

# Enfield Council’s Loft Conversion and Home Extension Policy for Foster Carers 2021-30

## Document Control

<b>Scope</b>	<p>This policy sets out a framework to support the effective implementation of the discretionary “Additional Bedroom Grant”, under the Loft Conversion and Home Extension Scheme for foster carers. This is a 9-year scheme and the Grant is applicable to foster carers who meet the Grant Eligibility Criteria set out in this policy.</p> <p>The Additional Bedroom Grant supports a limited number of foster carers each year, to increase the number of bedrooms in their homes, in order to provide an additional placement to a looked after child or young person in Enfield. In turn, the Council will reduce the need, wherever possible, to approach costly independent fostering agencies.</p> <p>The Additional Bedroom Grant is open for application from all foster carers who meet the Grant Eligibility Criteria and additional placement suitability. However annual funding for this scheme is finite, and therefore, only a limited number of foster carers can be awarded the grant each year.</p> <p>The grant is subject to a series of conditions set out in this policy and accompanying legal agreements, and award will be overseen by a newly established Additional Bedroom Grant Panel.</p>
<b>Approved by</b>	<b>CIlr Mahtab Uddin, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Protection</b>
<b>Date of Decision</b>	Wednesday 29 <sup>th</sup> September 2021
<b>Document Author</b>	Corporate Strategy Service
<b>Review</b>	This policy will be periodically reviewed and, when necessary, updated to respond to local and national change.

## **Introduction**

Enfield Council is committed to delivering a lifetime of opportunity to everyone in the borough, and we constantly strive to enhance the support that our looked after children and young people receive, to promote their welfare and increase the opportunities available to them. While we do everything that we can to support families to care for their children within their own family networks, sometimes this is not possible, and children and young people need to become looked after. As a Corporate Parent, we have a duty to provide our looked after children and young people with good quality foster placements, where their overall needs will be met.

This policy outlines how Enfield Council will implement its Loft Conversion and Home Extension Scheme for foster carers, through the award of a discretionary “Additional Bedroom Grant”. The purpose of this grant is to increase the number of placement opportunities in the homes of our existing foster families, through the creation of additional bedrooms.

With the introduction of this scheme and policy, Enfield Council’s foster carers can support more children and young people to live and thrive within their care, and we can more effectively deliver the essential service of protecting and supporting vulnerable children and young people within Enfield. The Loft Conversion and Home Extension Scheme for foster carers is another step forward in supporting safe, healthy and confident communities throughout the borough.

## **What is the Additional Bedroom Grant?**

The Additional Bedroom Grant supports a limited number of foster carers each year, to extend the number of bedrooms in their homes, in order to provide an additional placement(s) to looked after children or young people in Enfield. In turn, the Council will reduce the need, wherever possible, to approach costly independent fostering agencies.

The Additional Bedroom Grant is open for application from all foster carers who meet the Grant Eligibility Criteria. However annual funding for this scheme is finite, and therefore, only a limited number of foster carers can be awarded the grant each year. If a foster carer’s application is unsuccessful, the Council welcome their re-application over the course of the 9-year scheme, providing they still meet the Grant Eligibility Criteria and additional placement suitability.

The award of the grant is overseen by the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel. The Panel will make their decision based on a fair and transparent assessment that places the needs of our looked after children and young people at its heart. If a foster carer is awarded the grant, this will be subject to the conditions set out in this policy and the accompanying legal agreements.

## Who is this policy for?

This policy is for foster carers approved by the London Borough of Enfield, who would like to provide another fostering placement, but require an additional bedroom to be built at their property, to enable them to do so. To be eligible to apply for the Additional Bedroom Grant, all conditions must be met within the criteria below.

### Grant Eligibility Criteria

#### Foster carers must:

1. Be approved as a foster carer by Enfield Council;
2. Have at least 1-year of post approval experience caring for an Enfield looked after child or young person with no safeguarding or standard of care issues;
3. Remain a foster carer approved by Enfield, for a minimum of 5 years, from the start date of the additional placement made possible by the grant;
4. Be consistently available to accept and provide an additional ongoing placement within their family, for at least 5 years from the start date of the additional placement, made possible by an Additional Bedroom Grant.
5. Be owner-occupiers of the property they live in and have consent from all Title Holders of the property to apply for Additional Bedroom Grant.

#### The Additional Bedroom Grant is not suitable for:

- Foster carers living in private sector rented accommodation or a home where they are not the owner-occupiers.
- Foster carers wishing to provide sharing siblings (already living with the Foster carer) with a bedroom each. The Additional Bedroom Grant is strictly to meet the needs of an additional placement for a child or young person who is looked after in Enfield.
- Foster carers that do not intend to remain approved by the London Borough of Enfield for at least 5 years, from the start date of the additional placement, made possible by an Additional Bedroom Grant.
- Foster carers that will not be consistently available to accept and provide an additional ongoing placement within their family, for at least 5 years from the start date of the additional placement, made possible by an Additional Bedroom Grant.
- Foster carers that already have 3 bedrooms available in their homes for placements. The Loft Conversion and Home Extension Scheme for foster carers operates in accordance with the usual fostering limit, set under [Schedule 7 of the Children Act 1989](#).

## **Enfield Council's Loft Conversion and Extension process for foster carers**

### **Pre-application**

Once a year, the Council will invite foster carers to submit an “expression of interest” form, to let the Council know they are interested in the opportunity to apply for an Additional Bedroom Grant, under the Loft Conversion and Extension Scheme for foster carers.

Before submitting an expression of interest, foster carers must meet with their Supervising Social Worker to discuss the Grant Eligibility Criteria and their suitability to take on an additional placement(s). An expression of interest can be submitted by any foster carer who meets the Grant Eligibility Criteria. The completed form should be submitted by the foster carer via email/ post to their Supervising Social Worker by the deadline provided.

Once the Supervising Social Worker is satisfied a foster carer has met the Grant Eligibility Criteria and suitability, they will notify the Fostering Service Manager. The Fostering Service Manager must ensure the Grant Eligibility Criteria is met and will decide on the foster carer's suitability to take on an additional placement, in accordance with the Change of Approval Process. If satisfied, the foster carer will be invited to make a formal grant application under the Loft Conversion and Extension Scheme for foster carers.

### **Application**

A copy of the application form will be sent to foster carers by their Supervising Social Worker, once they have successfully completed the pre-application stage. If foster carers require a copy of the application form in an alternative format, they should inform their Supervising Social Worker.

Only Additional Bedroom Grant Applications submitted through the formal Application Process and by the deadline, will be considered.

At the time of application, foster carers will be informed by Enfield Council, of any information or evidence that they must submit in support of their application.

### **Applications are considered by the Fostering Service**

Applications and supporting information submitted by the deadline, will firstly be considered and by a team of three Officers from Enfield Council's Fostering Service. The Fostering Service will consider the applications based on a fair, appropriate and transparent evaluation and scoring process, taking into consideration:

- The Eligibility Criteria;
- A foster carer's suitability to take on an additional placement;
- The needs of looked after children and young people at that time;
- The placement priorities of the Fostering Service.

The 7 highest scoring applications will be recommended to the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel for their consideration. In some instances, the Fostering Service may decide to recommend less than 7 applications to the Panel. This decision is at the discretion of the Fostering Service and may be based on the scheme's Eligibility Criteria; a foster carer's suitability to take on an additional placement; the needs of looked after children and young people at that time; and the placement priorities of the Fostering Service.

**Officers responsible for considering applications:**

- Fostering Service Manager
- Fostering Team Manager
- A Supervising Social Worker

Due to the availability of Officers and service demands, this list may be subject to change.

**Recommended applications are considered by the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel**

Following this step, the Fostering Service Manager will convene the first meeting of the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel. The Panel will review the applications and scores, to decide a shortlist of up to 4 foster carers. This decision is at the discretion of the Panel and will be based on a fair, appropriate and transparent evaluation and scoring process, taking into consideration:

- The scores awarded by the Fostering Service and their recommendations, in relation to placement priorities at that time and additional placement suitability;
- The Grant Eligibility Criteria, application and supporting information.

Foster carers will be kept up to date on the progress of their application and will be notified of decisions within **14 business days** of the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel meeting.

**Enfield Council Members of the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel:**

- Head of Services for Looked After Children and Vulnerable Young People (**Chair**) (Voting Member)
- Fostering Service Manager (Voting Member)

- Accessible Housing and Adaptation Manager (Accessible Housing and Adaptations Team) (Voting Member)
- Fostering Team Manager (Advisory Member)

### **Shortlisted applications are referred for a Feasibility Assessment**

If a foster carer's application for an Additional Bedroom Grant is shortlisted, Enfield Council will arrange for a qualified professional(s) to carry out a Feasibility Assessment at the foster carer's home. The purpose of the visit is to: assess the feasibility of gaining an additional bedroom at the property; what options might exist; and to provide a provisional estimate of costs based on initial drawings. Where appropriate, a Council appointed professional will seek planning pre-application advice on behalf of the foster carer.

If a foster carer's application advances to the Feasibility Assessment stage, this does not guarantee that they will be awarded the Additional Bedroom Grant, this decision remains at the discretion of the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel.

### **Next steps following the Feasibly Assessment**

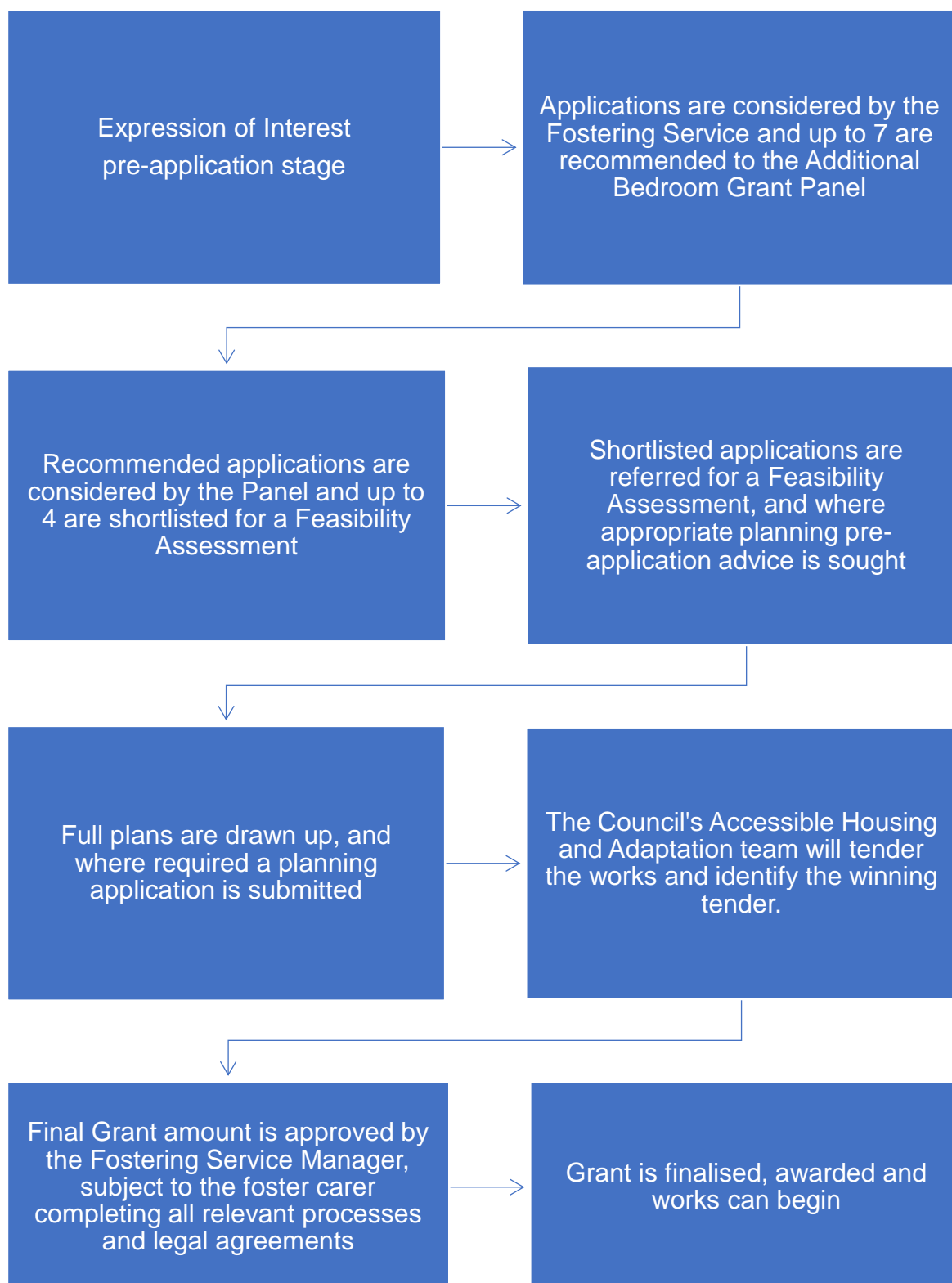
The Fostering Service Manager will convene the second meeting the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel, to review the findings and recommendations of the Feasibility Assessment. In complex cases, the Panel may invite advisory members to join the Panel from other relevant services in the Councils. If required, it is at the discretion of the Panel to revisit the applications recommended by the Fostering Service, to seek further Feasibility Assessments.

Following a satisfactory Feasibility Assessment, the Council will arrange for the full plans to be drawn up. The Council will work closely with foster carers during this process.

Where required, a planning application will also be submitted on behalf of the foster carer. Planning applications submitted on behalf of the those participating in the Loft Conversion and Home Extension Scheme for foster carers, will not receive guaranteed or fast track planning permission. As with a range of home improvements, works proposed and carried out under this scheme, will be subject to the London Borough of [Enfield's planning application processes](#) and building regulations.

Once the necessary permissions are in place, the Council's Accessible Housing and Adaptation Team will tender the works.

**An overview of the Additional Bedroom Grant award process:**



## Grant Funding

### Award of the Grant

A grant will only be awarded once a foster carer has successfully advanced through all stages of the application process and all relevant checks and legal agreements have been completed. The Council will release the funds directly to the contractors and other professionals at the necessary stages.

The grant will only cover the cost of “eligible works”. These are works agreed by the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel under the recommended scheme. Works and associated fees, which exceed the cost and scope of those agreed under the recommended scheme are known as “non-eligible” works. The Council will always look for the best value for money scheme, which meets the needs for their looked after children and young people.

#### The grant will include the agreed costs of:

- A standardised loft conversion, home extension, or adaptation (such as a partition wall) that results in one additional bedroom for the property, including build and labour;
- Standardised fixtures and fittings, decoration and soft furnishings to an amount set by the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel;
- Fees associated with the Feasibility Assessment;
- Fees associated with extension/ property design work; drawings and supporting information; Certificate of Lawful Development; Planning Application fees; Building Regulations; structural calculations; Thames Water cross over; schedule of works; and other relevant professional fees deemed necessary by the Council.
- An internal grant management fee of 10% of the total cost of the works per scheme (for services carried out by Enfield Council’s Accessible Housing and Adaptation team);
- The cost of Enfield Council’s Planning Pre-application Advice Service, and subsequent design changes/ additional supporting information in response to planning officer feedback.
- The cost of independent legal advice (up to a total of £300+VAT).

#### The grant will not cover the cost of:

- Additional, upgraded or bespoke design and building works, fixtures and fittings, decoration or furnishings that exceed the cost and scope of the recommended scheme agreed by the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel;



- Works in other areas of the foster carers home that are unrelated to the recommended scheme;
- An additional bathroom for the property, unless the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel is advised by the Supervising Social Worker that a bathroom is necessary to ensure the needs of the child or young person are appropriately supported;
- Further additional bedrooms (beyond the one standard bedroom). This would only be considered by the Additional Bedroom Panel under circumstances where a foster carer is willing and suitable to take on a further placement(s). The usual fostering limit, cost and property suitability would still need to be assessed as part of any decision by the Panel;
- Professional fees associated with non-eligible works;
- Appeal of planning decision, if permission is refused.

### **Upgrading the scheme (non-eligible works)**

If the foster carer would like to upgrade any elements of the additional bedroom scheme they must do so at their own expense. In this instance, the foster carer must notify and seek approval from the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel in writing, before the legal agreements are finalised. The foster carers will be asked by the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel to submit evidence to show that they have enough funds to cover the cost of the upgraded (non-eligible) works in full.

If the upgraded (non-eligible) works are approved by the Additional Bedroom Grant Panel, the contractor tendered to deliver the work, will be asked to itemise the cost of the upgraded (non-eligible) works as part of their quotation. The foster carer will be required to pay the total cost for upgraded (non-eligible) works into a Council holding account before the works start. Depending on the nature of the upgraded (non-eligible) works, foster carers may also be asked to pay a refundable contingency sum.

### **The role of the Council in the scheme**

Enfield Council's Accessible Housing and Adaptations Team are responsible for internal project management and delivery of the Additional Bedroom Grant, on behalf of the Enfield's Fostering Service. Full contact details for the Accessible Housing and Adaptations Team and the Council's responsibilities can be found in the Grant Agreement.

The Council's responsibilities include:

- Commissioning professionals and contractors to deliver all stages of the works in full, in compliance with the Council's [Contract Procedure Rules \(CPRs\)](#), financial regulations and relevant Council policies.
- Identifying the tender(s) providing the best value for money, ensuring works are delivered within the agreed budget and specification.

- Working with the foster carer to ensure they are kept up to date and are included in decision making (where appropriate).
- Ensuring all invoices and payments are appropriately managed.

### Grant conditions and repayment

A legal charge will be placed on the foster carer’s property, commencing at the point the grant is awarded and to the total amount awarded. At the end of the 5-year commitment period the Council can remove the legal charge from the property at the request of the foster carer.

Foster carers are required to repay the Additional Bedroom Grant in full or in part, if they are deregistered or are no longer able to provide the ongoing additional placement within their family, for 5 years. The expectation is that the foster carer is consistently available to accept and provide the ongoing additional placement for a period of 5 years. The 5-year commitment to providing the additional placement, will commence on the first day of the placement made possible by the Additional Bedroom Grant. Deregistration occurs when a foster carer resigns, or the Fostering Service decides they are no longer suitable to foster. This decision will be made via a Fostering Panel and ADM process or an internal ADM process by the Fostering Service Manager.

If the foster carer withdraws at any point from the award of the grant and within 1 year from the start of the additional placement, they are required to repay 100% of the funds.

Timeframe	Repayment Percentage of total grant awarded
Award of Grant and within 1 year from the start of the additional placement	100% repayable
Within 2 years	80% repayable
Within 3 years	60% repayable
Within 4 years	40% repayable
Within 5 years	20% repayable
<b>There are no obligations for repayments after the 5-year commitment is met and the legal charge can be removed at the foster carers request</b>	

Where repayment is required, a repayment plan will be agreed between the foster carer and Enfield Council, with the option to repay in instalments within the specified timeframes below:

Circumstance	Repayment
The property is sold, and the foster carer continues to provide the additional placement in their new home (for at least	No repayment required

5 years from the start date of the additional placement, made possible by an Additional Bedroom Grant).	
The property is sold, and the foster carer is no longer able to commit to providing an additional placement (for at least 5 years from the start date of the additional placement, made possible by an Additional Bedroom Grant).	Repayment required. Option to repay in 2 instalments within 3 months of the property sale.
A foster carer is deregistered or is no longer able to provide an additional ongoing placement within their family (for at least 5 years from the start date of the additional placement, made possible by an Additional Bedroom Grant).	Repayment required. Option to repay in up to 12 instalments within a 12-month period from the date they deregister or the additional placement ends.
In exceptional circumstances <u>and</u> at Enfield Council’s absolute discretion the requirement to repay may be waived.	

## Contacts, Agreements and Independent Advice

### Legal agreements

If a foster carer is awarded the Additional Bedroom Grant, they will be required to enter into the relevant legal agreements.

Enfield Council require foster carers to seek independent legal advice, before signing the legal agreements associated with this scheme, from a Solicitor authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

The Council will agree to cover the cost of independent legal advice up to a total of £300+VAT. The invoice will be paid by the Council directly to the Solicitor. For information and advice on instructing a Solicitor authorised by the Solicitors Regulation Authority please click [here](#) to visit the website of the Law Society.

### Insurance and mortgage agreements

It is the responsibility of the foster carer to notify their insurance companies of the works and to ensure that their buildings and contents insurance policies provide adequate cover for the duration of the works. It is the responsibility of the foster carer to cover any additional insurance premium or administrative costs incurred.

Foster carers will be required to check their mortgage arrangements and obtain any permissions necessary from their lender or any other interested parties, including

permission to carry out the building works at the property and to place a legal charge on the register.

## **After the works are complete**

### **Use of the additional bedroom(s) or bathroom (where applicable)**

The purpose of the Additional Bedroom Grant is to create an extra bedroom within the property, to enable a foster carer to provide an additional placement to a looked after child or young person. However, this extra bedroom(s) (or bathroom where applicable) may be used by another member of the Foster Family (and an existing bedroom/bathroom reallocated), on the advice and agreement of the Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker will work together with each Foster family, to support them to determine the most appropriate living arrangements within the property, to ensure the individual needs of all looked after children or young people living in the property are met in full.

If an existing bedroom in the property is reallocated to a looked after child or young person, the foster carer will be expected to cover the costs associated with making sure the bedroom is fit-for-purpose, decorated and furnished to the expected standard set by Enfield's Fostering Service. The Supervising Social Worker will undertake a visit to the placement to ensure the necessary standards have been met.

## **Measuring our success and review of this policy**

The key indicators of success for Enfield's Loft Conversion and Home Extension Policy for foster carers are as follows:

- The Council has successfully increased the capacity of between 2-4 Foster Families per year and they are providing at least one additional foster placement each.
- Foster Families who are awarded the grant, continue to provide high standards of care and an additional placement(s) for at least 5 years (from the start date of the additional placement, made possible by an Additional Bedroom Grant).
- The Council has reduced its use of independent fostering agencies and increased the number of looked after children and young people who are placed with our existing foster families in the borough.

This policy will be periodically reviewed by Enfield Council and, when necessary, updated to respond to local and national change.