

# Kent Fostering 'Payment for Skills'

## Policy

### Integrated Children's Services

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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. Both maintenance and reward payments are reviewed annually and a percentage up lift applied.

## Payment for Skills Framework

The Payment for Skills Framework has 3 levels (Foundation, Skilled and Advanced) to recognise and acknowledge the experience and competencies demonstrated.

### Foundation Level

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

A foster carer who is competently fulfilling the expected role of a foster carer to a 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

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.*

## Payment for Skills Process

All foster carers will begin fostering at Foundation Level, unless they are existing foster carers and can evidence, they are currently working at Skilled or Advanced Level.

At each Annual Review foster carers will be expected to evidence that they are meeting the mandatory requirements as set out below for all KCC foster carers.

### 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 Annual Review.

### 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, through the support the foster carer has provided to other foster carers and work within the wider service that is above and beyond the Foundation Level.

The Skills Level will be assessed each year as part of a carers Annual Review and foster carers will need to continue to provide evidence to demonstrate which level they are working at as part of their annual review evidence.

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. This will then need to be presented to the Payment for Skills Panel and ADM for a final decision.

Foster carers can be considered for progression to Skilled or Advanced Level at any time, provided that the Fostering Reviewing Officer supports in the most recent Annual Review that a higher skills level was being worked towards and the Foster Carer

demonstrates all criteria has been met at the time of submitting evidence to the Payment for Skills Panel.

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

Payment for Skills Levels would be assessed and recommended by the assessing social worker completing the transfer foster carers assessment. 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 or advanced level requirements with their previous agency.

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

Where there are concerns that foster carers are not working to the expected criteria for Skilled or Advanced Level following a recommendation from the Annual Review or where their approval as a foster carer has been presented to the fostering panel, their status will be reviewed via the payment for skills panel and payments reduce from this date.

However, provided that a recommendation for a carers Payment for Skills Level to reduce has been fully discussed with and is agreed by them at their Annual Review, there is no need for this to be presented to Payment for Skills Panel and payments can reduce at a date recommended by their Fostering Reviewing Officer. Payments will usually reduce in these circumstances from the date the Annual Review is signed off by the Reviewing Team Manager.

### 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 can make written representation to the next available Payment for Skills Panel. Any amendment to payment will be made on the date of this panel where the outcome decision is made.

### 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, any additional statement of evidence and Fostering Social Workers supporting statement.

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 two Fostering Team Managers. The Nominated Decision Maker will make the final decision on the foster carers agreed level.

## 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 requirements as non-related/mainstream foster carers. Connected Carers can also choose to progress through the Payment for Skills Levels in the same way as non-related/mainstream carers.

## 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.

## Appendix 1

### Foster Carer Payment for Skills Levels

This evidence should include how carers have used their skills and experience with children and young people with complex and challenging needs.

#### Foundation

- Standard fostering payments
- 14 days Holiday Payment

Mandatory requirements for all KCC foster carers:

- Evidence should be supplied to cover the NMS as required in the Annual Review Form.
- Support group attendance minimum of 8 per year.
- Mandatory and minimum training requirements.

#### Skilled

- Additional Skilled payment per week, per child placed
- 16 days Holiday Payment

Mandatory requirements for all KCC foster carers:

- Evidence should be supplied to cover the NMS as required in the Annual Review Form.
- Support group attendance minimum of 8 per year.

- Mandatory and minimum training requirements.

Additional evidence needed to achieve Skilled Level:

- Level 3 Diploma or relevant transferable training plus 2 years fostering experience.

OR

- 5 years relevant fostering experience.

ALL CARERS NEED TO ALSO

- Provide a written statement demonstrating your fostering practice over the last year covering:
- 4 of the Child Focused Evidence Criteria.
- 3 of the Wider Service Contribution Evidence Criteria.

#### Advanced

- Additional Advanced payment per week, per child placed
- 16 days Holiday Payment

Mandatory requirements for all KCC Foster Carers

- Evidence should be supplied to cover the NMS as required in the Annual Review Form.
- Support group attendance minimum of 8 per year.
- Mandatory and minimum training requirements.

Additional evidence needed to achieve Advanced Level

- Level 4 Diploma or relevant transferable training plus 5 years fostering experience.

OR

- 10 years relevant fostering experience.

ALL CARERS NEED TO ALSO

- Provide a written statement demonstrating your fostering practice over the last year covering:
- All of the Child Focused Evidence Criteria
- 7 of the Wider Service Contribution Evidence Criteria.

## Appendix 2

### Kent Fostering Service

#### Payment for Skills Level Criteria

#### Child Focused Evidence Criteria

This criterion can be evidenced with work undertaken with the children looked after by you or through the support you provide for other foster carers and within the wider service above and beyond the Foundation Level. This evidence should include how carers have used their skills and experience with children and young people with complex and challenging needs.

- For **Skilled Level** you are required to provide **4** different examples of evidence from the criteria below.
- For **Advanced Level** you are required to provide different examples of evidence for **all** the criteria below.

Your statement will need to detail what the identified need was, what you did and your reflection on how this benefitted children/young people with complex and challenging needs, benefitted other carers and improved practice within the service in Kent.

#### Sense of Belonging

How have you promoted the sense of belonging for children in a way that has had a positive impact for their outcomes?

For example, how have you supported children in your care or supported others to ensure that children have a sense of belonging in their placement and community through placement stability, transition to adulthood, Staying Put, Lifelong Links, participation at events, sustained relationships with birth / foster family and friends.

#### Advocacy

How have you advocated, over and above, for the needs of children in a way that has had a positive impact on their outcome and / or on the wider service or fostering community?

For example, through your advocacy for one child, has it affected the opportunities of others, this could be through the experience you gained to benefit others or by the outcome of the advocacy opening doors to more than just the child concerned. How did you research, document, provide evidence and influence outcomes to ensure informed opinions are heard.

#### Knowledge and Skills

How have you recognised a need to gain new knowledge and skills or use existing knowledge and skills to improve your practice as a foster carer with the children in your care or others in the wider community within Fostering?

For example, using a high level of understanding for educational, child development issues, processes and practices and that you have imparted this information or knowledge to provide support that has directly benefitted outcomes for children within the wider service. This may have had a positive impact or highlighted a gap in services.



## Creativity

How have you been creative within your role as a Foster Carer to benefit a child, children and the wider service?

For example, how have you thought 'outside of the box' to resolve a difficulty? Give examples as to how you have recognised, suggested, committed to and engaged with innovative productive ways of working to enable and support better outcomes for children.

## Flexibility

How have you been flexible in your role as a foster carer to enable an improved outcome for a child, children and the wider service?

For example, how you have adjusted your views, working practices and extended your experiences. With consideration towards complex and challenging behaviours, contact arrangements and supporting placement stability.

## Resilience

How have you been resilient within your role as a foster carer?

For example, reflect on what you have found difficult this year, whilst recognising what has been learnt, how you gained improved insight, understanding and commitment to the child. Consider any future vulnerabilities or strengths gained.

## Wider Service Contribution Evidence Criteria

This criterion can be evidenced with work undertaken within the wider service.

- For **Skilled Level** you are required to provide evidence for **3** examples.
- For **Advanced Level** you are required to provide evidence of **7** examples.

Your statement will need to detail the reason for your contribution and your reflection on how this benefitted children with complex and challenging needs, benefitted other carers and improved practice within the service in Kent and the wider fostering community.

Please include the following information to evidence active and ongoing involvement: What you did, who did you work with, when you did it and for how long and what was the benefit for the fostering service.

## Mentor and Support Other Carers

- The ability and commitment to mentor/counsel other foster carers going through the assessment process or newly approved foster carers.
- The ability and commitment to mentor/counsel other foster carers facing challenging situations and/or undertaking peer support for other foster carers subject to a formal allegation or complaint

- Provide support to carers in specialised areas i.e., Adoption and Special Guardianship as requested by Fostering Social Worker or the service.
- Be an active member of KFCA, supporting events and initiatives in collaboration with Kent Fostering Service.
- Improve or provide opportunities for fostering families and/or CiC in your area (excluding KFCA).

### **Promote KCC Fostering Recruitment**

- Support Kent Fostering recruitment at Recruitment Events on at least two occasions i.e., participating at Information Evenings/Events, Information Stands, Media events.
- Showcasing and promoting the recruitment of foster carers and the fostering service through social media, word of mouth, direct contact and advertising in your own community and referral of new applicants.
- Co-facilitate Skills to Foster training or participation at Skills to Foster training participation evenings.

### **Promote Learning and Development Within the Service**

- Co-facilitate foster carer Support Groups, new Foster Carer Support Groups, training events for staff and foster carers.
- Provide support to other foster carers with training i.e., IT, completing TSD portfolio, Diplomas etc. as requested by Fostering Social Worker.

### **Contribute to the Wider Service Development**

- Support Kent Fostering with additional roles i.e., Foster Carer Ambassador, Practice Development Groups, Area Focus Groups, County Advisory Board and other formal identified working groups.
- Undertake independent (agreed and approved) tasks to improve or support the wider service.
- Support Kent Fostering through inspections e.g., OFSTED or be involved with promoting and supporting Fostering on a national basis (outside Kent).
- Be involved in staff recruitment or interview panels for Kent Fostering and the wider service.

## **Appendix 3 Kent Fostering Service Payment for Skills Process**

### **Foster carers meeting the requirements for Skilled or Advanced level evidenced at the Annual Review.**

1. Payment for skills (P4S) statement of evidence completed within the annual review and skills level agreed by Team Manager and Fostering Reviewing Officer (FRO).
2. Annual Review, P4S statement of evidence and Fostering Social Worker (FSW) report presented to the P4S Panel.
3. P4S Panel recommends skills level achieved.
4. P4S Decision Maker (DM) makes final decision. If skills level agreed, payments will be amended from the date of Panel.

### **Foster carers transferring from IFA or OLA who meet Skilled or Advanced level requirements.**

1. P4S statement of evidence completed within the Kent Transfer Assessment, skills level agreed by Assessment Team Manager at QA.
2. Kent Transfer Assessment presented to Kent Fostering Panel.
3. Fostering Panel makes recommendation on approval including P4S Level.
4. Fostering Panel ADM makes decision about approval including P4S Level.

### **Foster carers meeting requirements for Skilled or Advanced level between Annual Reviews.**

1. P4S statement of evidence completed demonstrating criteria is met.
2. Annual Review, P4S statement of evidence and FSW report presented to the P4S Panel.
3. P4S Panel recommends skills level.
4. P4S Panel recommends skills level.

### **Foster carers are not maintaining the requirements & are not in agreement with reduction in level.**

1. Level reviewed following recommendation from the Annual Review or following a complaint, allegation or standards of care issue.
2. Annual Review, P4S statement of evidence and FSW report presented to the P4S Panel.
3. P4S Panel makes recommendation about reduction in skills level.
4. P4S DM makes the decision and payments are amended from the date of P4S Panel. Any appeal would be in writing to the next P4S Panel.

### **Foster carers are not maintaining the requirements and agree to a reduction in Skills level**

1. Discussion at Annual Review with carers, FSW and Reviewing Officer.
2. Reviewing Officer recommends and agrees with the Foster Carers a reduction in Skills Level.
3. Review Team Manager confirms change and payments amended from the date the review report was authorised.