

Wiltshire Children's Services: Placement Services Fostering Payments 2016/17

1. Principles

1.1 This finance policy replaces all previously published policies and applies to all foster carers including fee paid carers.

1.2 Wiltshire Council, in line with Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, is committed to ensuring that foster carers receive appropriate and timely financial support when caring for a child or young person.

1.3 Wiltshire Council believes that fostering payments should reflect the real costs of looking after a foster child and have previously set their weekly fostering allowances in line with the Fostering Network's Recommended Rates (no longer published) rather than the required Government National Minimum Fostering Allowance Rates. It is the Council's intention to increase fostering allowances year on year in line with local government pay inflation.

1.4 An additional four weeks of fostering allowances are also payable to allow for expenditure connected with birthdays, holidays and a religious festival – the festival allowance is usually paid at Christmas unless otherwise requested. If the child moves before Christmas, any gifts which have been bought should follow the child, either to a subsequent placement, or home to family.

1.5 Allowances and fees are reviewed annually and carers will be consulted and informed of any significant changes.

1.6 Foster carers are not eligible to receive Child Benefit for a foster child and the fostered child cannot be included in the foster family's claim for benefits or Tax Credits. Carers in receipt of benefits should contact the Benefits Agency to inform them of the allowance and any fees they receive through their fostering role and identify if there is an impact on their benefits. Foster carers cannot claim free school meals for a fostered child. The fostering allowance covers all food costs incurred by the child whilst in placement including school meals or packed lunches.

1.7 Fostering allowances and other income from fostering, for example fees, are considered income by the Inland Revenue. In April 2003 new Tax Relief measures were introduced. Further information on this is included in Appendix One of this document

1.8 The weekly rates for age related Fostering Allowances for the year 2016/17 are set out below and will be paid from 21 March 2016.

Age Band	Fostering Allowance (weekly)	Fostering Allowance (daily)	Recommended weekly rates for pocket money	Recommended weekly rates for clothing
0 – 4 years	£144.27	£20.61	£2.24	£10.08
5 – 10 years	£164.57	£23.51	£3.71	£12.32
11 – 15 years	£204.61	£29.23	£7.98	£17.36

16 years (to end year 11)	£248.92	£35.56	£14.14	£21.14
16-18 years (post year 11)	£262.71	£37.53	£27.93	£21.14

2. Payment

2.1 Payments are made fortnightly in arrears directly into the carer's bank or building society account by direct bank credit transfer.

2.2 Fostering payments are paid from the night the foster placement commences up to and including the night prior to the child leaving the foster home or becoming 18 years of age. Payments are made on a pro rata basis i.e. a one night placement is paid at one seventh of the age related fostering allowance.

2.3 This includes payments to a connected person who has been given temporary approval as a foster carer under Regulation 24/25 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. The fostering allowance will be paid according to the child's age as if the carer had been approved by the Agency Decision Maker following presentation to the fostering panel.

2.4 Fostering allowances are calculated to include all normal expenditure for the care of a foster child, as follows:

- food
- school lunch money or packed lunches
- replacement clothes and shoes
- party clothes
- youth organisation/youth group clothes
- nappies
- toiletries/sanitary wear
- haircuts and other personal needs
- pocket money
- toys/books/games
- sporting activities
- hobbies/music/dancing/sport
- subscriptions to clubs
- treats/outings
- presents for child's friends
- household costs (including costs of minor breakages, minor items in daily use, additional gas/electricity, wear and tear of furniture, carpets etc., telephone usage, durable goods e.g. TV, washing machine)
- transport to and from school
- all local journeys
- baby-sitters /child care for ordinary family social activities/carers personal commitments
- usual school trips
- replacement school uniform including uniform for a new school when the child has been in placement for approximately six months
- playgroup/nursery fees (except where the criteria for Priority Day Care apply)

2.5 Foster carers should establish a savings account for children and young people in their care, making a regular and proportionate contribution to it and ensuring that appropriate steps are taken to transfer the account should the child move.

2.6 Where a young person has left school, different arrangements are made for pocket money and clothing see below.

2.7 A breakdown by expenditure of the fostering allowance has not been produced. The principle advocated by the Fostering Network that a generalised breakdown of allowances is overly prescriptive and the expenditure should be made on the needs of the specific child and using the professional judgment of the foster carer. Foster carers are not expected to spend the total fostering allowance each week but are expected to manage the overall budget over the course of the year or the duration of the placement. Guidelines are given above for the proportion of pocket money and clothing allowance included in the fostering allowance.

3. Disability Living Allowance

3.1 Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) are state benefits available to disabled children who require help with personal care/or supervision over and above that of other children of the same age because of their illness or disability. The benefits may contain both a care and mobility component.

3.2 Foster carers who are looking after a child who is entitled to DLA (or PIP) should be supported by the child's social worker to claim the allowance. The child's social worker must be informed by the foster carer if they have applied for DLA or PIP, along with the outcome of any claim, including the rate payable for both the care and mobility component. Any payment is made by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and is additional to the age related fostering allowance and any fee payable to the foster carer.

3.3 If the child or young person is eligible for DLA or PIP, management and use of the benefit by the carer to meet the additional needs of the child should be discussed and agreed at the Placement Planning Meeting, or through a review of the Placement Plan. Use of the benefit should be reviewed regularly by the child's social worker with all other parties. Where benefit is in place there is an expectation that this will fund additional expenditure required for the care and maintenance of the foster child due to their illness or disability which is not covered by the fostering allowance. Foster carers must be able to tell the child's social worker how they have used the DLA or PIP to improve the life of the child.

3.4 DLA or PIP is not intended to be saved for the child to use in adult life, and any savings over a certain limit may impact on benefits claimed by the child's parents if the child returns home, or by the child on reaching 16 years of age. Any weekly surplus of DLA or PIP can be saved for a particularly large expenditure such as a special holiday.

4. Pocket money

4.1 Pocket money for a child is an entitlement and does not have to be earned. The amount should be discussed and agreed with the parents and child at the initial

Placement Planning Meeting (age related guidelines are given above) and reviewed between all parties at intervals. What the pocket money is expected to cover should also be agreed; however, young people will not be expected to buy toiletries/sanitary wear out of their pocket money (a separate amount from the fostering allowance may be given to the child by the foster carer to enable them to do this). See later section for pocket money rates for 16 and 17 year olds.

5. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

5.1 Where the age/date of birth of a child who is an asylum seeker is unknown, foster carers will receive a fostering allowance based on the outcome of the child's age assessment.

5.2 Where a reassessment of age is undertaken at any stage after the placement has commenced this may result in a reduction or increase in the child's age which falls into a different fostering allowance age bracket. Where this is the case fostering allowances will be increased or decreased from the date of the outcome of the new age assessment.

6. Parent and child placements

6.1 Where a parent and child are placed together and the parent is also looked after, the age related fostering allowance and the Level 4 (specialist) Parent and Child skills fee will be paid in respect of both child and parent. There are two sorts of parent and child placement: support placements where the carer is providing support and guidance to the parent(s) and assessment placements where the carer is providing detailed parenting assessment information to inform wider reports for court.

6.2 Where the parent is not looked after a fostering allowance at the 16-18 rate will be paid to the foster carer for the parent and the age related fostering allowance and the Level 4 (specialist) Parent and Child skills fee will be paid for the child.

6.3 A Festival, birthday and holiday allowance will only be paid to the foster carer for the parent or child if they are looked after.

6.4 There is an expectation that arrangements will be made at the placement planning stage to agree how some of the fostering allowance will be apportioned to the parent, if and as appropriate, to purchase milk, baby products and meet the parent's personal expenses as per care planning.

6.5 Payments to foster carers will not be reduced where either the parent or child are not looked after and have an income/child benefit or other benefit entitlement.

7. Travel Expenses

7.1 The fostering allowance covers the cost of transport to and from the child's nursery or school (approximately 10 miles round trip up to 100 miles per week for such journeys) and of all reasonable day to day transport in respect of the child's placement to a weekly total of approximately 150 miles.

7.2 Additional mileage expenses, in excess of the 150 miles described above, which arise from the need to make trips to hospital, attend reviews or other meetings

requested by Wiltshire Council's Fostering Service, contact arrangements, introductory visits to new foster homes or adoptive homes or other exceptional travel expenses, including to distant schools, will be met by Wiltshire Council upon agreement by the Fostering Team Manager. All requests for mileage reimbursement should be submitted on a Placement Services Claim Form and, if agreed, will be reimbursed at 45p per mile, plus car parking charges. Where public transport is used, costs will be reimbursed.

7.3 Carers need to complete a Placement Services Claim Form attaching any receipts if applicable (i.e. parking tickets/ train tickets/fuel VAT receipt etc.). The form is available from and is submitted via their Supervising Social Worker or the Finance Team Placement Services, Placement Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN.

7.4 All claims should be submitted monthly. Claims submitted after three months will not be paid.

7.5 Carers can also claim travel and other costs in relation to attending training or other meetings in relation to their role as a foster carer. See below.

7.6 From the 1 March 2013, all claims for travel expenses must be accompanied by a VAT receipt. For tax purposes, the receipt does not have to match the amount of the mileage claim but the fuel purchase does have to pre-date the journey and the receipt (or receipts) has to be for a sufficient amount of fuel to cover the mileage being claimed. For example, fuel purchased 3 January 2016 £25.00 accompanies a claim for a journey to the dentist 7 January 2016 – 20 miles @ £0.45 = £9.00.

7.7 Where more than one family car is used for trips associated with fostering, carers only need submit one monthly claim for all the journeys undertaken and one or more receipts from either vehicle.

7.8 Where there is one family vehicle which is used for the purposes of self-employment or where there is one family vehicle which is a company car and all receipts are collected by the employer. Please contact the Placement Services Finance Team on 01225 716510 to lodge the exemption.

7.9 For foster carers who submit their tax return under HMRC's "**profit method**" (i.e. carers have an accountant and complete a tax return from total income less total expenditure), mileage claims should not be submitted for payment where they are being used to offset profits for tax purposes – i.e.: carers cannot claim twice for the same journey.

8. Expenses for attending meetings/training

8.1 Foster carers can claim reimbursement of baby-sitting or child care costs, for looked after children, incurred whilst attending training, or other meetings, at the request of the Fostering Service. The rate payable is up to £3.84 per hour (based on the Family and Childcare Trust 2015 Childcare Cost Survey). Where carers have used a registered child care provider the actual cost will be paid (receipts should be submitted).

8.2 Foster carers can also claim travel costs. Mileage costs at 45p per mile will be paid

plus car parking charges or the cost of public transport will be reimbursed.

8.3 Foster carers, who assist the Fostering Service in the delivery of training, can claim £8.05 per hour plus travel costs, as above. Carers need to be mindful that this payment is not a fostering allowance or fostering expense. Carers are essentially self-employed when being paid to deliver training and this payment plus any paid travel costs could therefore be taxable.

8.4 On completion of training, or attendance at meetings, carers need to complete a Placement Services Claim Form attaching any receipts if applicable (i.e. parking tickets/ train tickets/fuel VAT receipts etc.). The form is available from, and is submitted for payment via, their Supervising Social Worker or the Finance Team Placement Services, Placement Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN.

8.5 All claims should be submitted within a month of completing the training event or meeting. Claims made after three months will not be paid.

8.6 Child care or babysitting expenses incurred for looked after children for other reasons for example, carers' social activities/personal commitments should be met from the weekly fostering allowance.

9. Payment for the provision of overnight respite care

9.1 Where a foster carer looks after a child in order to provide respite for either the child's family or another foster carer, payment of the fostering allowance and any fee paid to the carer providing the respite care will be made for each overnight stay on a pro rata basis. An overnight stay is up to 24 hours. Where a stay exceeds a 24 hour period, but does not include a further overnight stay, payment for the provision of daytime respite care will apply for the period in excess of 24 hours (see below).

10. Payment for the provision of daytime only respite care

10.1 Where a foster carer is asked by the Fostering Service to look after a child or children during the day and no overnight stay is involved, the carer will be paid £5.50 per hour per child up to the maximum of one day's fostering allowance per child (i.e. a maximum of one seventh of the age related fostering allowance for each child), where:

- The child is not a looked after child and the day care is provided to support the child remaining at home
- The looked after child meets the criteria for an enhanced fee or their main placement is a specialist foster placement

10.2 No skill fees will be payable.

10.3 Carers need to complete a Placement Services Claim Form detailing the number of hours' care they have provided per day/per child. The form is available from, and is submitted for payment via, their Supervising Social Worker or the Finance Team Placement Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN.

10.4 All claims should be submitted within a month of providing day care. Claims made after three months will not be paid.

11. Allowances for Family Link Carers

11.1 Family Link arrangements will be paid at the following 2016/2017 rates:

Up to 5 hours	0 – 11 years	£20.94
	12 – 18 years	£24.10
Daily	0 – 11 years	£41.90
	12 – 18 years	£48.21
Overnight 10pm – 7am		£5.50

12. SEND Specialist Carer Service (“Contract Care”)

12.1 The SEND Specialist Carer Service is under the management of Placement Services, although the funding is paid for by the NHS in agreement with Wiltshire Council. The recruitment, assessment and training of SEND Specialist Carers are undertaken by the Placement Services team. A full time carer is expected to offer 218 nights / sessions per annum to children with a disability for respite /short break care. For this they will receive an annual fee paid on a monthly basis plus an additional allowance per session when a child is placed. These payments can be arranged pro rata for part time carers. The SEND Specialist Carer signs a contract with Wiltshire Council and is deemed self-employed; therefore they will require to make contact with HMRC to ensure what tax they may be required to pay. Please see guidance on Income Tax below.

12.2 SEND Specialist Carers will be paid at the following rates:

SEND Specialist Carer fee	£1916.67 per month (pro rata for part time carers)
SEND Specialist Carer Allowance	£32 per child per 0-24 hour session

13. Under or Overpayment of Allowances and Fees

13.1 Whilst every effort is made to ensure correct payments, occasionally the payment of fostering allowances and fees may continue after a child has left a foster home.

13.2 It is Wiltshire’s policy that overpayments of allowances or fees are recoverable in full from the start of the overpayment period. Every effort will be made to provide carers with appropriate support to ensure that any arrangement for recovery does not have an adverse impact on any children in placement or cause hardship to the carers.

13.3 Where an overpayment has been made, a letter will be sent to the carer from the Finance Team Placement Services advising them of the overpayment and proposing repayment arrangements. The carer will be asked to send a cheque to repay the overpayment. Carers may request deductions from future fostering payments if this is their preference. Foster carers should discuss any problems with payments, or recovery of overpayments with their Supervising Social Worker.

13.4 The occasions when overpayments are made will be few. Carers can assist the Finance Section by telephoning them on 01225 716510 to advise them when placements end.

14. Equipment

14.1 Foster carers must be suitably equipped to fulfill their role. When a foster carer is being assessed the assessing social worker will ensure that basic equipment is available to meet the needs of a child or children within the carers' approval range.

14.2 When carers do not have basic equipment, Wiltshire Council will consider providing equipment considered necessary for the welfare of their foster child. This may include cots, beds, bedding, storage space for children's clothing and personal items, pushchairs, playpens, stair gates, car safety seats, etc. All equipment is on loan and, unless worn out, is returnable to the Fostering Service at the end of placement or when a carer is deregistered. If wear and tear has been especially heavy, replacement items will be purchased.

14.3 All purchasing of equipment by carers where reimbursement will be requested must be agreed by the Fostering Team Manager in advance.

14.4 If a child requires specific equipment e.g. specialist equipment for a child with disabilities or specific equipment in relation to a child's education, this need should be discussed with the child's social worker or manager in order to access available funding from the child care team.

15. Initial Clothing Grant

15.1 Most children who are in foster care arrive in their placement with a selection of clothing and other personal items which they have brought from home or from a previous foster placement. The carer will gradually replace or add to the child or young person's clothing supply using the weekly fostering allowance.

15.2 Where the child has been placed in an emergency the child's social worker should endeavour to collect items as soon as possible from the child's home.

15.3 If a child arrives in placement without adequate clothing, and it is not possible to access clothing from the child's previous home within a short period (24 hours of placement), there may be a need for extra money to establish a reasonable basic wardrobe for the child, including school uniform. Any initial clothing grant request must be based on actual need and agreed by the child care Team Manager placing the child. Carers should discuss the need for an initial clothing grant with the child's social worker or their Supervising Social Worker (or the Emergency Duty Service for placements made outside office hours).

15.4 The purchase of other items required to meet the child's immediate needs, such as nappies or baby milk, should be discussed and agreed with the child care team at point of placement.

15.5 For guidance it is suggested that when placed, or within the first 24 hours of placement, a child should have the following basic clothing:

- 5 sets of underwear
- 1 set of nightwear
- 3 T-shirts or equivalent
- 1 warm top
- 1 coat/jacket as required by the season
- 1 pair of shoes/trainers
- 2 pairs of trousers/jeans/skirt
- Appropriate clothing for school

15.6 Carers need to complete a Placement Services Claim Form attaching any receipts if applicable. The form is available from, and is submitted for payment via, their Supervising Social Worker or the Finance Team Placement Services, Placement Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN. The cost of all initial grants will be approved and met by the child care team placing the child.

15.7 All claims should be submitted within a month of purchase. Claims made after three months will not be paid.

16. Birthdays, Holiday and Christmas/Religious Festivals

16.1 Birthday Allowance

An amount equivalent to one week's age related fostering allowance will be paid in the payment fortnight prior to the fortnight in which the child's birthday falls. If a child begins a placement in the week before their birthday, arrangements will need to be made to ensure the carer receives the birthday allowance in time to meet the child's birthday needs. If a child changes placement after the birthday allowance has been paid, the new carer can apply for half the birthday allowance and the gifts purchased for the child should move with them to the new placement.

16.2 Christmas Allowance/Religious Festival

An amount equivalent to one week's age related fostering allowance will be paid in the last payment fortnight in November, unless the child does not celebrate Christmas. In this case the foster carer may apply via the child's social worker for the allowance at the time of year when an equivalent significant festival is held. Finance Team Placement Services will need to be informed on 01225 716510 if the allowance is **not** to be paid at Christmas. If a child begins a placement after the Christmas payment deadline, arrangements will need to be made to ensure the carer receives the Christmas allowance in time to meet the child's needs. If a child changes placement after the Christmas allowance has been paid, the new carer can apply for half the Christmas allowance and the gifts purchased for the child should move with them to the new placement.

16.3 Holiday Allowance

An amount equivalent to two week's age related fostering allowance will be paid for each child in a financial year (April to March). This will automatically be paid in the first payment fortnight in July (carers do not need to apply). In exceptional circumstances if a child has already had a two week holiday allowance with a previous carer in that financial year the Head of Service Children in Care can give permission for an additional holiday allowance.

Any issues concerning holiday allowances e.g. request to pay before July should be discussed with the child's social worker or Supervising Social Worker.

17. Exceptional Educational (School) Holiday Trips/Holidays

17.1 Along with normal clubs and after school activities, the cost of day school trips will be met from the basic fostering allowance. Residential school trips during term times or in school holidays will be funded through the Pupil Premium with approval from the Virtual School Head Teacher. It is expected that the purpose and desired outcomes of the activity are clearly outlined and agreed at the child's PEP meeting.

18. Long term fostering for a matched child or young person

18.1 Achieving permanency for children is extremely important and long term fostering is one way of doing this. For some children, long term fostering will be the best option when returning home is not possible and a legal order such as Special Guardianship or Adoption is not appropriate.

18.2 Where permanency is achieved through long term fostering the 'permanent' status of the placement should be celebrated and marked by the carers with a special event or purchase such as a family meal or outing, formal family photograph, new purchase such as personal furniture/bedding etc.

18.3 Following the approval of a long term fostering match at Foster Panel, Wiltshire Council will pay the foster carer £100 per child towards the cost of marking this event with the young person. The Supervising Social Worker for the carer should initiate payment via an FS5 following confirmation of the long term match via the Agency Decision Maker.

19. Temporary absences

19.1 This section applies to all carers including fee paid carers and replaces individual arrangements previously outlined under separate fee level schemes.

Respite care for children to sustain a placement (overnight or day care)

19.2 It is recognised that from time to time carers may require a respite period in order to sustain a placement. This should be needs led and planned as part of the placement plan. Agreement should be reached at the time of placement as to the level of respite care required by a child or by the carers. This should be written into the child's care plan. Where respite is identified as a need after the placement has started it must be documented as soon as possible through formal review of the child's care plan.

19.3 Respite arrangements should be reviewed at each review of the child's care plan or statutory review, or more frequently if necessary. They must always be based on the needs of the child in order to improve placement stability.

19.4 Provided that it is intended the child will return to that foster home, fostering allowances and any fees payable should continue to be paid to the primary carer during respite periods unless a single period of respite exceeds 14 nights.

Child's temporary absences from the foster home (not planned respite)

19.5 Where a child is temporarily absent from the foster home due to circumstances other than planned respite, such as where the child absconds from the foster home, family contact, hospital admission of the child, school or peer group holiday or as a result of emergencies within the foster home such as family bereavement, illness or hospital admission of the carer, etc. the full basic allowance plus any fee will be paid for up to 14 nights, provided that it is intended the child will return to that foster home.

19.6 Where the period of absence exceeds 14 nights, payment will cease at this time unless an exceptional decision is made on a case by case basis by the Head of Service - Children in Care regarding the level of fostering allowance and any fees to be paid to the carer.

19.7 Where the child attends a residential school, age related fostering allowance and any skills fee normally payable to the carer will be made on a pro rata basis for the nights when the child is in the foster placement. Where a child is away from the foster home for a significant period of time on a regular basis, foster carers should discuss who is to take responsibility for buying the child's clothing and providing the child's pocket money with the child's social worker at the placement planning stage. The basic payment for clothing and pocket money can be made to the foster carer during the child's absences if it is agreed that the foster carer will have this responsibility.

Breaks for carers

19.8 It is expected that fostered children and young people will be included in the foster family's social events and holiday arrangements if the child is with the carer at the time of the planning of the holiday, and it is expected that the child will be with them at the time of the holiday. The Fostering Service will take the carers' holiday plans and other planned commitments into account when making placements to avoid the need for the child to be looked after elsewhere as it is not ideal for children and unsettling for carers.

19.9 In some circumstances it will not be possible for foster children to be included in carers' holidays or social arrangements. These include:

- Placements made after a holiday or event has been planned
- Where it is agreed that the family should have a break without the foster child
- Where the event is unsuitable for children to attend
- Where the child refuses to accompany their carers

19.10 In these circumstances the fostering allowance and any fees for the child will continue to be paid for a total of up to 14 nights in a 12 month period (1 April to 31 March) on condition that the child returns to the carers at the end of the break. Carers must request a paid break in advance via their Supervising Social Worker who is responsible for monitoring the number of days taken in a financial year and informing the Finance Team if the period has exceeded two weeks. Age related fostering allowances and any fees will not be paid beyond 14 nights in the 12 month period.

19.11 Carers should give as much notice as possible to the child's social worker and

fostering team if a break without the foster child is planned. Unless an emergency situation, one month's notice is the expected minimum notice period. This is to ensure planning can be undertaken to identify a suitable alternative care arrangement for the child.

20. Holding a vacancy for a specific child

20.1 Where a foster carer is asked to retain a vacancy for a specific child, the agreement should last no longer than four weeks and must be agreed by both the Team Manager for the child and the Fostering Team Manager.

20.2 During such periods, the age related fostering allowance should not be paid as the child is not in placement.

20.3 In exceptional circumstances, a retainer may be paid at the carer's skills level with the agreement of the Service Manager or Head of Service for an agreed period based on the needs of the child to be placed. In exception, it may also be necessary to pay a proportion of the age related fostering allowance to the carer where they are having direct contact with the child before the placement commences; for example during a period of introductions. This should be pro-rata and proportionate to the task being undertaken. This must be agreed by the Head of Service, Care and Placements.

21. Payment to carers where children have been removed due to an allegation made against a foster carer or member of their household

21.1 Wiltshire Council acknowledges the difficult task of fostering and that at times allegations are made against foster carers. In some circumstances the allegations are of a nature that it is necessary to remove the children, or young people, from placement whilst the allegation is being investigated and a decision is made about the carer's continuing suitability to be a foster carer.

21.2 Arrangements meet guidance set out by the Government and the Fostering Network. The payment will be made up of allowances and fees for each child removed and will be on a sliding scale decreasing over a 3 month period, or until the outcome of the investigation, whichever is the sooner. Carers will only be paid for the actual children removed not the potential number of children by terms of the carer's approval.

21.3 If at the point of three months the investigation has not been concluded, the Fostering Service will consider the current circumstances of the foster carer, the investigation and its progress, and whether the carer should receive further payments. Any recommendation for further payments will be considered by the Head of Service, Care and Placements.

21.4 Wiltshire Council has the authority to cease these payments at any point, for example where a foster carer has been formally charged by the police.

21.5 The payment structure is as follows:

Non fee paid carers (historic scheme)

- Full fostering allowances for each child for 14 nights.

- 75% of fostering allowances for each child for remainder of first month
- 50% of fostering allowance for each child in second month
- 25% of the fostering allowance in the third month

Fee paid carers (historic or skills based scheme)

- Full fostering allowances and fees for each child for 14 nights.
- 50% of the fostering allowance and 90% of fees for each child for remainder of first month
- Two thirds of the above total figure in the second month and one third in the third month

Carers in receipt of a retainer

- Full retainer for one month
- 50% of retainer for second month
- 25% of retainer for third month

22. Passports and other documents

22.1 The cost of obtaining children's birth certificates (and copies), passports and documents (e.g. marriage certificates) required when applying for a passport, including passport photographs, and "life story" books will be met by the Council. Day to day photographs of the child's life in placement, which may be included in a life story book, would be covered by the fostering allowance.

22.2 Carers need to complete a Placement Services Claim Form attaching any receipts if applicable. The form is available from, and is submitted for payment via, their Supervising Social Worker or the Finance Team Placement Services, Placement Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN. The cost will be approved and met by the child care team for the child.

22.3 All claims should be submitted within a month of purchase. Claims made after three months will not be paid.

23. Looked after young people aged 16 and 17 in foster care

23.1 The fostering allowance, and any skill fee normally paid to the foster carer, continues to be paid up to and including the night prior to the young person becoming 18.

23.2 There is an expectation that as young people become older an increasing element of the fostering allowance, including the pocket money and clothing allowance element, will be given to the young person by the carer to aid the young person's transition to independence. In consultation with the child's social worker or personal adviser, the level of allowance to be given to the young person and what this is to purchase must be agreed.

23.3 The amount of pocket money and clothing allowance included in the fostering allowance will depend on the individual young person's situation as follows:

- £35.28 Pocket Money and Clothing Allowance is payable to young people who are not in education, training or employment
- £49.07 Enhanced Pocket Money and Clothing Allowance is payable to

young people continuing in full time education or training. The 16 year old fostering allowance rate of £248.92 payable to the carer will be increased to £262.71 to include this enhanced rate.

- Young people employed or on paid Training Schemes – where a young person is in employment or on a paid training scheme, the fostering allowance payable to the carer will be reduced to £213.64 by the deduction of the minimum pocket money and clothing allowance rate (£35.28). The young person will be expected to meet these needs from their own income.

23.4 The young person will also be expected to contribute an agreed amount calculated by their social worker or personal adviser (usually about 10%) from their income towards their living expenses. The total fostering allowance payable to the carer (£213.64) will therefore normally be made up by contributions from the Fostering Service **and** the young person.

23.5 A discussion must take place between the young person, carer and child's social worker to agree what the carer continues to be responsible for providing from the fostering allowance and what the young person is now responsible for purchasing from their own income. The frequency and method of payment by the young person to the carer must be agreed as well as the process for managing any non-payment of living expenses by the young person to their carer.

24. Current Skill Fee Scheme and Emergency Scheme (from 2016)

24.1 From the time of implementation of the new payment schedule in 2016, all carers paid on the previous basic skill level scheme, enhanced fee scheme or a historical level scheme, as outlined above, will be expected to move to the 2016 skill fee scheme within one year. The mechanism for doing this will be the annual review. The review will consider the skill level that the carers should transfer to, based on evidence and what they want to offer within their approval. The recommendation of the review will be considered by the Service Manager – Placement Services, in consultation with The Fostering Team Manager.

24.2 At the time of transferring to the new scheme within the first year, any difference in total fostering payments made will be backdated to the date of implementation of 2016 with underpayment being rectified by a one-off payment at the time of the carers next pay run and overpayment being reclaimed from the carer as agreed with the Service and in accord with the arrangement for other overpayments (see above).

24.3 Where carers do not agree with the skill level they can appeal to the Service Manager by submitting additional evidence along with the previously completed annual review and transfer evidence checklist. This will then be considered by a convened panel consisting of three managers from other parts of Children's Services e.g. an IRO, CiC manager, Safeguarding Service Manager.

24.4 Should a carer, in discussion with their Supervising Social Worker, want their transition to take place more quickly, an early review should take place; for example where a carer feels they are working at a different skill level than they may be mapped to and this may result in an over or underpayment.

24.5 Skills level payments are as follows:

Connected Person (2016)	Age related fostering allowance only	
Level 1 (2016)	Age related fostering allowance plus £70 per week	
Level 2 (2016)	Age related fostering allowance plus £91 per week	
Level 3 (2016)	Age related fostering allowance plus £140 per week	
Level 4 (specialist) (2016)	Carers will receive the age related fostering allowance plus either a Level 4 skills payment of £196 per week per child or a specialist fee payment as follows:	
	Parent and child support placements	Age related fostering allowance plus £210 per week
	Parent and child assessment placements	Age related fostering allowance plus £301 per week
	Out of hours emergency and remand placements	Age related fostering allowance plus £252 per week

24.6 Skills fees are paid per child and will be paid pro rata, reflecting the number of placement nights, when children are only placed for a proportion of the week.

Out of Hours Emergency Placements

24.7 A small number of foster carers (2016 estimate = 4 households) will be specifically approved within Level 4 (Specialist) to provide emergency and out of hours short term placements across the age range. Operating on a rota basis, they will be on call and paid a retainer when a child is not in placement. They will be expected to take a child when requested to do so by Placement Services or the Emergency Duty Service. A retainer will be paid for an empty bed of £210 per week per child, or £30 per night, when there is no child in placement. It is anticipated that placements will be for a maximum of 14 nights. When the emergency placement continues for more than 14 days because an alternative placement cannot be found, the carer will be continue to be paid at the emergency scheme rate of £252 per week plus the age related fostering allowance.

24.8 The retainer will continue to be paid when the carer is not on call

24.9 When a child is in placement an emergency placement fee of £252 per week per child will be paid plus the age related fostering allowance for that child.

24.10 There are requirements placed upon these carers:

- Carers to have one bed kept free for emergency fostering

- Carers to be on call for EDS placements and emergency placements made by Family Placement Duty
- Carers are expected to take children aged 8 – 18.
- If carers refuse to take children, without adjudged good reason, a discussion will take place and they may be removed from the scheme.
- A planning meeting will need to take place within three days of placement with an exit plan discussed and agreed.
- Carers must be able to demonstrate flexibility and capacity to manage these placements

25. Historical Fee Schemes (included for reference)

25.1 Wiltshire Council is committed to developing a single payment scheme for foster carers. There are a number of historical fee skill schemes which are aligned to set criteria that have been used to assess the skill level that carers are paid. These arrangements will cease when the current placement comes to a natural end. Should the foster carers remain approved, they will move to the current (2016) Skills Fee Scheme and any future placements will be made within this scheme.

25.2 In addition, there remain a small number of individual arrangements in place, agreed by previous senior managers, which will be reviewed on a case by case basis at the time of the carers' annual review. Should there be a request for the arrangements to continue, they will be referred to the Head of Service – Placement Services.

25.3 Criteria are outlined in separate procedures and in summary include:

Historical Fee schemes (closed to new carers):

Level 2: £60.48

Level 3: £120.89

Level 4: £196.77

Level 4 retainer: £114.24

Bail and Remand (combined fostering allowance and fee): £425.39

Bail and Remand retainer: £182.42 (2 weeks max)

Historical Fee Scheme retainers (closed to new carers)

Retainers were introduced to ensure that in the unlikely event that level 4, Specialist or Bail and Remand carers find themselves with a vacancy between placements they will receive a minimum level of payment.

Specialist and Bail and Remand retainers are payable for maximum period of two weeks between placements.

25.4 The aim of the historical level 4 scheme was for only two children to be in placement and a retainer to be paid for up to two beds during breaks in placements. Where there are two carers at home the scheme has the flexibility for carers to be approved for three placements. This does not affect the policy in relation to retainers and the undertaking to pay retainers in respect of the first two available beds only.

25.5 The following outlines the policy for historical level 4 retainers (closed to new

carers):

Level 4 carer approved for 1 placement	Level 4 carer approved for 2 placements	Level 4 carer approved for 3 placements (where 2 carers are available)
0 child in placement – 1 retainer retainer	0 child in placement – 2 retainers	0 child in placement – 2 retainers
1 child in placement – 0 retainer	1 child in placement – 1 retainer	1 child in placement – 1 retainer
	2 children in placement – 0 retainers	2 or 3 children in placement – 0 retainers

25.6 Retainers are only payable when a level 4, Specialist carer or Bail and Remand carer has a vacancy and is available and willing to take a placement. Where carers have a vacancy they are expected to take a placement when requested to do so unless it is considered by the Fostering Service to be an unsuitable match. If carers are unwilling to take a placement they will be considered as unavailable and a retainer will not be paid.

Historical basic skill fee and enhanced fee scheme (closed to new carers):

Basic fee: £56.35

Enhanced fee age 0-11: £67.62

Enhanced fee aged 11 plus: £127.68

Specialist (combined fostering allowance and fee): £450.66

Specialist retainer: £407.68 (2 weeks max)

26. Transferring from an independent fostering agency (IFA)

26.1 Foster carers being approved by Wiltshire Council and transferring in from an IFA, where it is agreed that current placements will continue, will initially be paid at the same rate (age related allowance and fee) as they receive from their IFA. Where they are not looking after a child but where a placement is subsequently made, they will initially be paid the same rates (age related allowance and any fee) as they receive from their IFA, regardless of which skills level they are approved at. In both situations, six months after approval the difference between their IFA payment and their Wiltshire payment will be reduced by 50% and after one year they will be paid the Wiltshire rate.

27. Discretionary Payments for Exceptional Needs

27.1 In general the fostering allowance payment will be expected to meet all the normal costs of bringing up a foster child. However, sometimes exceptional circumstances will arise and on rare occasions it may be appropriate to make an exceptional payment to a carer in respect of the particular needs of a child in their care. Such situations should be discussed with the child's social worker to determine whether a discretionary payment may be applicable.

27.2 The application for any additional payments should be made through the child's social worker for consideration and must be authorised by the child care Team Manager or appropriate Head of Service.

28. Insurance

28.1 Approved foster carers are covered by Wiltshire Council's liability insurance policy for carers. In general terms the policy covers:

- a) Damage to carers' property caused by a foster child
- b) Personal injury to carers caused by a foster child

28.2 The insurance policy does not cover:

- a) An excess of £1000 which will be met by Wiltshire Council
- b) Damage caused by a child's parents, sibling or others in the course of contact.
- c) Damage incurred through supportive lodging placements and any child not currently fostered.
- d) Loss, including theft, of cash (you are therefore advised not to keep large sums of money in the house and if you occasionally have to, you should ensure it is kept safely).

Note: It is the responsibility of the foster carer to inform their insurance company that they are fostering; otherwise, they may invalidate their buildings and contents insurance.

28.3 Carers are required to provide copies of buildings and contents insurance on an annual basis, details of which will be kept on the fostering file.

28.4 If a carer needs to make a claim they should, in the first instance, seek to claim from their own insurance. If unsuccessful, they should claim from Wiltshire Council's insurers, details from the Supervising Social Worker.

28.5 Wiltshire Council may make ex-gratia payments to cover those damage costs that are not covered through its insurance policy.

28.6 Membership of Fostering Network gives carers legal insurance cover for issues involving foster care and details can be found in the Fostering Network membership pack. An important leaflet covering this area is Fostering Network's 'Foster Care and Insurance'.

28.7 The insurance cover provided by County insurers does not cover damage to cars. Carers are advised to take out fully comprehensive car insurance and to inform their insurance company that they are foster carers. A copy of the current car insurance must be passed to the Supervising Social Worker annually.

Note: Carers are advised that their car insurance is invalidated if they do not have current car tax and MOT for the vehicle.

29. Fostering Network membership

29.1 Once approved, a foster carer will automatically become a member of Fostering Network. The Fostering Service will pay the annual subscription fee.

30. Income Tax, National Insurance and Benefits

30.1 Although the council is not in a position to advise individuals on their personal tax position, some general advice on foster carers Income Tax can be provided. For specific and specialist personal tax questions, external expert advice should be sought.

30.2 HMRC normally treat foster carers as **self-employed**. This means that legally they are responsible for maintaining their own records. It is very important that carers make it clear to the Inland Revenue what payments they are likely to receive and find out what tax, if any, they are required to pay. Carers will not necessarily be sent a tax return (this depends on a number of factors including other income sources) but if they receive one, it should be completed.

30.3 Carers should keep their own record of receipts. This is not as onerous as it sounds. The finance team is able to provide a template in Microsoft excel spreadsheet format which may assist with this task.

30.4 Foster carers are exempt from tax up to a particular limit. This limit is based upon a fixed amount per household and additional weekly amounts for each child fostered, currently £10,000 per household for each complete tax year (i.e. reduced proportionately for part year carers) plus a tax free amount per week - £200 for children under 11 years & £250 for children & young people aged 11 and above. (Part of a week counts as a full week.) Foster carers should check with HMRC for updated information using the following link:

<https://www.google.co.uk/url?url=https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering&rct=j&frm=1&q=&esrc=s&sa=U&ved=0ahUKEwi17busjZjKAhXC1hQKHfRqDsQQFggIMAE&usq=AFQjCNF53eF3ewwllcETw4cfRrLRvrIVIA>

30.5 If total receipts from providing foster care in the year do not exceed the qualifying amount above, receipts will be exempt (free) from income tax for that year. This means that, for taxation purposes, carers will be treated as having no profit or loss from foster care for the year. This will not affect any other income carers may have (e.g. income from employment, self-employment or savings) which will be taxed in the normal way.

- (i) The actual profit from foster care (total receipts from foster care less allowable expenses and capital allowances): **the profit method**. The profit method gives a smaller profit if your expenses and capital allowances are more than the qualifying amount. But it means carers must keep records and calculate profit.
- (ii) Total receipts from foster care less the qualifying amount with no additional relief for allowable expenses or capital allowances: **the simplified method**

30.6 Carers should decide which of the above to follow and different choices can be made for different years. To use the simplified method, carers must notify HMRC. Completing a tax return using the simplified method and submitting it by the filing date will be accepted as notification.

Wiltshire's Foster Carer Tax Letter

30.7 In addition to a carer's own record of receipts from Wiltshire Council, each foster carer will receive an annual letter including exemption details and a summary of fostering fees and allowances paid to you, based on records. These can be cross checked against the carer's own records and will form a basis for providing HMR&C with tax return information using the **simplified method**.

National Insurance

30.8 Foster carers should always make it clear from the time of approval what payments they are likely to receive and find out from the Department of Social Security what NI payments they may be required to pay. All self-employed people are liable to pay Class 4 National Insurance contributions on annual profits above a threshold. If receipts from foster care are exempt, carers will not have to pay Class 4 National Insurance contributions on them as they will have no profit from foster care.

Benefits

30.9 The fostering allowance is designed to reflect the true cost of looking after a child. As a result, allowances do not generally have any effect upon entitlement to benefits or the amount of benefits paid. However, carers should always make their local Benefits Agency office aware that they are an approved foster carer.

31. Contact points for queries

31.1 Staff dealing with fostering payments can only pay with authorisation from the relevant Child Care Team or Fostering Service. The carer should therefore discuss any finance issues with their Supervising Social Worker or the child's social worker.

31.2 There may be occasions when a carer has queries about fostering allowance, fees or expenses. Payments are made by the Finance Team Placement Services, Placement Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, BA14 8JN. The team can be contacted on 01225 716510.

Placement Services

June 2016