

# Skill Level Payment Scheme

## Guidance for foster carers and staff in Children and Families

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance is intended for foster carers and staff working in Children and Families and sets out Warwickshire's skills-based, career progression scheme for foster carer's.
- 1.2 The purpose of the fee payment scheme is to ensure that Warwickshire can recruit and retain high quality foster carers who can provide excellent care and who can provide stability, safety, security and where possible permanence for all children and young people in the care of the local authority. The expectation of all carers who receive the fee payment is that whilst in receipt of the fee, they are available to foster at all times.
- 1.3 The scheme was reviewed in 2016 and takes account of the following regulations and standards:
- [UK National Standards for Foster Care 1999](#)
  - Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers 1999
  - [Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#)
  - [Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011](#)
  - The outcome of the Warwickshire County Council Foster Care Review June 2016; changes to the requirements regarding placing children with connected others as foster carers for an interim period before the SGO is made; and the introduction of fostering to adopt arrangements.
- 1.4 This revised scheme also incorporates the following key principles identified by regulations, standards, guidance and OFSTED requirements:
- 1.4.1 Payments as a reward:
- a) Foster carers are clear about the fostering service's payment structures and the payments due to them including:
    - clarity on payment of allowances;
    - any fee during a break in placement;
    - should the fostering household be subject to an allegation?
  - b) Reward payments are linked with foster carers' skills and abilities to:
    - adapt to and meet the changing needs of children who are fostered;
    - to work as part of the multi-agency team around each child;
    - their commitment to training, skills and development.
- 1.4.2 With regard to training and development:

- a) A clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs.
- b) All foster carers have 2 years from point of approval to complete their 6 core training courses.
- c) The foster carer must be able to evidence the training, support and development standards for foster care (TSD's), within the timescales specified in Fostering Services National Minimum Standards.
- d) As a minimum child protection training and first aid training must be completed within the first twelve months of approval.
- e) Foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake on-going training and development.
- f) Annual performance reviews should confirm what progress has been made on the previous year's training and development objectives, and identify areas for further development of skills. Annual reviews should be used to ensure that adequate training continues to be provided and is taken up.

## 2. The scheme

- 2.1 The scheme is designed to recognise and reward foster carers' skills, experience, time and the commitment involved in:
  - caring for, and meeting the needs of a number and range of children and young people placed in their care;
  - meeting the requirements of the child care plan and placement plan which outlines their delegated responsibilities and duties;
  - working in partnership with other professionals, parents and extended family;
  - maintaining their personal development through participating in training.
- 2.2 All Warwickshire foster carers are able to further their development through a range of training opportunities and learning materials provided by the authority, including courses, online training/distance learning etc.
- 2.3 Online/distance learning should not replace attending attended training (as there is a value in learning as a group and sharing experience). The secondary carer should complete at least 3 core training courses as part of their core training commitment.
- 2.4 Any persons applying to be foster carers for Warwickshire, who have prior experience as a foster carer, will be considered for the Payments for Skills Scheme at their fostering approval. Entry to the Payments for Skills scheme

is subject to foster care approval and the applicant(s) being able to evidence that they meet the appropriate skills level criteria.

- 2.5 Skills fee payments are reviewed at a minimum annually and practice is continually monitored through formal supervision by the fostering social worker. Fees can be reduced for a number of reasons, for example when carers are subject to an investigation under the position of trust process or where they consistently do not act in accordance with policies, standards and procedures.
- 2.6 Separate payment structures and financial conditions apply for foster carers who offer the following placements (see relevant sections below):
- Teenage placements
  - Solo placements
  - Short Term Emergency Placements
  - Emergency Duty foster carers
  - Parent and child placements
  - Foster to adopt placements

### **3. Skills Level 1 entry criteria (short-term, respite and long-term.**

- 3.1 Eligibility entry to skills Level 1 will depend on the foster carer(s) meeting the following criteria:

#### **3.1.1 Approval**

- person(s) is/are approved foster carer for Warwickshire County Council;
- person(s) has/have completed 'Focus on Fostering' preparation training;
- Where one approved mainstream foster carer is based at home full time, skills level 1 payment will be made on point of first placement. This is to aid recruitment of mainstream foster carers and increase mainstream carers ability to respond to a variety of children who need a placement at short notice.
- In all other circumstances, skills level 1 payment will be paid to households upon completion of training in 3.3 and completion of the TSD workbook in 3.4.
- All mainstream approved carers are expected to complete their TSD Standards within 12 months following approval; Connected Persons within 18 months; this will be monitored via formal

supervision. Fostering couples may evidence the standards in one workbook.

### 3.1.2 Training

- Primary foster carer must have completed three core training courses within 12 months including child protection and first aid. (All carers have 2 years in which to complete all 6 core training courses).
- Second carer (where applicable) must have attended child protection and first aid within 12 months.
- Any training or actions identified at the time of their approval as foster carers or through the annual review must be completed or show evidence that this is being progressed. If a priority training need has been identified at the point of approval this must be completed within any agreed timescale.
- Carers must complete a minimum of 2 courses per review period where one course must be an attended training course.
- Completion of Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care (TSD) workbook
  - a) TSD workbooks should be signed off by fostering social workers and then sent on to the training/QCF manager for quality assurance and final sign off. This will ensure consistency across Warwickshire with regard to the standards expected. At times further work will be required and guidance will be given on what work is needed to bring the workbook to the standard required.
  - b) Advice and guidance will be available from fostering social care workers and fostering social workers to enable carers to complete their TSD.
  - c) Standards should be part of a foster carer's supervision agenda until completion. A 6 month review will take place during supervision to check on progress, skills level fee (if one carer based at home full time) may be removed if insufficient progress has not been made.
  - d) TSD Standards **must** be completed within the first 12 months of approval or 18 months if connected person carers. Foster carers need to take note that it is their responsibility to complete these standards.

### 3.1.3 Availability

- The fostering team manager is satisfied that the foster carer has been available to foster.

## **4. Skills Level 2 entry criteria (short-term, respite and long-term)**

- 4.1 Eligibility: All foster carers sign the Foster Care Agreement, and by signing this agree to attend training identified as required through the assessment or Annual Performance Review. Carers will need to have had sufficient fostering experience to be able to demonstrate skills and competency and must have been available to foster and meet the training requirements. There are two routes for attaining Skills Level 2 status which acknowledges that some carers may not want to take the academic approach to their development and learning.
- 4.2 Entry to Skills Level 2 will be dependent on the foster carer(s) meeting the following criteria:

### **4.2.1 Route 1 – Where the primary carer wants to take the QCF (a more academic) route**

#### **4.2.2 Approval:**

- a) Both foster carers have met the requirements of Skills Level 1;
- b) The primary carer taking the QCF route must undertake the following QCF units as part of their choice in the first twelve months of pursuing the QCF.
  - 172 - understand the context of supporting children and young people through foster care;
  - 174 - practice as a foster carer;
  - 052 - engage in personal development in health, social care or children's and young people's settings;
- c) QCF units will be assessed by QCF Assessors to ensure consistency of standards.

#### **4.2.3 Training:**

- a) The primary and secondary carers must have completed all core training courses since attaining Skill Level 1.
- b) For carers whose matching preference is teenage placements both carers must complete the managing challenging behaviours or promoting positive behaviour and relationships training.
- c) Additionally where training has been identified in the performance review or by Fostering Panel for either one or both carers the necessary training must have been completed.

#### **4.2.4 Availability:**

- The fostering team manager is satisfied that the foster carer has been available to foster.

#### **4.2.5 Route 2 – where the primary carer wants to complete WCC modular route**

- This route will suit carers who are not currently interested in obtaining a vocational qualification, but still have the skills and experience to progress to Level 2. For these carers the expectations will be as follows:

#### **4.2.6 Approval:**

- a) Both foster carers have met the requirements of Skills Level 1;
- b) The primary carer will undertake the following WCC modules which are:
  - Module 1 - practice as a foster carer;
  - Module 2 - personal development;
  - Module 3 - supporting children and young people through foster care.
- c) Warwickshire modules will be assessed by QCF assessors within the Central Fostering Service, to ensure consistency of standards. This will also ensure that if carers choose to take up the QCF in the future the learning may be transferable.

#### **4.2.7 Training:**

- a) The primary and secondary must complete all 'core' training courses.
- b) For carers whose matching preference is teenage placements both carers must complete the managing challenging behaviours positively or promoting positive behaviour and relationships.
- c) Additionally where training has been identified in the annual performance review or by Fostering Panel for either one or both carers the training must have been completed.

#### **4.2.8 Availability**

- The fostering team manager is satisfied that the foster carer has been available to foster.



## **5. Teenage placements (teenagers are defined as 13+ placements)**

- 5.1 Foster carers who are approved as mainstream for teenage placements and who are not in the Skills Level Scheme, will be paid at Skills Level 1 during the time the teenager is in placement, provided they have attended caring for teenagers training (or online equivalent) and promoting positive behaviour and relationships training within 3 months of approval. If they have other children in placement they will only be paid Skills Level 1 for the teenager for the duration of that placement, and will receive usual payment for the other placements.
- 5.2 When a mainstream foster carer accepts a teenage placement where the young person is assessed as having high risk behaviours for example, self-harm, frequent absconding, risk of child sexual exploitation, the carer can receive a 12 week enhanced payment of £50 a week. This is a reward payment in recognition of the additional difficulties and challenges which will be presented in the early placement stages in order to achieve longer term stability for the young person in placement.
- 5.3 The eligibility for the enhanced payment will be confirmed by the Placement Hub Manager at the point of the placement being made and will be dependent upon the foster carer (s) having attended caring for teenagers training (or online equivalent) and promoting positive behaviour and relationships training. Foster carers will be required to work to the placement plan by ensuring that they support the young person in attending appointments and that they work in close partnership with the social worker and other professionals engaged in addressing the concerns. Carers will receive usual payment for the other placements.
- 5.4 This also applies to respite placements for teenagers 13+ where the young person's behaviour meets the matching matrix criteria; the carer is approved for teenagers and meets the criteria regarding training as above.
- 5.5 This additional teenager payment is not applicable to SOLO, STEPs or parent and child foster carers or Emergency Duty carers.

## **6. Solo, STEPS, ED and parent and child placements**

- 6.1 Separate payment arrangements are made to each of these fostering specialisms and payment rates are available at the point of entry onto these scheme.
- 6.2 As per all approved fostering households, specialist foster carers will be expected to:
- complete the TSD standards within 12 months of approval;
  - complete all core training within 2 years of approval and to maintain their skills and abilities;
  - update their practice by completing identified training with the view that a minimum of 2 courses per review period be completed by each approved carer in the household, one of which must be an attended training course.

## **7. Connected Persons**

*Refer to Connected Persons Procedure for further details.*

- 7.1 This guidance only applies to Connected Person carers where the plan is for the children to remain in the placement on a long term fostering basis agreed by the relevant service manager; and where the foster carers have completed all the requirements as outlined above.
- 7.2 Connected Person foster carers will be offered fostering social work support and are eligible for training in accordance with their assessed needs.

## **8. Approved foster carers who adopt with the support of the agency**

- 8.1 An adoption allowance may be payable to a former foster carer who adopt a child in their care (see [Adoption Allowance Scheme Policy](#)) once the child is confirmed as placed under the [Adoption Agencies Regulations](#) the fostering allowances and any payment for skill allowances received by the foster carer in respect of the child will cease.)
- 8.2 Where the foster carer continues to care for other children on a fostering basis any payment for skills allowances are classed as an income for the purposes of the financial assessment and could affect the adoption allowance payable.

- 8.3 Foster carers are also eligible to receive a transitional allowance equal to a maximum adoption allowance payable where they previously received a skill level payment for the child under the payment for skills scheme; and where as a consequence of adopting the child they will experience financial hardship. This allows the former foster carers to make the financial adjustments (see [Adoption Allowance Scheme Policy](#).)

## **9. Ongoing development and training for all foster carers (to maintain their skill payment)**

- 9.1 As a minimum each approved foster carer in the fostering household must attend at least 2 training courses, one of which must be live in any 12 months review period. This will be identified within supervision or the annual performance review.
- 9.2 Additionally carers must attend any training identified at their annual performance review where there are specific concerns about their skills, knowledge or practice.

## **10. Withdrawal of skills level fee**

- 10.1 The decision to suspend or reduce the skill level payment will be made by the fostering operations manager following discussion with the fostering social worker and fostering team manager.
- 10.2 Where the training criteria has not been met this may result in skill level payments being reduced or suspended until the relevant training is completed.
- 10.3 Where there has been a cause for concern or a position of trust meeting skills level fee may be reduced until recommendations have been completed. In some cases the fostering team manager will require that foster carers undertake a full reassessment of their current skills level. If a decision is made to remove a foster child due to concerns of risk then the financial arrangements in the [Allegations, Cause of Concern and Complaints against Warwickshire County Council Foster Carers guidance](#) will apply (see section 12). [Need to put in new procedures link](#)
- 10.4 Where there are significant or ongoing practice issues, skills level fee may be reduced or removed and as per 10.2 above, a full reassessment of current skills level may be undertaken.

## **11. Joining a foster home – as a partner, with a view to being jointly approved**

- 11.1 When a new adult joins the fostering household as a partner to the carer and will be equally involved in fostering that person they will be expected to complete all core training within 2 years of approval.
- 11.2 In line with national guidance, where two adults in a household are approved as foster carers, both carers must evidence that they meet the standards (as stated in the revised NMS, Standard 20.1). For partners joining a fostering household, they will be expected to complete a TSD workbook within their first 12 months of approval.
- 11.3 New partners joining a household who are approved will be expected to sign the Foster Care Agreement and will be expected to maintain the same standards as all approved foster carers.

## **12. Transferring from other local authorities/agencies**

- 12.1 Any persons applying to be a mainstream foster carer for Warwickshire, who have prior experience as a foster carer, will be considered for the Payments for Skills Scheme at their fostering approval. Entry to the Payments for Skills scheme is subject to foster care approval and the applicant(s) being able to evidence that they meet the appropriate skills level criteria. An entry is also subject to carers having given notice to their agency and are not in receipt of any other form of fostering income.

## **13. Further Information**

[Procedure: Emergency Duty Team Foster Carers](#)  
[Procedure for When a New Partner or Other Adult Joins the Fostering Household](#)  
[Solo Placement Scheme Procedure](#)  
[Smoking Guidance for Foster Carers](#)  
[Out of Hours Fostering Service - Guidance for EDT & Children's Social Care & Safeguarding Teams](#)  
[Short Term Emergency Placement \(STEPS\) - Guidance for Fostering Services](#)  
[Parent and Child Specialist Fostering Scheme](#)  
[Promoting Positive Behaviour Guidance for Foster Carers](#)  
[Applications by foster carers to adopt procedure](#)

# Appendix A – Foster Carer Approved

During first year of approval both carers to complete:

- TSD Standards
- At least two Core Training Courses 2 of which **must** be Child Protection - Safeguarding and Basic First Aid. (carers have 2 years in which to complete all core training)

N.B.

Those approved for teenagers **must** complete

- Caring for Teenagers
- Promoting Positive Behaviour & Relationships. within 3 months of approval

