

**Financial Support Policy
for
Special Guardianship Order / Child Arrangement Order /
Adoption Order**



Financial support is intended to supplement existing means of support available to Adoptive parents, Special Guardians, and Child Arrangement holders (hereto referred to as recipients) and the child or children being cared for.

Where carers become legal guardians and obtain parental responsibility for a child through Adoption / SGO / Child Arrangements Order there will also be an expectation that they recognise this change in responsibility at the time of commitment to the plan. The decision to move from caring for a child on behalf of the local authority to being a primary 'parent' to the child also involves becoming financially independent from the Council.

Prior to any consideration for financial support carers will be expected to and supported to explore their eligibility for benefits, for example child benefit, disability living allowances in the case of children with complex needs, or carers allowance. In addition, any support available via the Adoption (and SGO) support fund can be explored.

Financial support from the council will be considered when all other ways of being financially independent have been explored and adopted. Life circumstances change as do the needs of children and therefore any initial agreement for financial support will be temporary and reviewed regularly within specific timescales.

1. Criteria

The circumstances in which provision of financial support may be paid are as follows, based on an assessment of need:

- a. Where the multi-agency assessment of the child highlights the child needs special care which requires a greater expenditure of resources by reason of illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the continuing consequences of neglect - and the child's condition is serious and long-term. Any financial need above the entitlement to DLA or carers allowance would need to be agreed by the responsible Service Director and or the DCS.
- b. Where it is necessary for the local authority to make any special arrangements to facilitate the placement by reason of the age or ethnic origin of the child or the desirability of the child being placed with siblings or a child with whom he/she has previously shared a home.
- c. Where such support is to meet the recurring costs of travel for visits for the child to members of the birth family/significant others. Also subject to regular review based on any change of circumstances.
- d. Where the local authority considers it appropriate to contribute towards expenditure on legal costs, including court fees (in cases where the placement is supported by the local authority), or expenses associated with the child's introduction to recipients or expenditure on accommodating the child (e.g., adaptations to the home, furniture, clothing, or transport).

2. Types of Payment

Payment to recipients may be made in the following ways:

- Regular payments - calculated as agreed and reviewed by the local authority.
- Lump sum payments (settling in costs, special needs, and adaptations), which will cover items or adaptations that are required because of assessed individual needs. This does not include OT assessed required equipment.

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- Payment may be in instalments and will end at a time specified by the local authority.
- Payments in special circumstances (for example, a child with additional needs or where foster carers adopt a child for whom they are already caring or where adopters incur legal expenses in contested cases). Payment may be in instalments and may end at a time specified by the local authority.

Financial support doesn't include the "reward" (fee level) element which may be payable to foster carers, and neither will payments be made to provide an income.

The financial support will not increase in line with changes to the local authority in-house foster carer service fees and allowances. It will not include mileage, birthday, celebration, or holiday allowances but the recipient will be eligible for child benefit and may be able to access other allowances / benefits.

3. Assessment for Financial Support

Financial support will be determined by an assessment of their means. This will take account of the recipient's income and resources (excluding their home), reasonable outgoings and commitments, and the financial needs and resources of the child. (N.B. Support provided under Section 1.e to assist with legal costs or expenses associated with the child's introduction to the placement will not be subject to an assessment of means).

As part of this assessment, the recipients should be asked to complete a Financial Assessment Form and the completed form should be forwarded to the Finance Department. The responsible Service Director will decide the level of support to be included in the draft Adoption Support Plan, having regard to this assessment, and obtain budgetary approval from the DCS as necessary depending on the amount.

In relation to proposed financial support for a new placement, the Support Plan and all other relevant documentation including the financial assessment will be submitted to the Service Director for authorisation.

The recipients will receive a letter from the child's lead professional confirming the financial assessment agreed by the Service Director and or the DCS. This will include the amount and terms of the financial support and information about annual financial reviews.

4. Terms and Conditions

If it is decided that financial support should be given to recipients, payment may be subject to conditions and a date specified by which the condition is to be met. Prior to making financial support available to prospective recipients, they will be required to inform the finance team:

- a. Of changes to their home address.
- b. Change of bank details.
- c. If the child (for any reason) no longer lives with them.
- d. If there are any changes to their financial situation / the needs of the child.

Should recipients fail to comply with the requirements, the local authority may suspend payment of the financial support provided.

**Financial Support Policy
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Special Guardianship Order / Child Arrangement Order /
Adoption Order**



5. Annual Review of Financial Support

Recipients must also agree to complete and supply the local authority with an annual statement of their circumstances for the financial annual review.

The recipients should specify the following in the statement:

- a. Their financial circumstances.
- b. The financial needs of the child or children.
- c. Their home address and whether the child or children live at home with them.
- d. If there have been any changes to their own or the child/children's circumstances.

There will be an annual review of the financial support, considering the information provided. Any proposed variation or termination of the financial support must be notified to the recipients concerned and dealt with by the Finance Team. Any decision to vary or terminate should also consider whether it is appropriate to seek to recover all or any of the financial support already paid.

Should recipients fail to supply an annual statement, the local authority must send a reminder and give 28 days to comply. If they fail to comply, the local authority will suspend payment of the financial support provided.

6. Remuneration for former foster parents

Where the recipient previously fostered the child, and they received remuneration in the financial support paid to them as the child's foster parent, the local authority may continue to pay remuneration for a transitional period of two years from the date of the order. The decision to include remuneration must have been taken before the making of the order and agreed by the SM or the DCS. This would not normally apply to foster carers who are fostering to adopt.

7. Ending of financial support

Financial support will not be paid in all cases under the following circumstances:

- When a child reaches age 18
- Where a child ceases full-time education or training and commences employment.
- Where a child qualifies for benefits in his/her own right.
- Where circumstances have changed significantly, and the criteria are no longer met.
- If a child leaves the family home and this is regarded as a permanent departure.
- The child dies.

Temporary absences from placement do not apply to para 7 above, for example when a child is in boarding school, hospital, and respite care.