**Foster Carer Retainer Policy**

Policy Development Officer

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# Introduction and Purpose

This policy aims to set out the stipulations and arrangements for retainer fees which will be made to Somerset County Council foster carers, connected person and kinship carers, in specific circumstances where it is deemed appropriate. Retainer fees are not applicable to specialist fostering services.

Retainer fees are temporary, weekly payments made to financially support foster carers during periods that they are unable to foster to the maximum capacity that they are approved for. This applies when a child or young person is matched with a carer, who has a greater fostering capacity. However, the child or young person’s circumstances require the Fostering Service to temporarily place any additional available bed/s on hold, in the best interest of the child needs.

Agreement to pay a retainer fee will always be time limited, and subject to review.

# Context

The National and Legal context of this policy is set out in the following legislation and guidance:

* Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 – Child-Focussed Standards
* Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
* Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended)
* Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers
* Somerset County Council’s Foster Carer’s Handbook and Foster Carer’s Agreement
* Somerset County Council’s Training Programme for Foster Carers.

# Scope of Policy

A retainer fee will be payable to foster carers when they have one or more vacant bed/s that need to be blocked or placed on hold for the following reasons:

1. When it is agreed that a child will move to a foster home, but the move is delayed due to ongoing operations issues (e.g. court proceedings/planned introductions).
2. Where a child in placement has complex needs, requires intensive support and supervision from the carer, and where it is unsuitable or inappropriate to place another child or young person in an additional, available bedroom in the foster carers home.
3. If a child has been with a foster carer for more than four months, and the plan is for reunification, Somerset County Council Fostering Service will pay a retainer for up to two weeks, if the carers are available for the child to return in the reunification period (as set out in the child’s plan), or they are available to take another child or young person during this period.
4. When a child or young person has been removed from placement, due to a standards of care concern, allegation or complaint, a retainer under this policy or the Managing Allegations Policy will be considered. Payment of this retainer fee will be dependent on the nature and circumstances of the concern, number of children removed and likely duration of the investigation.
5. Following a child moving after being in placement for 2 years or more, a retainer fee maybe considered for the carer, dependent on circumstances and complexities of the placement. Any such agreement to pay a retainer fee under this category will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
6. In specific cases, dependent on the circumstances and complexities of the placement, a retainer fee maybe considered at the discretion of the relevant manager. Authorisation of such retainer payment by the relevant manager will depend on the length of time payment is required. Please see Monitoring and Review section below for relevant manager.
7. Fee Structure

The retainer fee payment is £100 per week for all foster carers. The fee is paid weekly and is regardless of one or more Children/s places being placed on hold. No other fee will be paid at this time.

1. Monitoring and Review

If a Retainer Payment is considered necessary, the Supervising Social Worker must seek the approval of the relevant Practice Supervisor/Manager, depending on the length of time payment is necessary.

For Retainer payments up to 2 weeks, the agreement of the relevant Practice Supervisor or above, must be sought.

Retainer payments over 2 weeks and up to 3 months need to have approval from the relevant Team Manager, who has discretion to agree the length of time that a retainer payment can be made. The Team Manager will determine when a retainer payment review is needed. However, it is generally expected that this is every two weeks.

In specific and very complex cases, if the relevant Team Manager concludes that there is an ongoing need for a retainer fee to be paid for a period of more than 3 months, agreement will be sought from the Fostering Operations Manager.

The Supervising Social Worker will inform Somerset County Council Finance Team by completing the foster care payment form with dates and agreed review dates.

Decisions and agreements in respect of retainer payments, should always be recorded on the carer’s LCS record, by the appropriate supervising social worker, Team Manager and or Fostering Operations Manager.