



### **Kent Fostering Service Payment for Skills Policy**

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#### **Introduction**

Fostering Payments are crucial in the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the outcomes for Children in Care. There are two components to foster carer's income from fostering. The maintenance allowance is designed to cover the costs of caring for a child. All foster carers in the UK receive a maintenance payment in line with rates advised by the DFE. The second component is a professional reward which recognises the time and skills of the foster carer. Various studies demonstrate the value of paying a reward element to foster carers in recognition of the fact that fostering is complex and specialised work which requires expertise, training and experience over and above the level of skills needed for 'ordinary' parenting. Both maintenance and reward payments are reviewed annually in line with staff awards and a percentage up lift applied. There is no proposal to change this process.

#### **Background – Additional Level 1, 2 and 3 Payment for Skills**

Since 2003, Kent Fostering have paid foster carers an additional weekly payment known as Payment for Skills. There are three levels of payment based on a competency framework, devised by the Fostering Network to develop a fair and rational approach to payments for foster carers. This was a 'best practice' scheme which required that payments to foster carers were related to skills and experience, defined at three levels, and linked to the old NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) that was available for foster care: Caring for Children and Young People, Level 3. A number of payment-for-skills schemes were set up for local authority fostering services. Each scheme differed in the detail and was designed to meet the needs and budget of the commissioning fostering service, taking account existing specialist schemes and the requirement to ensure that payments did not impact on any state benefits paid to carers.

Records (Competency Assessment Framework - Guidance KCCs Strategic Commissioning Plan 2003-07) show that the KCC Payment for Skills Competency Assessment framework was introduced in recognition of the changing role of foster carers as part of the wider children's workforce and providing them with opportunities for training and skills development to meet the increasingly complex needs of looked after children and young people. The Competency Assessment Framework was meant to clarify the fostering service's expectations about the tasks that foster carers should undertake and was aimed at improving the outcomes for Children in Care. The framework has not been updated for over 10 years and is rigid in linking additional payments to qualifications, with **ALL** newly approved foster carers starting at Level 1, regardless of experience.

### **Revised Kent Fostering Payment for Skills Framework**

Kent Fostering have revised the current framework with the assistance of Kent Foster Carer Ambassadors, Fostering and Child in Care Team Managers, Service Managers and the Foster Carer Training Coordinator.

The current Payment for Skills Framework has 3 levels (1, 2 and 3). The proposal is for these levels to become Foundation, Skilled and Advanced Level to recognise and acknowledge the experience and competencies demonstrated.

There will be no change to the payment enhancements received for each level, however foster carers progressing to Skilled or Advanced Levels will receive 2 additional days holiday entitlement each year over the standard 14 days that all KCC foster carers receive.

N.B. The skilled level payments are increased annually in line with any increase to foster carer payments.

- **Foundation Level** (Currently Level 1)

A foster carer who is competently fulfilling the expected role of a foster carer and meeting the National Minimum Standards, Training and Development Standards. A Foundation Level carer will receive standard fostering payments per child placed and the standard 14 days holiday entitlement.

- **Skilled Level** (Currently Level 2)

A foster carer who is competently fulfilling the expected role of a foster carer to the skilled level, meeting the National Minimum Standards, Training and Development Standards **and** actively supporting the in-house fostering community and promoting the wider service.

A Skilled Level carer receives an additional amount per week, per child placed, plus 2 additional days holiday to the standard 14 days holiday entitlement (16 days in total) for a period of 1 year following an appropriately evidenced Annual Review.

- **Advanced Level** (Currently Level 3)

A foster carer who is competently fulfilling the expected role of a foster carer to an advanced level, meeting the National Minimum Standards, Training and Development Standards **and** actively supporting the fostering community at a high standard and level of commitment. Advanced Level foster carers would be regularly involved in the recruitment and retention of foster carers across the county.

An Advanced Level carer receives an additional amount per week, per child placed, plus 2 additional days holiday to the standard 14 days holiday entitlement (16 days in total) for a period of 1 year following an appropriately evidenced Annual Review.

*The 2 additional holiday days granted should be taken with a Nominated Relief Carer unless identified during supervision as not achievable.*

N.B Refer to Appendix 1: Payment for Skills Criteria

### **Payment for Skills Process**

The payment for skills levels are achieved through meeting the mandatory requirements for all KCC foster carers alongside providing additional supporting evidence as identified below:

#### **Mandatory Requirements for all KCC foster carers.**

- All foster carers should evidence meeting the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011) as part of their Annual Review and ongoing supervision.
- Support group attendance is expected to be at a minimum of 8 per year for all KCC foster carers.
- All KCC foster carers are also expected to meet the mandatory and minimum training requirements, along with training identified within their Personal Development Plan.

### **Additional Evidence Statement**

To progress to Skilled and Advanced Levels, foster carers are expected to evidence additional knowledge, skills and working over and above the day to day fostering role to benefit the children they care for, other children and foster carers within the service and the wider service. This statement will evidence foster carers current practice, how they have implemented the practice and the impact for the child or children within the service.

#### **Additional evidence needed to achieve Skilled Level:**

- Level 3 Diploma or Relevant Transferable training + 2 years active fostering experience **or** 5 years relevant fostering experience.
- In addition to the above foster carers will be required to provide a written statement demonstrating their fostering practice over the last year which was over and above the Foundation Level.

#### **Additional evidence needed to achieve Advanced Level:**

- Level 4 Diploma or Relevant Transferable Training + 5 years active fostering experience **or** 10 years relevant fostering experience.

- In addition to the above foster carers will be required to provide a written statement demonstrating their fostering practice over the last year which was over and above the Foundation and Skilled Level.

The additional evidence can be from work undertaken with children looked after by the foster carer or through the support the foster carer has provided for other foster carers and work within the wider service that is above and beyond the Foundation Level.

N.B Refer to Appendix 1: Payment for Skills Criteria

### **What does this mean for our Connected Carers?**

KCC's policy is that whenever Connected Persons foster carers are approved on the same terms as 'non-related/mainstream' foster carers they should be paid the full fostering payments with the expectation that they would meet the same conditions as non-related/mainstream foster carers. These include participation in preparation training, requirements for record keeping, continuing training, and attendance at support groups.

### **What does it mean for foster carers who are approved jointly and who both foster on a full-time basis?**

Foster carers who both foster full time can achieve progression through payment for skills levels by evidencing that they both have the required years' fostering experience and can demonstrate how their skills and competencies between them benefit the children they care for, other children, foster carers within the service and the wider service.

If progressing through the skills levels following completion of the Level 3 Diploma, Level 4 Diploma or evidence of relevant transferable training, implementation of the learning and development would be evidenced by the foster carer who completed the training demonstrating how this has benefited the children they care for, other children, foster carers and the wider service. Both foster carers can use additional individual evidence of their contribution to the wider service within the supporting statement.

### **Payment for Skills Approval Process**

Foster Carers who wish to progress to Skilled or Advanced Level or remain at these levels will be required to provide an additional statement to demonstrate and evidence how they have met or continue to meet the required criteria for Payment for Skills.

### **Process from Annual Review**

The Annual Review will consider if the foster carer has met the required criteria or not and a recommendation will be made for the foster carer to remain on the current level, progress to a higher level or revert to a lower level depending on the evidence provided.

### **Process following transfer from an Independent Fostering Agency or Other Local Authority**

Payment for Skills Levels would be recommended by the assessing social worker completing the Kent Fostering full approval assessment report. The foster carer

transferring would be required to meet the same criteria as KCC foster carers, either through achieving the relevant qualifications or years of experience alongside evidencing that they have met the skilled and advanced level requirements with their previous agency.

### **Process In between Annual Reviews**

Foster carers can be considered for progression to Skilled or Advanced Level in between their Annual Reviews. This can be achieved following completion of the relevant qualification, evidence that this learning has been implemented into practice and recommendation from the last annual review that the foster carer was working towards a higher level with the support of the Fostering Team Manager and Fostering Reviewing Officer.

### **Process for reviewing Skills Level if there are concerns about the standard by which the foster carer is achieving.**

Where there are concerns foster carers are not working to the expected criteria for Skilled or Advanced Level, their status should be reviewed via the payment for skills panel. This will either be following a recommendation from the annual review or if the foster carers approval has been subject to presentation to the fostering panel.

### **Process of Appealing Payment for Skills Level decisions**

If foster carers are not in agreement with the outcome decision following presentation to the Payment for Skills Panel, they are able to make written representation back to the next available Payment for Skills Panel. Foster Carers will need to provide additional information at this time, however, payments will be amended following the initial agency decision makers decision.

N.B Refer to Appendix 2: Payment for Skills Process Flowchart & Appendix 4: Annual Review Form

### **Payment for Skills Panel**

Payment for Skills evidence is presented to the Payment for Skills Panel. The documents include the foster carers annual review report, additional statement of evidence and Fostering Social Workers supporting statement. In the case of foster carers transferring to Kent this would be agreed at the point of approval through Kent Fostering Panels.

The Payment for Skills Panel meets on a quarterly basis. The Payment for Skills Panel is chaired by an Independent Panel Chair. The membership includes an experienced foster carer and 2 Fostering Team Managers. The Panel's recommendation is forwarded to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Head of Fostering and will make the final decision on the foster carers agreed level.

N.B: Refer to Appendix 5,6,7: Payment for Skills Panel documents