

Kent County Council

Step Across to Fostering

Kent Fostering Service



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Introduction

A small number of our children and young people in care, are placed within a residential children's home due to the complexity of their needs during a specific period in their childhood. For some, past adverse trauma and their family experiences may lead to poor emotional and mental health expressed through their behaviour. They are often highly vulnerable children who may exhibit behaviours that carers will require additional support with, such as placing themselves or others at risk. Our ethos is that wherever possible and if it is safe to do so, children should be cared for within a family environment. Therapeutic care provided by the residential setting, should form the basis of a care plan that works towards preparing the child to transition to a family home. Once a child is ready to be cared for within a family and all options for a kinship carer have been explored, then a referral will be made for an in house foster carer. In Kent we call this **Step Across to Fostering**.

Eligibility

The child must be under the age of 16 with agreement from the professional network that their needs can be met safely within a family home. There must be an updated detailed referral and positive profile completed for the child. For young people over the age of 16, that continue to have care needs that need to be met within a family, a referral will be made for a Kent Supported Homes host.

Care and Support Plan

Carers will need to be resilient, patient and child centred but above all, will need to understand the importance of stability and permanence and be willing to stick with the child, to achieve this. We recognise that the transition for these children and the families who care for them is important if the long-term ambition of a permanent family home is to be achieved. The suggested stages for a 4-6 week transition plan and elements of the support that will need to be available are:

Matching: Effective matching is crucial. This will be initiated through the sharing of a comprehensive referral and a positive profile of the child. This will be followed by discussion with those in the professional network to obtain a wide range of information before proceeding with the match. A profile of the foster family must be shared with the child/young person as part of the transition planning.

Joint Planning with the residential setting: This will include discussion and observation of the child prior to proceeding with meeting the child and staff. The foster carer will be able to observe the child's relationships with both staff and other children. This will support the carer to understand routines, sharing of behavioural management techniques, getting to know the child's triggers to behaviours, what makes them happy, sad, angry, what they like to eat etc. This will require an ability by the foster carer to travel to the residential setting¹.

¹ See financial summary for rates

Planned move: It is anticipated that there will be several visits to and from the child prior to the child moving home. This may include overnight visits and possibly contact with the child and their birth family or those that they have significant relationships with. The liaison between the residential staff and the carer(s) will enable a positive ending, to lead on to a new beginning and maximise stability going forward.

Fee: The carer will be paid a retainer payment equivalent to the higher-rate reward payment once the match is confirmed. If the carer has any vacant beds once the child is placed, the higher-level rate retainer payment will be made for one bed only for a four-week period to help support the child settle into the home and avoid another child being placed at the same time. Mileage/travel costs² will be paid during the liaison with the residential setting at 45p per mile or the cost of public transport. From the date the child moves into the home, the carer(s) will be paid the complex enhanced rate for the first 18 months. The complex rate will then be reviewed by the area Access to Resources Panel every three months.

Professional Network: The carer(s) will be a valued member of the professional network and will be required to work with all members of the network; Social Workers, Children's & Adolescent Mental Health services, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Education, Placement Stability Team, and the Virtual School Kent (VSK). We recognise the importance of ensuring education for our children both in terms of learning, socialisation, and routine. Where education is not in place VSK will support to prioritise identifying an appropriate educational setting and must be included in the early transition planning, to include liaising with SEND for children with an EHCP. If a change of school will be required due to the location of the foster carer, consideration must be given around the timing of this for the child.

Summary of Support

- For the first 8 weeks, the carer(s) will have regular minimum two weekly visits or contact from the Child's Social Worker and/or the allocated Fostering Social Worker (FSW) or Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). A Social Work Assistant will be linked to the foster carers to provide additional support and advice at key times.
- A therapist from the Special Guardianship and Therapeutic Support Team will be available to support the carers to better understand the young person's behaviour, what drives it and to think about how to best manage the presenting behaviour. Where a child requires direct therapy sessions, there will need to be a referral made to Children's Mental Health Services.
- Specific support groups and training in working with teenagers are available for the carer(s) to attend to provide additional support and learning.
- An experienced Foster Carer Sessional Worker will be identified offer up to 15 hours a week support to work with the child and support the main carer. There will need to be flexibility regarding when this support is accessed, dependent on the education offer to the child.
- Kent Fostering Out of Hours and County Out of Hours will prioritise calls from carers in the Step Across Scheme.

² See financial section

- The main foster carer(s) will be able to access 3 days respite support per month via an identified Kent County Council foster carer. From September 2024 it is anticipated that the 'Mockingbird Program' may be able to be part of the support offered to Step Across to Fostering families.
- For disabled children, dependent on their needs, there will be agreement that respite of 3 days respite support per month will be available through the Short Breaks Units. This could include overnight stays where appropriate for the child and will need to be part of the child's transition planning to ensure this respite offer can be achieved.
- All respite support offered via the Step Across to Fostering Scheme is additional to the standard holiday entitlement offered to all KCC Foster Carers.
- The role of all KCC staff within the child's network is to work together to support the carer(s) in providing security and stability for the child to enable them to live within a family home.

Summary of Fostering Payments (2023 Rates)

At point of match

1. **£258.63 per week** retainer (equivalent to the higher rate reward) paid from point of match, throughout introductory period, up until child moves into the foster home.
2. If carers have any vacancies within their current terms of approval **£258.63 per week** paid for a maximum of 4 weeks for one vacant bed only to support the settling in period.
3. **45p per mile** for all travel incurred during the introductory period.

At point of moving in:

1. **£258.63 per week** higher rate reward regardless of the age of the child paid from the point the child moves into the foster home.
2. Age related maintenance paid from the point the child moves into the foster home.
3. **£258.63 per week** complex payment for the first eighteen months, this will then be reviewed by the Access to Resource Panel.
4. **45p per mile** for all travel in accordance with the mileage policy for foster carers.

Tax Implications for Foster Carers

As the scheme offers foster carers retention payments alongside their reward fee and maintenance, carers will be required to seek advice on any tax implications this may have.

Weekly summary of foster payments for Step Across to Fostering 2023
Rates (without retainers or vacancy payments)

Foundation Level Carer			
Age	9 to 10 years	11 to 15 years	16 to 18 years
Maintenance Payment	£202.71	£231.99	£270.66
Reward Payment	£258.63	£258.63	£258.63
Complex Payment	£258.63	£258.63	£258.63
Total Per Week	£719.97	£749.25	£787.92
Skilled Level Carer			
Maintenance Payment	£202.71	£231.99	£270.66
Reward Payment	£283.34	£283.34	£283.34
Complex Payment	£258.63	£258.63	£258.63
Total per Week	£744.68	£773.96	£812.63
Advanced Level Carer			
Maintenance Payment	£202.71	£231.99	£270.66
Reward Payment	£320.36	£320.36	£320.36
Complex Payment	£258.63	£258.63	£258.63
Total per Week	£781.70	£810.98	£849.65

Settling in and Retention Payments

Foster Carers will receive:

Timescale	Amount
Paid at end of month one: One off "Settling-In Payment"	£5,000
4th Month Retention Reward Payment	£2,500
8th Month Retention Reward Payment	£2,500
12th Month Retention Reward Payment	£2,500
18th Month Retention Reward Payment	£2,500
Additional payments at end of 18th month	£15,000
TOTAL	

What happens if a child moves from the foster carer(s) during the 18 months?

The scheme is based on an 18-month commitment from the foster carer to care for the child and if appropriate that this will then be extended to offer them a longer-term home. It is acknowledged that in exceptional circumstances a child may have to be moved, where they can no longer be safely cared for within a family home. In these circumstances, payments to the carer will be ended on the date of moving on. No further retention payments will be made. Foster carers are requested to give 28 days' notice to end the child's care, to facilitate a planned move. A Placement Stability meeting should be convened if there is any suggestion that the child's placement is becoming fragile.

There will be no expectation for foster carers to repay any of the retention payments that they have already received for the care of the child.