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| Sheffield City CouncilFostering Service**Policy on Foster Carers** **Taking Time Off**April 2023 |  |

## Paid Holiday

In Sheffield City Council we are proud that our foster carers act as good parents and whenever possible take children in their care on holidays with them to give them opportunities, fun and new experiences as they would do with their own children. However, there are circumstances when this is not possible, and because of this, foster carers with a child placed with them can access up to 14 nights ‘paid’ holiday per year (from 1st April to 31st March) when they have time off without the child(ren) in their care.

Before taking their paid holiday, foster carers can choose to do one of the following:

1. Propose that in their absence the child placed with them is cared for by their own family/support network (e.g. carer’s parents, aunt) which can take place in the family/support network’s house or the main carer’s own house. In this case, the main carer will be paid 'Family Support Care Payment' pro rata (which is given to fund this arrangement) plus their usual 'Weekly Skill Level Fee'. The foster carer will not be paid their 'Weekly Fostering Allowance'.
2. Request that in their absence an alternative foster carer identified by the Fostering Service looks after the child (i.e. the alternative foster carer will be providing ‘holiday care’). In this case, the main carer will be paid their usual 'Weekly Skill Level Fee' but not their 'Weekly Fostering Allowance' as this will be paid to the carer providing holiday care for the child.

Any such arrangements need to be agreed upon by the fostering social worker and the child’s social worker in advance of the carer’s paid holiday to ensure that it is in the child’s best interest. Foster carers are encouraged to submit their paid holiday request preferably in writing, clearly outlining the date and time of the beginning and end of their time off. This will enable the Fostering Service to arrange an alternative foster carer.

Any paid holiday needs to be planned via the fostering social worker with as much notice as possible to ensure that there is enough time to identify a suitable alternative carer, plan the alternative care arrangements and arrange introductions. **The minimum notice for requesting paid holiday is 8 weeks**, however, foster carers are expected to notify their fostering social worker as soon as they start planning to take it. While we will try our best to arrange alternative care arrangements for the child when less than 8-week notice is given, we cannot guarantee that they will be arranged. We ask that carers do not pay for their holiday arrangements before the Fostering Service confirms that an alternative carer has been identified.

The Fostering Service advises carers not to take holidays during significant times, such as the child's birthday, Christmas, school exams/SATs, transition periods and important contact periods. Children must not be taken on holiday during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances that would be approved by Social Care and the Head of School.

Foster carers can find the current Allowance/payments rates in the ‘Fostering Rates/Payments’ document uploaded to the [Fostering Service handbook](http://www.fosteringhandbook.com/sheffield/local_resources.html) located at [www.fosteringhandbook.com/sheffield/local\_resources.html](http://www.fosteringhandbook.com/sheffield/local_resources.html) under the 'Finances & Money' heading, or they can ask their fostering social worker to provide them with this information.

## Additional Paid Support: Support Care Arrangements

In some circumstances, additional support to foster carers is arranged through ‘support care’ (sometimes referred to by carers as respite care) as part of the child’s care plan. Support care is provided by another foster carer and the frequency of support care is agreed on a case-by-case basis. It is usually offered for 1 weekend every four or six weeks. Other more flexible arrangements can be discussed.

Support care may be agreed for a number of reasons, for example:

* To enable carers of foster children with severe disabilities and/or complex health needs to have a break from the demands of their caring role;
* To support carers to recover from illness or provide them with time to deal with their own family emergency or other crisis;
* To maintain the placement’s stability.

There may be occasions when the support is requested by the carers themselves. There may also be occasions when the Fostering Service advocates for this support and it might be against the carer’s wishes but the Fostering Service believes that it would best support the carers, their family and the child(ren) in their care.

Any support care needs to be agreed by the Fostering Service and the child’s social worker who will work with carers to agree a specific support plan. Any ongoing support care arrangements will be reviewed at least six monthly.

Support care is provided in addition to paid holiday. During any arranged support care, the main foster carers will continue to receive their usual 'Weekly Skill Level Fee' and 'Weekly Fostering Allowance', meaning no deduction will be made from their salary.

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## Unpaid Time Off

In exceptional circumstances foster carers can take additional time off above the 14 nights whilst a child is placed with them but this will be unpaid and must be agreed by the fostering social worker. Again, **the minimum notice for requesting unpaid leave is 8 weeks**, however, foster carers are expected to notify their fostering social worker as soon as they start planning to take it. As in other circumstances, the child’s needs will be taken into account when agreeing any requests for them to be cared for outside of the main fostering household.

The foster carer will not receive their usual 'Weekly Skill Level Fee' or 'Weekly Fostering Allowance' but when it is agreed that the child placed with them is cared for by the carer’s own family/support network, the main carer will be paid 'Family Support Care Payment' pro rata to fund this provision.

## Foster Care Leave through a Carer’s Normal Employer

Some employers offer foster carers paid or unpaid time off to care for newly placed foster children or attend training, meetings and appointments relating to their fostering role. As such, we encourage foster carers to check with their employer whether they are entitled to any time off to support their role as a foster carer. Being paid for “Foster Care Leave” by an employer does not affect payments from The Fostering Service to the foster carer.

Sheffield City Council offers its employees an additional five days of paid leave per year (pro-rated for part-time workers) to undertake training, panel meetings, and other ad hoc requirements associated with providing foster care.

## Foster Carers Taking a Short Break from their Fostering Role, i.e. being 'On Hold'

Foster carers may decide that they would like a period of time when they do not foster any children and request to go 'on hold'. In some circumstances, it may be the Fostering Service which ask the foster carer to go on hold. Going on hold means that the foster carer is removed from the vacancy list and will not be contacted about any placements/holiday and support care for the agreed time.

There may be various reasons where a foster carer can be put 'on hold' including:

* When a child’s placement ends;
* Following an adoption, being granted a Special Guardianship Order or offering a Staying Put placement;
* A bereavement or a serious illness within the family;
* An extended break from the fostering role following a difficult placement breakdown;
* A change in family circumstances such as moving a house or a relationship breakdown.

A foster carer can be put 'on hold' for no longer than 12 months. Any longer period of being 'on hold' will be considered during supervisory visits and at the carer's next Annual Review which may be arranged at an earlier date than it was originally due – the Fostering Service will have a discussion with the foster carer about alternatives such as resignation or re-approval for a different category.

Foster carers 'on hold' will still be visited at a minimum of every 3 months to recognise that they are still registered foster carers, ensure it is still appropriate for them to be 'on hold' and offer any fostering related support. Foster carers 'on hold' will still be required to fulfill the mandatory training requirements, attend support groups, undertake any standard checks (such as a medical check, DBS check, health and safety check) and undergo the annual review process.

Foster carers are expected to inform the Fostering Service about their availability to be put back on the vacancy list. It is, however, the responsibility of the supervising social worker to get an update from the foster carers as they are nearing the end of the originally agreed on hold period.

Before the Fostering Service makes a decision whether to place the carer back on the vacancy list, the fostering social worker will get an update on the carer’s circumstances; this will include the following:

* Are there any significant changes in the foster carer’s circumstances (such as carers’ separation, a new partner joining a fostering household) which would require an assessment/piece of work to determine whether the terms of approval are still appropriate?
* Does the foster carer need any additional support?
* Is the foster carer up-to-date with any new procedures or processes that have been put in place while they were ‘on hold’?
* What skill level are they returning on? If the foster carer no longer meets the criteria for their last skill level (e.g. due to them not attending the mandatory training), then consideration may be given, in discussion with the foster carer, that they return to fostering on a lower skill level.

When the carer is put on hold or their on hold period ends, the fostering social worker will record this in the carer’s case summary as well as under the 'Availability Restrictions' (under ‘Carer’s taking a break/holiday’ heading) on the carer’s LCS records and notify the Placement Team.

This policy was agreed and signed off by: Anne-Marie Banks (Service Manager)

Date: 03/04/2023