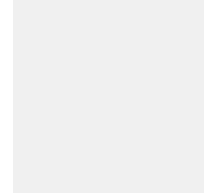


Payment for Skills and the Skills Level Criteria



AMENDMENT

In February 2017 **Section 10, Carers 'On Hold'** was added to this chapter.

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the skill level criteria and the foster carer fee payment scheme for all foster carers. The purpose of the fee payment scheme is to ensure that Walsall can recruit and retain high quality foster carers who can provide excellent care and who can provide stability, safety, security and where possible permanence for all children and young people in the care of Walsall Council. The expectation of all carers who receive the fee payment is that whilst in receipt of the fee, they are available to foster at all times.

2. Payment for Skills – Skill Level Criteria

Walsall Council is committed to ensuring that those who foster for Walsall are offered training and development opportunities which will support them in the challenging and rewarding task of caring for our Looked After children. All foster carers registered with Walsall Fostering Service will have access to the fee level scheme. Progression through this scheme will depend on the type of assessment that has been completed, evidence of the foster carers on-going commitment to training and development, the foster carers ability to care for a wide variety of children coming from diverse and complex backgrounds and the foster carers willingness to assist the service with on-going development which will include support to other carers and assistance with running training for foster carers and wider children's services.

3. Core Competencies for all Foster Carers

Skills

All Foster Carers must evidence competence in carrying out the tasks specified in the joint working protocol and in accordance with the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards at their approval stage in respect of:

1. Caring for children;
2. Providing a safe and caring environment;
3. Working as part of a team;
4. Own development.

Values

Carers should be able to interpret the underpinning values of the service and provide examples based on the hypothetical situations or reflection on experience to evidence this, in particular,

- a. That foster care is a partnership between the agency and the carers which should be extended to include parents, children and any significant persons when in the best interests of children;
- b. That the child's needs are paramount and that carers need to act in the child's best interests even when this conflicts with their own wishes and feelings;
- c. That 'difference' is to be recognised and valued, not judged in terms of inferiority or superiority;
- d. That everyone, children, their families, carers and professionals, have the right to be treated with dignity and respect irrespective of their personal beliefs and their chosen lifestyle;
- e. That individuals have the right to be guaranteed the same quality of service;

- f. That discrimination is recognised and actively challenged;
- g. That personal prejudice is recognised and efforts are made to eliminate it;
- h. That power is acknowledged and abuse of it is avoided.

Knowledge

Carers must be able to evidence basic background knowledge in respect of the main aspects pertinent to the fostering task, particularly in the following areas:

Child Protection: An understanding of the duties of the Local Authority's and the carers' role in respect of:

- Reporting suspicions / allegations of abuse;
- Supporting and cooperating with the investigation process;
- Supporting the child.

Legislation, policies and procedures: An understanding of the spirit and practice of relevance guidance and an ability to work in accordance with it.

Behaviour Management: Knowledge in the areas of child development and behaviour, on which basic strategies appropriate to individual children's behaviour management are formulated (with particular regard to the child's past experience and without recourse to physical punishment).

Any carer who is approved as a foster carer on this basis is eligible to enter the fee payment scheme on level 1.

4. Level 1

Level One – This level does not attract a professional fee; however, foster carers will receive the child's allowance and will be expected to work in accordance with the service to complete relevant training and to ensure their ongoing development is addressed.

There are some foster carers in Walsall who choose to foster without receiving a professional fee; these are usually foster carers who have been fostering for a considerable amount of time and who only wish to receive the child's allowance to enable them to provide for the needs of the child or children they are caring for. These carers will have been assessed using the Fostering Network tool (or alternative such as an F1 assessment) to evidence their ability to care for a broad range and variety of non-specified Looked after Children with diverse and complex needs. This will have been presented to a fostering panel for a recommendation and later agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.

There will also be some family and friend foster carers who have chosen not to take up the opportunity to fulfil the criteria to access the fee level scheme and in doing so have chosen to foster without receiving a professional fee.

In addition to the most appropriate assessment, Level one carers must also have:

1. Have a commitment to their on-going training and development;
2. Be willing to work with partners and be able to engage with and implement the child's care plan;
3. Received formal notice that they have been approved as foster carers from the agency decision maker, either following fostering panel or approval under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning and Placement Regulations; or
4. Received formal notice they have been approved as foster carers following a recommendation of the fostering panel and an approval of the agency decision maker of their suitability to foster. These foster carers will have either completed the 'home study' assessment; this will either be a CoramBAAF Connected Form C assessment which assesses the applicants capability to offer care to a specified child or young person who is already known to them or a Fostering Network assessment or equivalent which assesses the applicants capability to offer care to a broad and diverse range of Looked After children who are not known to the applicants;
5. Be able to provide accommodation and availability to care for at least one child;
6. Have signed the foster care agreement; and the joint working protocol;
7. Be willing to actively participate in supervision with their allocated worker;
8. Have a commitment to their on-going training and development;
9. Be willing to work with partners and be able to engage with and implement the child's care plan.

The following are additional criteria, which have to be satisfied for carers to operate at the specified skill levels. However, it should be noted that any carer can choose to operate on a level below their actual or assessed skills level, for whatever reason. This may be, because he or she may not wish to be paid a fee, or because he or she may not wish to undertake the tasks associated with a particular level, either on a temporary or permanent basis. The service will review all carers skill levels annually or more frequently where it becomes apparent the carer is not satisfying the criteria for that skill level.

5. Level 2

This is for Foster Carers who have been assessed and approved by the Local Authority using the Fostering Network assessment or equivalent tool to equip them to care for a broad range and variety of non-specified Looked after Children with diverse and complex needs. These carers will automatically be registered on level 2 as they must have completed the initial Skills to foster training which will equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to care for such a wide range of children.

It is likely that family and friend foster carers will only be foster carers for a relatively short period of time. In the vast majority of cases, the expectation is they will secure permanence for the child or young person they are caring for within a relatively short period of time via a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order, in accordance with the child's care plan. For those family and friend carers where the care plan is for the child to remain Looked After, often due to their complex needs and who wish to be registered on level 2 and receive the fee must complete the Skills to Foster training. This requires all applicants to attend all sessions. The Fostering Service will ensure that family and friend foster carers are supported to access this training locally within the geographical areas of the four Black Country authorities, (Walsall Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Dudley), or in the local authority where they live.

In order to maintain a level 2 skill level, all carers must:

1. Continue to have a looked after child placed in their care;
2. Achieve the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. Family and Friends foster carers are expected to meet these standards within 18 months of being approved;
3. Attend 4 induction workshops, two of these must be recording and supervision (ideally both carers but the service will accept one carer completing);
4. Attend at least five core training courses, three of these must be positive handling, child protection and first aid at work (ideally both carers but the service will accept one carer completing);
5. Complete a Personal Development Plan which will outline training, support and development needs. Each year this will be reviewed and the expectation is that carers undertaken agreed actions.

In order to remain at Level 2; all carers must provide evidence of their continued learning and their commitment to access training on offer. If a foster carer does not continue to meet the requirements of Level 2, then their case will be presented to Skill Level Board with a recommendation to reduce their skill level to level 1. This will require a change of approval status, which will be heard at the Fostering Panel and approved by the Decision Maker.

6. Level 3

In order to progress to Level 3 carers must have been assessed and approved as a foster carer using the Fostering Network assessment tool to equip them to care for a broad range and variety of non-specified Looked after Children with diverse and complex needs.

In addition to this they must also:

1. Have 18 months experience of fostering. Some foster carers will have substantial professional experience of working with difficult and challenging situations involving children. If carers have this experience, they may apply to progress to Level 3 within 12 months of their fostering career. This experience must be evidenced by references;

2. Both carers to have completed the TSD;
3. Have attend 4 induction workshops;
4. Have attended 5 core training courses.

Family and Friend foster carers can progress to level 3 following a period of further assessment to assess whether they are able to provide care to a diverse range of non specified Looked After children.

The process for progression to level 3 is as follows:

- At the first 12 month or annual foster carer review, the co-ordinator for foster carer reviews must have made a provisional recommendation for an application to level 3;
- The supervising social worker completes a supporting statement and makes a clear recommendation in relation to the carers wish to progress to level 3. The paperwork must include the carers' personal development plan which should evidence completion of the TSD standards and all training that the carers have attended;
- The supervising social worker must include in the report if there have been any allegations, complaints or concerns and the outcome of any investigations;
- The team manager and the co-ordinator for foster carers review agree the recommendation and agree the date from which the carers will progress to level 3;
- Progression to level 3 will only be possible once carers have submitted their portfolio of evidence as required by the TSD standards.

7. Level 4

Carers must:

1. Meet requirements of levels 1, 2 and 3;
2. Have 12 months experience of fostering at level 3 demonstrating competence or potential and willingness to work with children and families in the most complex and challenging circumstances. They must provide robust evidence of their experience to date of working with challenging and complex situations;
3. Have the willingness to work with young people, where little is known about their background, and to work with emerging information towards meeting the child's or young person's needs;
4. Provide - where necessary and appropriate - a high level of supervision and support for children;
5. Actively seek out training to meet their identified and agreed developmental needs;

6. Be able to take responsibility in a lead role - where appropriate - for the care plan provided to their child or young person in placement and to evidence their ability to work as part of a team in driving the care plan forward;
7. Provide availability to care for children or young people where it has been assessed that they require a level 4 carer;
8. Be willing where asked to support the fostering service to deliver training and or workshops to new carers;
9. Be willing to develop skills, abilities and expertise to undertake at least 2 of the following:
 - Caring for children with severe attachment difficulties;
 - Caring for children who exhibit complex behaviours that arise due to specific disabilities/syndromes, e.g. autism;
 - Caring for children and young people who have complex needs arising from medical or disability issues, which necessitate nursing level care;
 - Dealing with children and young people assessed as preventing severe management problems and/or disruption to family life, including as a result of sexual exploitation, persistent offending or sexualised behaviours which may present a risk to others;
 - Providing care for any other young people who would otherwise require a residential placement;
 - Become part of the fostering service training team to support other carers on a formal and structured basis, including visiting, recording, group work and to lead on group supervision sessions for new and existing carers on a chosen specialist area;
 - Participating in intensive therapeutic work.

The process for progression to level 4 is as follows:

- The co-ordinator for foster carer reviews must have made a provisional recommendation for an application to level 4 at the foster carers annual review;
- The foster carer must complete the application form for progression to level 4 and complete a portfolio of evidence to support their application;
- Once the foster carer has submitted this to the service, this must be sent to the Designated Manager for the Fostering Service within 5 working days to consider;
- The Designated Manager for the Fostering Service must make a decision within 10 working days of receiving the application;
- If the progression to level 4 is agreed a date will be agreed for commencement the new level.

8. Expectations in Terms of Ongoing Training at all Levels

All foster carers must be up to date with their training. All single carers to attend 3 foster carer training events a year (this would also include attendance and participation at a foster carer consultation event, a support group with a training component or the completion of online training courses which have been identified by the fostering service as relevant to ongoing continued professional development).

Completion of the 'Solihull Approach training' or equivalent therapeutic parenting course would count as 3 training sessions. Other training completed in a work or similar setting (e.g. safeguarding training in schools), would be accepted, but would need the prior approval of the team manager (foster carers would be expected to do at least one fostering training course a year).

Where a couple are fostering, the expectation would be that they complete 4 training sessions between them, of which each carer must complete at least 1.

9. Changes to Skill Levels

Carers must continually demonstrate that they are complying with the expectations of all skill levels. This will be monitored through the supervision process and considered at every foster carer review.

Reduction in skill levels may be achieved through the following processes:

- Mutual agreement /carer request – if a carer no longer wishes to operate on their agreed skill level or an agreement is reached between carer and the supervising social worker that their skill level should be reduced, this can be implemented immediately;
- As the result of a review recommendation – if the carer and supervising social worker disagree about the carers' skill level, a review should be arranged to consider this;
- At the review, if agreement can be reached between the co-ordinator for foster carer reviews, the supervising social worker and the foster carer, to retain or reduce the skill level, this will be auctioned immediately, effective from the date of the review. The review will be presented to the fostering panel in the usual way;
- In the event of the review not reaching agreement, a report detailing the reasons and evidence for this recommendation will be sent by the co-ordinator for foster carer reviews to the Designated Manager for the Fostering Service for consideration within 10 working days. The carers will be expected to make their own written representations and may wish to refer to the skill level criteria and the evidence they presented for their own progression. The supervising social worker should present an outline of why the requirements of the current skill level have not been fulfilled;
- The Designated Manager for the Fostering Service will make a decision within 5 working days of receiving the report following the review and the decision will be effective from that date i.e. the carer to remain on that skill level or reduction to a lower skill level;

- The Designated Manager for the Fostering Service will write to the carers advising them of their decision within 5 working days;
- There is no appeal against this decision. The carer may make a complaint that due process has not been followed and if the outcome of the complaint concludes that by not following due process an incorrect decision has been reached, then the Designated Manager for the Fostering Service will review their decision.

10. Carers 'On Hold'

There will be some situations where carers request to go on hold due to an urgent change in their personal circumstances, such as a family bereavement. In these situations, the carer will be asked how long they are likely to be on hold. If this is a period not exceeding two weeks, then the payment of the fee will continue during this two week period in recognition of the need to provide support to the foster carers. However, if the period of going on hold is likely to be longer, then the payment of the fee will stop until such time that the foster carer is once again able to take placements of Looked after Children. This is because the payment of the fee is upon the basis that the local Authority can place children at any time. Carers will be notified by letter in either circumstance.

There will be some situations where carers request to go on hold due to a planned event, such as attending a family event abroad or a request to take a break from fostering. In these situations, the payment of the fee will cease immediately until such a time that the foster carer is once again able to take placements of Looked after Children. This is because the payment of the fee is upon the basis that the local Authority can place children at any time. Carers will be notified by letter in either circumstance.

There will be other situations where the fostering service places a carer on hold such as when an allegation has been made about a carer or where a complaint has been received. In these situations, the carer will continue to receive the fee whilst a full investigation of the matter is undertaken. Carers will be notified of this by letter.

The payment of the ongoing fee is on the basis that foster carers will take placements of children at any time. The fostering service will make every attempt to match children according to a foster carers matching preferences or approval category. However, as the needs of the children requiring care and protection from the local authority is varied and often unpredictable, there is an expectation that foster carers are flexible in considering children that may not necessarily fit into their chosen age range, gender or number of children. In the event of a carer refusing to take a placement of a child and this refusal is judged by the fostering service as being unreasonable, discussion will take place with the foster carer as to why the refusal is unreasonable. It will be clearly explained to the foster carer that in the event of them refusing a further placement for unjustifiable reasons then their fostering fee will cease immediately. There will be an urgent meeting held with the foster carers to consider whether their approval category is correct and whether there are any gaps in their leaning and development. The fee will be reinstated once the fostering service is assured that a carer is able to once again willing and able to take placements.

11. Criteria for Children Placed as Part of a Short Term Break Scheme

Carers offering short term break placements will in addition to the usual progression criteria also have to evidence the following in order to successfully progress to Level 3 and Level 4.

LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
Child with a significant/substantial learning, physical and/or sensory disability	Child with multiple significant/substantial learning, physical and/or sensory disabilities
Child may also have one or more of following needs:	Child may also have two or more of the following needs:
Requires administration of limited medication	Requires administration of a regime of medication/clinical procedures
Requires supervision with all personal care needs e.g. toileting, eating	Requires total personal care needs e.g. feeding, dressing, bathing
	Minor non-compliance in care routine could result in serious consequences for the child
Requires care/supervision throughout the day	Requires care/supervision throughout day and night
	Requires support in using aids/adaptions/specialist equipment
Communicates via methods other than speech e.g. makaton, or may have limited speech	As level 3 but may use only emotional display of need or facial/body gestures
Requires high level of stimulation and close supervision during play	As level 3 but will also require use of specialist equipment, toys, games and may include input from specialist workers in this area
Exhibits challenging behaviours that cause management problems	Exhibits extreme challenging behaviours which may not be modified by behaviour programmes
Is vulnerable to abuse due to disability	As level 3 but due to possible lesser communication

and intimate care needs

options and more intimate care needs will be more vulnerable