Section 17 Financial Support for Children in Need

**Scope**

This policy sets out the circumstances in which the provision of financial support is available to families whose children are assessed as being ‘in need’ in line with the definition contained within [Section 17](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/17) (S17) of the Children Act 1989.

To ensure S17 spending decisions are cost effective, while also addressing levels of need equitably across Northamptonshire, this policy provides a financial framework as a basis for resource allocation and explains the governance arrangements required for officers who may be required to make a call on these limited resources.

**Relevant Chapter**

[Families with No Recourse to Public Funds](https://northamptonshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_no_recourse_public.html)

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Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (S17) defines the duties of a local authority in safeguarding and promoting the general welfare of a child in need and her/his family within their area. Under S17, financial assistance in terms of goods, services or in exceptional circumstances cash can be provided to a child, parent or carer to address identified needs to safeguard and promote a child’s welfare, where there is no other legitimate source of financial assistance.

In order to appropriately and efficiently apply this responsibility; this policy outlines Northamptonshire County Council’s expectations regarding practice and spending decisions, and requires that all officers who may request financial support under S17 for a child and/or their family, to be fully aware of these expectations, and be able to record and justify any application for resources accordingly.

Although the relevant S17 Budget Managers are responsible for the financial planning, control and forecasting of S17 expenditure, it is also the responsibility of the officer making an application for S17 resources to comply with this policy, as well as the Council’s underpinning financial regulations and relevant Statement of Required Practice ([SORP 1 – Financial Performance and Management](https://staff-intranet.northamptonshire.gov.uk/operating-standards/Documents/Financial_PerformanceManagement_SORP.pdf)).

**Criteria for Financial Assistance under S17**

Any financial support and assistance that is provided under S17 must be additional to payments provided through the benefit system, and not an alternative to it.

Before giving any assistance or imposing any conditions, officers shall have regard to the means of the child concerned and of each of the child’s parents, therefore the services provided may include giving assistance in kind, goods or in exceptional circumstances cash form.

Assistance where possible should be subject to the repayment of the value of the goods or services received (in whole or in part). Officers would need to explain upon application if this was not possible.

The Criteria for S17 financial assistance are as follows:

* Payments under S17 can only be made where the Child and Family Assessment indicates that specific financial assistance is the most appropriate means of safeguarding or promoting a child's welfare within their family, and that all alternatives have been fully explored to assist in accessing and utilising the families existing resources to the best effect and support the family in becoming self-sustaining;
* S17 resource allocation will not exceed the S17 budget available for each team;
* At the point of request for financial support, there are no alternate sources of finance from the Benefits Agency, Housing Benefit, family or friend contributions, other agencies, charities;
* The request can only be made via completion of the [Form F1](http://ccl/sites/scs/NCC%20policies%20procedures%20and%20flowcharts/Form%20F1.docx) which must be submitted for approval, to the [Designated Manager](http://northamptonshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/pr_desg_man.html#section_17). An allocated social worker should be involved with the family at least for the duration of the payments being made;
* Wherever possible, payments will be made directly to the supplier or provider of services, not the parent/carer or person with parental responsibility.
* If financial assistance is identified as being required for more than a one-off/short term emergency assistance, this cannot be funded through S17 and must be assessed as part of an assessment or through the review of a child's plan. Evidence to be provided through a completed/ or updated Child and Family Assessment and Care Plan together with the outcome of the request being recorded on CareFirst as an ’Observation’ with the subject title of ‘C-Decision – Management’ together with the completed and approved [Form F1](http://ccl/sites/scs/NCC%20policies%20procedures%20and%20flowcharts/Form%20F1.docx) being added to CareStore for each child for whom the assistance is being provided.
* All financial assistance should be a one off payment. There may be exceptional circumstances where multiple payments are required; these are to be considered on a case by case basis and are subject to approval by the appropriate [Designated Manager](http://northamptonshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/pr_desg_man.html#section_17) or panel. If multiple payments are agreed, the period over which these will be provided must be clearly communicated by the responsible Practice/Team Manager to the person in receipt of the assistance and the reasons for this decision recorded on CareFirst.
* If theft is alleged, a crime number (URN – Unique Reference Number) must be provided and recorded in the application/request and the ‘Observation’ record for the support to be approved;

Examples of small payments permitted under S17. The list below is not exhaustive;

* Food – service users should be sign posted in the first instance to food banks, wherever possible food or vouchers should be provided instead of cash equivalents. Where cash is given the guideline is £10 per child per day (nothing for adults).
* Gas and electricity payment are only provided where exceptional circumstances prevail. e.g. where there is a vulnerable child or young person. The maximum should be £25 to cover immediate need.
* Furniture and essential household equipment – Charities must be approached for assistance, but where this is not possible, second hand items (that meet the appropriate health and safety standards) should be purchased to a maximum limit of £250 per family;
* Payment for essential travel will be based on the cost by public transport. The only exception is when public transport is completely unfeasible, or if travel will cost less by taxi;
* Baby equipment such as fireguards, stair gates, bottles and sterilising equipment can be provided to maintain children safely at home;
* Accommodation – **see** [**No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) procedure**](http://northamptonshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_no_recourse_public.html) **(see Section 2: Role of the Local Authority). Where NRPF is not applicable and pending a decision to a child’s Care Plan, in exception circumstances a contribution to accommodation costs can be supported through the S17 budget. A full and detailed Child and Family assessment is required in order to evidence need and support approval of expenditure. See Section 2: Approval of Financial Assistance under Section 17**
* Day Care, child minders or nursery payment is only provided in exceptional circumstances and agreed by the appropriate Service Manager;
* Stolen money can only be replaced up to a maximum of £10 if evidence can be provided that the police have been informed, for example the crime number (URN – Unique Reference Number);
* Skip hire and cleaning services that are part of a Child in Need (CIN) or Child Protection (CP) Plan
* To facilitate temporary private care arrangements e.g. when parent may be hospitalised. Only appropriate if it is evident that the viability and success of the arrangement is dependent on the financial assistance. The main financial responsibility for the arrangement lies with the child’s family. The parent should be expected to provide the person caring for the child with the child benefit received for that child. Any S17 payment should be based on actual cost;
* To enable a parent or guardian to attend a meeting where the safeguarding of a child in need is discussed;
* Assessments as part of the Public Law outline (PLO);
* Interpreting and translation services;
* After school activities that are part of a CIN or CP Plan:
* Short Breaks as identified through a completed Child and Family Assessment.

Types of payments not permitted under S17;

* Petty cash payments over the value of £10 per family. Payments above this level will be at the discretion of the Strategic Manager ;
* Families with disabled children assessed to require additional support or short break to enable them to safely care for their children may receive regular payments as part of the children’s plan. Parents have the right to request that personal care through a direct payment or personal budget. Separate guidance covers these types of payment – see the [Direct Payment procedure](https://northamptonshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_direct_payment.html).

1. **Approval of Financial Assistance under S17**

The need for the provision of support under S17 must be evidenced in the Child and Family Assessment for a child who is closed to the service at the point of referral. Arrangements for any ongoing financial assistance must be included in the Child in Need, Child Protection or the [**Childs Health and Care Plan**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/child_need_plan.html).

No commitments are permitted until the approval from the appropriate [Designated Manager or panel](http://www.proceduresonline.com/northamptonshire/childcare/user_controlled_lcms_area/uploaded_files/ListofAgencyDecisionMakersDesignatedManagersandNominatedOfficers.docx) has been obtained.