of the Requirements of Each Level of the Scheme

Full details of the requirements of each level are available upon request.

Fee Level	Broad Description of Entry Criteria
Foundation Level	Approved by agency decision maker following assessment and consideration by fostering panel.
1	<p>To achieve Level 1 Status both carers must have attended all preparation group training and have been approved through fostering panel process.</p> <p>To remain at level 1 both carers are expected to have completed three mandatory training courses: Diversity, Safeguarding and First Aid within the first year of their approval.</p> <p>To remain at level: Commitment by at least one approved foster carer in the household to attend at least four post-approval workshops within a twelve month period.</p> <p>Commitment to fulfil the Children's Workforce Development Council's (CWDC) standards for Foster Carers within twelve months of approval (national requirement).</p>
2	<p>Fulfilment of all Level 1 Requirements above for at least twelve months and approval as level 2 carer through the fostering panel process.</p> <p>Further commitment by at least one approved foster carer in the household to attend at least four post-approval workshops in each year.</p>
3	<p>Fulfilment of all Level 2 Requirements for at least twelve months and been approved as a Level 3 carer through the fostering panel process.</p> <p>Further commitment by at least one approved foster carer in the household to attend at least four post-approval workshops each year.</p> <p>At least one approved carer available full-time.</p>
ARC (Alternative to Residential Care) Fostering Project	Standalone scheme providing placements with no other children in the household. Evidence of significant experience of management of challenging behaviour, sexualised behaviour, youth justice, specialist assessments. Commitment to attend ongoing specialist training and to contribute to the development of the fostering service.

5. Principles of the Fee Payment Scheme

- The scheme is designed to be fair, open and robust, supporting the highest possible standards of foster care for Herefordshire's children.
- The scheme aims to provide a clear career pathway for foster carers, rewarding and supporting ongoing post-approval development and child-focussed foster care.
- One fee is paid for each child placed.
- Progression on the scheme is dependent upon ongoing evidence of competence. Although experience and attendance at post-approval workshops are important factors **they do not guarantee progression**. There is, for example, no automatic progression based upon experience alone.
- Regular attendance at posts-approval workshops is seen as an essential component of the scheme for two reasons: it promotes post-approval learning and development; and it provides opportunities for experienced foster carers to share experiences and knowledge with other carers. Consequently, although relevant training run by other organisations may be accepted by the Team Manager (Fostering) as "counting" towards workshop attendance in specifically agreed cases, the general expectation is that the workshops will be a significant source of post-approval training for Herefordshire's foster carers.
- The scheme is open to all foster carers approved by Herefordshire Council, including kinship carers and those offering long-term foster placements. Appropriate and flexible support will be provided to ensure all carers have the opportunity to demonstrate competence and skills.
- While it is hoped that the majority of foster carers will progress to at least Level 2 of the scheme, those who fail to meet the requirements of a specific level may be downgraded to a lower level. For example, if a Level 2 carer fails to attend post-approval workshops or fails to offer high quality foster care they may be downgraded through the foster care review process to Level 1. (NB As at present, more significant concerns may result in a recommendation to terminate approval as foster carers altogether).
- **There is no assumption that all foster carers will achieve Level 3 status.** Each year, the fostering service will determine how many Level 3 carers are required to meet service delivery requirements. If a carer fulfils the criteria for Level 3 they will only progress if there is a vacancy at that level. In effect, a waiting list will operate for progression to Level 3 if a vacancy does not exist.
- Foster Carers who, for personal reasons (such as bereavement or a significant change in family circumstances) need to take a break from fostering, will generally resume their fostering at the same level as the one they were on when they stopped fostering. For example, a level two foster carer who has to take a break from fostering for six months will generally resume at Level 2, not return to Level 1.

6. Progression Through the Scheme

- 6.1 Progression through the scheme is achieved through the foster care review process, the means established through regulation for assessing the quality of foster care provision. Herefordshire's Foster Care Review formats assist evidence gathering and support appropriate foster care progression through the scheme.
- 6.2 In order to ensure consistency and independent scrutiny, all decisions related to progression within the scheme are based upon a full foster care review considered by Herefordshire's Fostering Panel, not a home review.
- 6.3 All payments related to progression will be **backdated** to the previous April in any given year. So, for example, a foster carer review held in October 2010 may

review performance at Level 1 and recommend progression to Level 2. If agreed, appropriate Level 2 payments will be backdated to April 2010. This ensures that no foster carer will lose out because their foster care review happens to fall late in the financial year.

6.4 For those carers who have achieved Level 2 and who wish to progress to Level 3, an additional learning and development meeting with the Team Manager (Fostering) will need to be booked within six months of their foster care review. The purpose of this meeting is twofold. Firstly, it will consider whether the proposed specialisms are required by the fostering service currently. Secondly, it will agree a specific action plan outlining how the service will assist foster carers develop and evidence their specialism. This action plan will form the basis of the consideration of progression to Level 3 at the next foster care review.

7. Demonstrating Competence – Some Examples.

7.1 The fostering social worker will assist in the gathering of evidence, particularly for those foster carers unfamiliar with demonstrating their competence.

7.2 Evidence of competence to assist progression through the scheme can be drawn upon a combination of the following:

- Foster carer recording.
- Written evidence of completed tasks, e.g. foster carer's assessments, observations of contact sessions, descriptions and reflections upon specific placements.
- Evidence gathered through the foster care review process, e.g. comments or direct observations of children's social workers, other professionals.
- Evidence of supporting a broad range outcomes for children in care, e.g. engaging with teachers, supporting health professionals, supporting children to access therapy.
- Detailed observations by those who have run post-approval workshops.
- Evidence gathered for other assessment-based formats (e.g. NVQ Level 3 or AKAMAS, the online award in working with children and young people).

7.3 It is expected that all relevant evidence will be gathered into a portfolio by the foster carers, supported by the fostering social worker, for consideration by the Fostering Panel.

8. Other Significant New Features of the Fee Payment Scheme

8.1 Alongside a structured approach to fee payments, there are a number other significant changes to the financial arrangements for foster carers within the new scheme.

Transport.

- 8.2 Carers can claim **all** transport costs specifically related to their fostering. It is expected that, unless specifically agreed by the Fostering Service, carers will be responsible for the transport of children in placement. The transport costs of those outings which can be considered a part of ordinary family life – e.g. weekly food shopping or family trips – are included in the weekly fostering allowance and cannot therefore be claimed for.

Purchase of Cars.

- 8.3 Where it can be demonstrated that the size of a foster carer's car has been increased **as a direct result of taking on additional fostering tasks**, Herefordshire Council will consider financial support for vehicle purchase. Such payments will be discretionary and subject to the agreement of the Head of Service, Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children. Please note that the replacement of cars of a similar size will not be eligible for financial support.

Clothing Grants

- 8.4 Foster carers will be eligible to claim for ongoing support in relation to clothing children in their care.

Grant Type	Payment Level
Emergency Clothing Grant	Up to a maximum of £200 for each child in any one year.
0-4	£50 per quarter
5-10	£75 per quarter
11-15	£100 per quarter
16+	£125 per quarter

- 8.5 The emergency clothing grant is at the discretion of the Team Manager (Fostering), based upon evidence that a child's level of clothing is inadequate, either upon placement or as a result of a growth spurt, loss or damage during their time with the foster carer.

Holiday Payments

- 8.6 Foster carers are eligible to claim **up to two weeks** of the age appropriate fostering allowance to support taking a child on holiday with them. A further £200 per fostering household may also be payable at the discretion by the Service Manager (Safeguarding and Looked After Children) dependent upon consideration of the following factors:

- The specific needs of the child, e.g. safe caring considerations which may increase the accommodation requirements a foster carer has to consider when booking a holiday.
- The long-term care plans for the child in placement.

- 8.7 Please note that such additional payments should be agreed in advance with the Service Manager (Safeguarding and Looked After Children), prior to booking the holiday, rather than assumed as an entitlement.

Back-up Carers

- 8.8 The expectation documents attached to this document introduce the idea of 'back-up carers.' The idea, which has been drawn from other local authority fostering services, is that each carer should be able to identify carers from within their own network to support their fostering and minimise disruption for foster children.

Foster carers will need to demonstrate sufficient availability and support to provide stable and secure care for children, both during term time and in school holidays.