

Southampton City Council

Foster Carer Allowances and Payments Policy

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¹ Subject to any review prompted by a significant change in legislation, regulations or statutory guidance.

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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to set out the framework of financial support that foster carers receive from Southampton City Council. It details the allowances, fees and other payments that will be paid to foster carers and what this money is expected to be used for. It also explains the circumstances in which additional, discretionary payments can be made.

The basic principles of this policy are:

- To pay allowances to approved foster carers for children who are looked after (in care or accommodated) and placed with them by Southampton City Council. This includes immediate placements made with connected persons under Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
- All allowances are based on the needs of the child placed and financial resources available to Southampton City Council.
- It recognises the complex task of fostering other people's children.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following: -

Fostering Services Regulations 2011:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/581/made>

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf

2. SCOPE

This policy covers all foster carers, including connected persons foster carers (formerly known in Southampton as Friends & Family Carers), approved by Southampton City Council Fostering Service.

In addition, some elements of this policy are relevant for those connected persons foster carers who are temporarily approved as foster carers under Regulation 24 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 and some elements relate to those temporarily approved under Regulation 25A of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 in relation to Fostering for Adoption placements – see also Fostering for Adoption Policy (Adopt South).

This policy only applies to children who are looked after and placed by Southampton City Council. Looked After Children placed by another local authority with Southampton City Council foster carers will be subject to that Local Authority's policies regarding funding for Looked After Children and foster carers.

3. FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO FOSTER CARERS

Southampton City Council offers a range of financial support to foster carers:

- An all-inclusive, weekly, age-related child maintenance allowance is paid to all foster carers. This is set at a level to reimburse the carer for all costs associated with caring for a foster child, which is equal to the Government recommended minimum allowance.
- A Carer's Skill fee to recognise the skills and commitment required by foster carers who have completed the Skills to Foster preparation course and who have been approved by Southampton City Councils' Fostering Panel. (This fee is dependent upon on the Carers skills and experience and is independent of the costs of caring for a child). Details of the Level Scheme can be found separately.

3.1 WEEKLY AGE-RELATED MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCES

This allowance is provided to cover the day-to-day costs of looking after a child in placement. For example, it covers the costs of accommodating the child in the home, food and associated household bills, basic entertainment and activity costs, clothing costs, and other general items. The weekly maintenance allowance also covers some transportation costs.

All child maintenance allowances are payable to maintain the young person and are payable on an age-related scale.

Age	Child Maintenance Allowance 23/24 (as agreed by DfE)	Child Maintenance Allowance 24/25 (as agreed by DfE)
0 – 2 years	£171	£183 minus £5 for savings
3 – 4 years	£171	£189 minus £5 for savings
5 – 10 years	£195	£208 minus £5 for savings
11 – 15 years	£229.53	£238 minus £10 for savings
16+ years	£279.21	£279.21 minus £10 for savings

A more detailed breakdown by expenditure of the fostering allowance has not been produced. This is based on the principle advocated by Fostering Network that an exact breakdown of allowances is overly prescriptive, and the expenditure should be made on the needs of the specific child and the foster carer using their professional judgment. Foster carers are not expected to spend the total fostering allowance each week and should use some discretion to allocate proportions of the allowance depending on the needs of the child over the course of the year.

It is expected that Carers provide all food, basic toiletries, clothing, school equipment, transport to and from education, contact and therapy and that they support the child's leisure activities. It is also expected that Carers celebrate the child's efforts and achievements including buying small gifts or funding a special treat as appropriate to the child's age and the situation.

If there are specific equipment or social needs that cannot be met due to financial constraints these should be identified within Placement Agreement Meetings or Child in Care Reviews.

Discussion between Foster Carers and their Supervising Social Workers should determine how the money is divided up. It is good practice for Foster Carers to record the amount spent on clothing, personal items, gifts, leisure activities (including treats and days out) and transport, in order to ensure that this is a transparent process. It is advised that foster carers keep receipts for these expenses.

The amount paid for the weekly maintenance allowance will be over or equivalent to the DfE and Fostering Network recommendations on the minimum allowance. This will be reviewed yearly.

What's included and what's not included in the weekly maintenance allowance?

Item	What's included?	What's not included?
Household expenditure	The weekly maintenance allowance covers extra electricity, gas or other fuel, normal wear and tear on household items, maintenance and redecoration of the foster child's bedroom.	

<p>Clothing and Footwear</p>	<p>There is no initial clothing grant.</p> <p>The weekly maintenance allowance provides for basic clothing and footwear. The foster carer is responsible for maintaining and replacing the child's clothing (from their on-going weekly fostering allowance) on an on-going basis.</p> <p>The clothing allowance can be used flexibly by the foster carer to buy clothes directly for younger children; or be given to older children / young people on a weekly/monthly basis to purchase their own clothing. Older young people should be encouraged to take responsibility for some of this allowance as part of their developing independence skills and learning to budget.</p> <p>The use of the clothing allowance should be set out in the child/young person's placement agreement meeting and agreed by the foster carer, supervising social workers and the child/young person's social worker.</p> <p>Children's feet should be regularly measured and specially fitted up to the age of 13 or older if advised by Health or Southampton City Council, as children's feet can be damaged long term by poorly fitting shoes.</p> <p>Foster carers of young people aged sixteen and over should ensure that the young person has enough suitable clothing and footwear for formal interview situations, education, training or employment opportunities and for their future move to independence.</p> <p>Foster carers are expected to evidence how the clothing allowance is being used, especially when the child has a sufficient 'wardrobe'. It may be appropriate for the clothing allowance to be saved or spent on other things for the child following discussion and agreement with the child's social worker and/or the SSW.</p>	<p>It is accepted that some children and young people come into foster care with inadequate or insufficient clothing and footwear and it is not possible to obtain this from the birth parents. In such cases the foster carer may, following discussion with the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) and/or Fostering Service Manager purchase some emergency clothing up to the value of £150 and claim for this separately via the Supervising Social Worker on production of receipts or evidence of purchase.</p> <p>When a young person leaves a placement his/her Social Worker will check that he/she is in possession of sufficient clothing.</p> <p>It is expected that any child leaving a placement, whether to return home or to move to a new placement will have a full wardrobe of clothes and appropriate personal items for his/her age plus a holdall/case(s) into which to pack his/her belongings.</p> <p>In no circumstances should plastic bin bags be used for transporting children's belongings. Alternative disposable holdalls are available to use when a child's belongings do not all fit into their suitcase / holdalls. It is the responsibility of the Foster Carer to ensure that a child's belongings are prepared.</p>
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School uniform and school branded clothing	<p>The weekly maintenance allowance is intended to cover the general and ongoing costs of school uniform. When a child joins a new school or changes school, the social worker should discuss with the foster carer what uniform items, sports clothing and school equipment is necessary.</p> <p>Many items of uniform, equipment and sports clothing can transfer from one school to another but should be replaced when outgrown or worn out.</p>	<p>School uniform may be funded separately when a change of school occurs or when additional, high cost, school branded clothing is required.</p> <p>This is considered on a case-by-case basis by the SSW and the Fostering Service Manager in discussion with the child's social worker.</p>
Hobbies, extracurricular activities, clubs and sports	<p>Children who are looked after should be encouraged to maintain or take-up hobbies, sports and other activities, including the membership of organisations such as Scouts or Guides or a sports team or weekly sporting activity, including swimming lessons and any on-going swimming sessions.</p> <p>Where appropriate and in line with the child's Care Plan, they should be helped to develop new special interests and skills. Such activities are likely to improve a child's self-esteem and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Where additional finance is required to support specific, high cost activities, the foster carer must discuss this with the child's social worker before agreeing any funding.</p> <p>The Fostering Service Manager may authorise additional payments after discussion with the child's social worker and in line with the child's Care Plan. Such payments must be reviewed at each statutory looked after child review meeting.</p>
	<p>Children and young people should be encouraged to take part in at least one social activity each week. The cost of these activities is included within the weekly maintenance allowance.</p> <p>The cost of swimming lessons should be taken from the weekly maintenance allowance and CANNOT be claimed for separately, unless the lessons for a child with a Special Educational Need or a physical disability requiring specialist teaching at a higher cost.</p>	

Travelling expenses	<p>The first 60 miles a week of travel per child is included in the weekly maintenance allowance.</p> <p>This mileage will include travel to and from school, activities solely for the child, contact with family members and statutory and/or medical appointments for the child.</p> <p>Other than in exceptional circumstances, children at secondary school, aged 11+, should be encouraged to make their own way to school by bus, bicycle or foot. If carers, or the child, are anxious about travelling an unfamiliar route to school by bus, if they have passed their cycling proficiency test, and the foster carers have discussed with them the safest route to school, and they have a helmet, they should be safe to travel to school by bike.</p> <p>Bus passes should be bought by foster carers from the weekly maintenance allowance.</p>	<p>Mileage in excess of 60 miles a week per child, can be claimed at a rate of 45p per mile via the SSW on the mileage claim form.</p> <p>Where carers are caring for more than one child they will be expected to demonstrate that they have <u>exceeded the total mileage allowance for all children in their care</u> before they can submit a claim for additional mileage.</p> <p>Mileage and/or other travel expenses where the activity or event is for the whole fostering family/household cannot be claimed.</p> <p>Any other exceptional travel expenses in connection with the child, may be paid, subject to the approval of the Fostering Service Manager.</p> <p>Other travelling expenses in respect of the fostering role are not included in the weekly maintenance allowance and can be claimed separately – e.g. bus or train fares, car parking charges in relation to fostering activities, meetings or training. Any additional travel expenses should be discussed with the SSW prior to travelling.</p>
Gifts	<p>Any gifts given to the child by the foster carer without prior consultation with their Supervising Social Worker should not be funded from the weekly maintenance allowance.</p>	<p>An allowance equivalent to one week's fostering allowance is payable to foster carers as appropriate for the child's age, in respect of: Birthdays and Christmas or other religious festivals.</p> <p>Please see below for details.</p>
Holidays	<p>Please see additional information below in regard to Holiday Allowance</p>	<p>Foster carers are expected to take a child/ren on holiday with them and their family. There is no expectation that this holiday be abroad.</p> <p>Please see below for details of the Summer Holiday Allowance.</p>

<p>Education trips, residential trips and holidays with clubs and organisations</p>	<p>Any costs associated with a daytime school trip within Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 are included in the weekly maintenance allowance.</p>	<p>It may be important for a child's social, emotional and educational development to take part in residential school trips and holidays, youth organisation camps and similar activities.</p> <p>Where such an activity is seen to meet a child's need the child's social worker and/or Team Manager, may authorise payment of all or part of the cost. It may be appropriate for the child to contribute towards such activities and save towards them. Only one educational trip will usually be agreed at each education Key Stage.</p> <p>The Fostering Service is unable to agree additional funding if the expenditure is not agreed by the child's social worker and/or Team Manager and is not part of the child's Care Plan.</p>
<p>Other educational costs</p>	<p>Standard materials that are required for a child's school attendance are included within the weekly maintenance allowance. This includes, school bags, PE bags, lockers, pens, pencils, paper, folders, basic maths equipment, basic art equipment etc...</p>	<p>If specific items are required over and above those deemed as standard, foster carers should contact their supervising social worker regarding payments for 'one off' educational situations prior to making a purchase.</p> <p>All Looked after Children aged between 4 and 15 years are also entitled to 'Pupil Premium' funding. Pupil Premium funding should be used to raise the attainment of Looked after Children and close the gap between them and their peers. The grant allocation for Looked after Children is managed by the individual school to be used for the benefit of the Looked after Child's educational needs as described in their Personal Education Plan (PEP).</p> <p>Foster carers are encouraged to take an active role in negotiating how this funding is spent and</p>

		should discuss these ideas with their supervising social worker and the Virtual School.
Holiday Clubs, play schemes, day camps and school holiday activities (both at home and when on holiday away from home.	The weekly maintenance allowance provides for the provision of clubs and activities during term time and for part of the school holiday periods. However, children should not spend all of their school breaks in play schemes, unless there are special circumstances agreed with the supervising social worker and children's social worker.	<p>In exceptional circumstances additional funding may be available to support a child or young person attending an activity or Play Scheme during the school holidays.</p> <p>This is only after consultation and agreement with the child's social worker and agreement given that this would be in the child's best interests.</p> <p>The Fostering Service is unable to agree additional funding if the expenditure is not already agreed by the child's social worker and/or Team Manager and is not part of the child's Care Plan.</p>

Pocket money	<p>Pocket money is included in the weekly maintenance allowance and should be given to children for their own use (age appropriately) from the weekly maintenance allowance. It should not be to pay for regular entertainment, clothes or personal toiletries.</p> <p>0-4 years - £0 per week 5-9 years - £5 per week 10-12 years - £10 per week 13 – 14 years - £12 per week 15+ - £15 per week</p> <p>If the foster carers do not provide the full guidance amount of pocket money to the child or young person, it can be deposited into the child or young person's savings account.</p>	
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Savings	<p>Currently foster carers are expected to set aside long-term savings per child, regardless of the child's age.</p> <p>This is now set at £5 per week for children aged 0 – 10 and £10 per week for children aged 11 to 17.</p> <p>Moving forward this will be deducted at source directly from child maintenance payments, however, a date for this to go live is still to be confirmed. Any savings held by foster carers up to this point will be transferred into individual accounts for the children and over seen by SCC. This money is protected and should not be given to a child or young person prior to their 18th birthday.</p>	
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Pre-School, playgroups and nurseries	<p>Most pre-school aged children will benefit from sessions at a playgroup or nursery – Please ensure this is in line with the national offer to 2/3 year olds and on this basis, no additional funding from the weekly maintenance allowance should be required.</p>	<p>Where it is identified that a child would benefit from additional sessions at a pre-school or nursery, additional funding may be agreed by the child's social worker and their Team Manager. Attendance at a pre-school and nursery over and above the national offer should be discussed at the child's statutory review.</p> <p>The Fostering Service is unable to agree additional funding if the expenditure is not already agreed by the child's social worker and/or Team Manager and is not part of the child's Care Plan.</p>
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Passports/immigration documents		<p>Following the first review unless a child is imminently returning home, agreement should be sought from those with Parental Responsibility to apply for a passport for the child, using the relevant form. This should be discussed with the child's social worker.</p> <p>If the necessary approval has been given for a child to leave the country, foster carers will be reimbursed for the passport photograph and fee.</p> <p>The foster carer will also be reimbursed for any additional costs related to immigration documents.</p>
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NB – Foster carers are asked to retain receipts or other evidence of spending and that this be available to the Supervising Social Worker when requested.

3.2 CARERS SKILL FEE

In September 2023, Southampton City Council reviewed the skills-based scheme. This is based on the assessed skills of the foster carers, plus the meeting of certain requirements; training, record- keeping, ongoing supervision and attendance at development groups.

This Skills Level Scheme is to encourage and reward foster carers to develop their skills and knowledge and enhance their fostering offer.

All carers will commence at Level 1 following approval at panel.

Levels	Skills Fee Amount
Level 1	£120
Level 2	£240
Level 3	£350

This fee is paid in recognition that this commitment to the Fostering Service and ongoing training and development enhances a foster carers skills and abilities to care for children. A foster carer's Skill Level is reviewed as part of their annual Foster Carer Review. Should it become evident that all requirements have not been met then Southampton Fostering Service reserve the right to withdraw the Skills Level status and associated professional fee.

The details of this scheme are set out in the Skills Level Expectations Guidance document.

3.3 EXCEPTIONAL PAYMENTS

Exceptional / discretionary payments are also available for various circumstances and subject to requirement being met.

Consideration can be given to an exceptional payment in certain circumstances. This payment is in relation to children's specific needs where it is considered that an additional fee may be required to support the placement which is outside of the carers approved skill level. This must be agreed with the Fostering Service manager and will be for a time limited period whilst it remains under review.

3.4 PARENT AND CHILD PLACEMENTS

The carer/s will receive a fee for providing a placement for a parent/s and their child. This is inclusive of a maintenance allowance and skills fee. This amount can vary depending on the parent's ability to financially support themselves.

Parent and Child Allowances	2 x [L2 Placement Allowance]	1 x [16 – 17 years old Maintenance for Parent]	1 x [0 – 2 Years old Maintenance for Baby]	Total Weekly payment
	2 x £240	1 x £278	1 x £183	£941

Agreement will be reached at time of placement as to what benefits the parents may be able to claim. These amounts in full or part may be deducted from the foster carer's payment as there will be an expectation that the parent's benefits will contribute towards the care of their child. A parent may themselves be a child and looked after by the local authority, in these cases additional maintenance funds may be offered to the foster carer.

This enhanced payment is in acknowledgement that this is a very specialist type of placement that requires both an element of care and assessment. Foster carers need to have attended specialist training and be specifically approved for these types of placements. In addition, it is important that at least one 'parent and child' foster carer is available throughout the day and that the placement is available at short notice.

If the placement/assessment is ended prematurely by either the parent or the department and both the child and parent are moved, and no other 'parent and child' are placed, the carer will continue to receive the total payment for up to a maximum of 14 days. If after the 14 days, no other 'parent and child' placement is made, payment will cease. If the parent is asked to leave or withdraws from the assessment and leaves the placement but the child remains, the carer will then revert to the age-related weekly maintenance allowance in respect of the child and the Level 2 Skills Level fee for as long as the child is in placement.

3.5 OUT OF HOURS

Southampton City Council would like to be able to have foster carers on call for children needing care outside of office hours. Foster carers who volunteer to be on call for out of hours receive a daily on call fee (though this will not be paid if they decline a placement). Foster carers need to be willing and able to offer a home to a child who may need care any time day or night and care for them at least until the office re-opens. If a child is placed out of hours, the foster carer will also receive the one-off emergency payment, in addition to the respective allowances and fees paid for the child.

3.6. SPECIALIST CARER

There is no specific progression to this role. This will be a specific matched placement under one of the following criteria:

- Step across from residential
- Remand (i.e. prior to custody)
- Significant physical health needs
- Significant risk i.e missing / high risk exploitation.

In order to fulfil this role carers must have the following:

- Transferable skills gained from caring for children, young people or adults with complex needs
- Be available at all time. At least one foster carer who is a full-time carer and does not have any other work, voluntary or caring commitments whilst the child is in their care.
- Have access to transportation
- No other children in the household who require high levels of supervision or care.

These placements will be considered under the exceptional fee arrangement up to a maximum of £850 per week.

4. GRANTS, ADDITIONAL AND DISCRETIONARY PAYMENTS

Southampton foster carers are entitled to receive set grants each year in relation to the children or young people placed with them and for themselves. This includes payments for birthdays, religious festivals and payments for holidays.

The Southampton Fostering Service will negotiate additional allowances or discretionary payments on a case-by-case basis, between the foster carer, the supervising social worker and the Fostering Service Manager.

Foster carers must seek approval from their supervising social worker before they make any additional expenditures in relation to a child. They should also keep receipts where possible to provide to their supervising social worker.

4.1 HOLIDAY ALLOWANCE

The summer holiday allowance is set at twice the weekly, age related child maintenance allowance and is available for all carers if criteria below is met:

Age (years)	Holiday Allowance based on 24/25 maintenance fees 1st July.
0 – 2 years	£366
3 – 4 years	£378
5 – 10 years	£416
11 – 15 years	£476
16+ years	£558.42

The holiday allowance is designed to cover some of the additional costs incurred during the school summer holidays and, in most cases, this will be a contribution towards the cost of a holiday in the UK or abroad. Family holidays are important social events that can build lifelong memories and foster carers are expected to include a child or young person when planning their family holiday. We ask that foster carers are mindful of this as well as the amount of the summer holiday allowance when booking family trips. There is no expectation that children are taken on foreign holidays.

Alternatively, the summer holiday allowance can be used towards the cost of ‘staycation’ activities such as day trips, theme park entry fees, play schemes, day camps or holiday sports clubs, if the foster family has no plans for a holiday away from home. It is expected that looked after children do not spend the entirety of a school holiday in a day camp or other holiday childcare provisions.

The summer holiday allowance can be claimed at any time of the financial year, but only once per year per child and if the following criteria is met:

- The child is or is likely to be in placement when the foster family are going on holiday or,
- The child is or is likely to be in placement during the school summer holidays.

If a child unexpectedly moves placement before the holiday has been taken and the travel insurance will not refund the money paid by the foster carer, the new foster carer may make another claim if they are going on holiday and will

incur additional costs by taking the child or young person with them. **This will be a case-by-case decision by the child's social worker, their Team Manager and the Fostering Service.**

If the holiday allowance has been claimed for 'staycation' activities and the child unexpectedly moves, the new foster carer may be able to claim for additional expenditure during the school summer holidays. **This will be a case-by-case decision by the child's social worker, their Team Manager and the Fostering Service.**

If the child moves placement after the money has been claimed but before it has been spent, the foster carer is expected to return the money to Southampton City Council or pass on to the new foster carer by mutual agreement. The allowance can be claimed if the foster family have a holiday home which the child uses with them.

Travel insurance should be purchased for the child if the family is holidaying in the UK and abroad. Foster carers are expected to evidence how this allowance has been spent.

4.2 BIRTHDAY ALLOWANCE

The birthday allowance is equal to one week's child maintenance allowance according to the age of the child.

Age (years)	Birthday Allowance based on 24/25 maintenance fees from 1 st July.
0 – 2 years	£183
3 – 4 years	£189
5 – 10 years	£208
11 – 15 years	£238
16 + years	£279.21

The Birthday Allowance is provided for foster carers to purchase gifts and to provide a contribution towards the cost of the child or young person's birthday celebrations. The allowance is NOT to be given to the child or young person in cash, except in exceptional circumstances and with the permission of the child's social worker and the Fostering Service Manager. Payments are made automatically and usually three weeks prior to the child's birthday. If the child moves placements after the payment is made but before their birthday, the previous foster carer is expected to give the new foster carer the gifts purchased and any unspent funds. If the child or young person comes into the care of Southampton City Council on or just prior to their birthday, the foster carer will be paid the birthday allowance as soon as possible.

Some older young people may wish to use the money for clothes or footwear. This is acceptable but should be in addition to clothing or footwear purchased using the proportion of the weekly maintenance allowance.

Some young people may also wish to have retail or online 'vouchers' instead of a gift and foster carers are encouraged to enable a child or young person to learn safe on-line shopping skills and use any vouchers sensibly.

The birthday allowance should not be used for the purchase of items that would usually be purchased as part of the weekly maintenance allowance. If there is any doubt, a discussion should take place with the child's social worker and the supervising social worker.

If the child moves placement after the money has been claimed and before it has been spent, the foster carers is expected to return the money to Southampton City Council or pass on to the new foster carer by mutual agreement. Foster carers are to expected evidence how this allowance has been spent.

4.3 FESTIVITIES ALLOWANCE

This allowance is equal to one week's maintenance allowance according to the age of the child.

Age (years)	Christmas / Festivities allowance based on 24/25 maintenance fees from 1 st July.
0 – 2 years	£183
3 – 4 years	£189
5 – 10 years	£208
11 – 15 years	£238
16 + years	£279.21

The Christmas/religious festival allowance is provided to purchase a gift for the child or young person and contribute towards any additional costs to enable the child to participate in the celebrations.

For ease, payments are made automatically approximately three/four weeks before the 25th December. If the allowance is required at a different time of year for an alternative festival, a request should be made via the supervising social worker. This allowance can only be claimed once per year per child.

If the child moves placement after the money has been claimed and before it has been spent, the foster carers is expected to return the money to Southampton City Council or pass on to the new foster carer by mutual agreement. Foster carers are expected to evidence how this allowance has been spent.

4.4 GLASSES OR CONTACT LENSES

Children and young people's glasses (lenses and frames) should be funded via an NHS Optical Voucher. The foster carer may request additional funding towards a pair of glasses in exceptional circumstances.

If designer frames or a second pair are wanted, this should come from the clothing allowance proportion of the weekly maintenance allowance or the child or young person may contribute if appropriate from their pocket money.

Additional funding from Southampton City Council may be agreed if specialist lenses or frames are required – this will be considered on a case-by-case basis and agreement must be given by the child's social worker and/or their Team Manager.

4.5 YEAR 11 GRADUATION / SCHOOL PROM EVENT

Southampton Fostering Service encourage our foster carers to enable our looked after young people to attend special Year 11 School Prom or 'graduation' events – these events create lifelong memories for young people and often celebrate huge achievements. Additional funding of £250 per young person can be claimed by the foster carers to be used towards costs including clothing, make-up, hair and transportation for the event.

4.6 RESPITE CARE

It is expected that Carers will, whenever possible, take the children and young people placed with them away on holiday with them (see section 6.1 above). However, it is also recognised that at times some Carers and their families need time together away from the fostering task and that in some instances Carers may already have a holiday arranged prior to a placement being made.

It is in the best interests of the Children in Care if their Carers take a break between placements rather than fostered children having to move to temporary placements while their Carers are away on holiday and then return to their Carers on their return.

It is recommended that if Carers require some time off they make use of public resources such as stay-away camps in order to minimise the number of placement moves experienced by Children in Care.

If carers have friends and family who are part of their network and known to the children in care, they could elect to become "support" carers and be available to care for the fostered children for short periods to give carers a break. It

is normally best for the child to be cared for by people known to them. Support carers would require DBS checks and a brief assessment. Any financial implications of informal care arrangements used under the Delegated Authority, remain between the foster carer and their family member or friend and should be paid out of the weekly child maintenance allowance.

If Carers take a planned holiday without a foster child accompanying them they will not receive any payment for this period.

It is recognised that fostering can be a demanding and challenging task and therefore there may be occasions when Carers, particularly those who have children on a long-term basis, need a break. Any respite taken should be in order to support the current placement and it clearly should not be against the child's Care Plan or detrimental to the child's emotional wellbeing. It has to be in child's best interests to move to a Respite Carer. Foster Carers are expected to complete the Respite Request Form and agreement to be sought from their SSW and the child's SW.

It will be expected that other than in an emergency, any request for respite will be made **at least** 28 days in advance of the time when the arrangement is due to begin.

Other than in the case of a family emergency, any agreed respite arrangement will be subject to a limit of 21 days in any 12-month period. Exemptions to this will be considered in terms of a child's care plan / personal arrangements but will require sign off from the Fostering Service Manager.

We do ask that if foster carers identify their own approved respite carers, the respite request form is still completed and the SSW and child's SW must be informed so our records can be updated to ensure it is correctly reflected where the child is placed and to ensure correct payments are made.

4.7 PAYMENT FOR RESPITE PERIODS

In the event that a Carer requests a break and an alternative placement has to be found for a child in placement, both the child's maintenance fee and the skills allowance will be paid to the alternative Carer and the main carers fees will cease to be paid while she/he is not caring for the child.

In exceptional circumstances a discussion can be had with the foster carer, SSW, CSW to consider whether there is a need for an exceptional payment. This can only be agreed with sign off from the Fostering Service Manager.

4.8 DAY CARE / BABYSITTING

Foster carers are in receipt of an allowance to provide full-time care for children placed, regardless of whether the child is in school or pre-school. When foster carers need a one-off session of day care or a babysitter, they should prioritise the use of their approved support network wherever possible. Any financial implications of such informal care arrangements used under the Delegated Authority, remain between the foster carer and their family member or friend and should be paid out of the weekly maintenance allowance.

If no approved family member or friend is viable, foster carers are encouraged to seek support from other foster carers known to the child for all day care requests. If another foster carer is used for one-off day care, Southampton Fostering Service will pay the provider (other foster carer). The cost of the day care may be deducted from the main foster carer's weekly maintenance allowance if the day care is not in the child's Care Plan and is requested by the foster carer for their own reasons.

Day care will be funded by Southampton Fostering Service when the main foster carer is undertaking fostering business, e.g. meetings, Court, training etc. and no other option for childcare is available. The cost of day care for these reasons will not be deducted from the weekly maintenance allowance.

In exceptional circumstances, day care or babysitting may be provided to support a foster carer with the child's care, for example if a child has significant additional needs or where the day care is required to stabilise a placement. The Fostering Service is unable to agree to this additional funding without agreement from the child's social worker and/or Team Manager. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis and in such circumstances the cost of the day care will not be deducted from the main foster carers.

Foster carers are asked to discuss all childcare requirements with their supervising social worker in advance to ensure that it is in the child's best interests and in line with their Care Plan.

The foster carer providing the day care is responsible for claiming these costs. The foster carer requesting the childcare should not pay the other foster carer.

An hourly rate of £10 per child is payable, with a maximum payment of £100 per day.

This payment is taxable. It is the responsibility of the Foster carer to contact the Inland Revenue, to declare this taxable income.

4.9 EMERGENCY PLACEMENTS

Where an approved foster carer takes on an emergency placement, a one-off payment of £100 will be made. This payment is in recognition that in some cases, when children and young people are placed in an emergency there are likely to be additional costs incurred up front. The payment is also made in recognition that some carers may take on the care of a child out of their usual 'matching criteria' in an emergency and to support the Fostering Service.

This payment is **not** per child.

Emergency placements are defined as being placements happening on the same day the foster carer is approached by the Placements Team about the child or children and agrees to take the placement, or whereby a foster carer takes a placement via the Emergency Duty Team; out of usual office hours, over a weekend or on a bank holiday.

Emergency payments are not applicable for day care or where the child is being placed for a short period of respite care.

4.10 FOSTERING INTRODUCTIONS

It is good practice for a child to have a period of 'introductions' before moving to a foster carer. Clearly for children coming into care in an emergency or straight from their birth family, it is unlikely that this will be possible, but is expected when children are moving between foster carers or having respite.

Introductions usually comprise a child having tea or a short outing with a new foster carer. This may happen a few times over a short period of time and is wholly dependent on the child's needs. It is not expected that foster carers would experience any significant additional costs in relation to this.

Some children may benefit from having a 'sleepover' with a new foster carer and in these circumstances the new foster carer may claim for the number of nights the child stays in their care before the move if they feel additional expenses have been incurred.

For an infant awaiting discharge after birth, a foster carer will be paid the full fostering allowance (maintenance allowance and professional fee) from the date they begin to visit the infant in hospital and assume some of the caring tasks. Foster carers are expected to spend as much time as possible with a newborn baby awaiting discharge from hospital.

4.11 ADOPTION INTRODUCTIONS

Foster carers are integral to effective and positive adoption introductions and children successfully moving on to their adoptive family.

Adoption introductions can be intense and require a foster carer to make their home and time available to the adoptive family. This may also include some overnight stays where the adoptive family live a distance from the foster carers.

It is expected that adoptive parents will visit the child in the foster carers home for long periods of time and the foster carer will then become 'host' to the adoptive parents and possibly their own children. Foster carers can claim £5 per day, per person, as a 'hosting allowance' whilst adoptive families are visiting their home for more than three hours. It would be expected that foster carers provide adopters with drinks during meetings and periods of less than three hours, as part of the usual weekly maintenance allowance.

If overnight accommodation for the foster carer and the child is needed, this will be booked and paid for by the adoption agency if required. A food allowance for a foster carer, up to the maximum of £15 a day will also be allowed whilst they are away from their home. This can be claimed via the Fostering Service.

Travel during any introductions period can be claimed for when this exceeds the usual 60 mile per week included amount.

5. EQUIPMENT

Foster carers are expected to come to fostering with the basic equipment to care for a child or young person, depending on their age. It would be expected for a foster carer to have a bed, mattress, clothing storage and some basic toys available at the point of approval. Aside from Car Seats, Southampton Fostering Services welcomes the use of 'pre-loved' toys, games and equipment if these are safe, clean and in good condition. It is accepted that some foster carers may not have the additional equipment needed to care for a new-born baby, a young infant, twins/triplets or a child with a disability.

Foster carers are required to have appropriate car seats for the age/weight of the child in their care. Funding for car seats can be requested via the Supervising Social Worker and will be agreed on a case-by-case basis. A new car seat is not required for each child placed.

Foster carers are required to purchase a new cot mattress for new-born babies placed and for babies placed under six months old.

Wherever possible, equipment should be borrowed from the fostering equipment store. The fostering equipment store is currently managed via a nominated foster carer who maintains a record of available equipment and the loan arrangements, giving the description of the equipment, the date of purchase, cost, names and addresses of the recipients, dates of issue and withdrawal. This equipment will remain the property of Southampton City Council and may be reclaimed for use in another foster home when necessary. Washing machines tumble dryers and other household electrical equipment will not be supplied or maintained by the Department.

Equipment should be returned in a clean and safe condition when it is no longer required. If equipment borrowed is lost or damaged, the cost of the replacement item is expected to come from the foster carer last in possession of the item, unless the loss or damage was non-accidental or the responsibility of the child or young person.

Foster carers may be given permission to purchase new equipment if it is not available via the store for loan. This may also be agreed for individual children with additional needs, or to enable a foster carer to take an emergency placement. Foster carers must get agreement from the Fostering Service Manager before any purchase of new equipment. Foster carers are encouraged to consider the use of public money when purchasing new equipment and ensure value for money, along with the child's safety.

When a child with a disability is placed with foster carers, the child's social worker should ensure that any needs relating to special equipment for the child are discussed at the Placement Agreement Meeting and at all subsequent reviews. Funding for specialist or additional equipment must be agreed by the child's social worker and with the approval of the Fostering Team Manager before any purchases are made.

In very exceptional circumstances a grant may be offered to a foster carer for initial set-up costs, such as a bed, mattress, wardrobe, chest of drawers, equipment for a new-born or young infant and basic toys. Appendix 1 outlines a guide to the amount to be funded for basic equipment. This is usually more relevant for connected carers caring for a child from within their network in an emergency. This funding must be agreed by Foster Team Manager.

6. ABSENCES FROM THE FOSTER HOME

6.1 MISSING FROM PLACEMENT

The weekly child maintenance allowance in respect of the child or young person who is missing from the placement will be paid to the foster carer. If after 7 days the child or young person is still missing, decisions about the placement will be subject to the normal care planning processes. This may include negotiating the payment of a retainer until the child or young person returns to the placement.

6.2 SCHOOL TRIPS

When a child or young person is on a residential school trip, the foster carer will continue to receive the weekly child maintenance allowance and any skill fee. The foster carer is required to ensure that the child or young person has enough money for food, travel and pocket money for the duration of the school trip. During this period the foster carer is expected to remain available to take the young person back if the plans around the school trip change or the child or young person is required to return early for whatever reason.

6.3 HOSPITALISATION

When a child or young person is admitted to hospital, the weekly child maintenance allowance and any skill fee will be paid to the foster carer with the expectation that the foster carer supports the child as any parent would. If after 7 days the child or young person is still in hospital the on-going payment of the weekly child maintenance allowance and any skill fee will be negotiated with the foster carer on a case-by-case basis, depending on the presenting situation and the needs of the child or young person. The negotiation will consider the amount of contact the foster carer maintains with the child or young person whilst they are in hospital, whether they are supporting the child or young person with money, toiletries, additional food and drink etc... As a minimum Southampton Fostering Service expect a child or young person to be visited daily whilst in hospital. For younger children, it would be expected that, where possible, the foster carer stays with the child in hospital.

6.4 ALLEGATIONS / COMPLAINTS

Where carers are subject to an allegation and a child/ren living with them are moved as a result, the carer will continue to receive the maintenance allowance and any skills fees normally paid for the child/ren for a period of up to 28 days. If the decision is made not to return the child within that timeframe, payments will cease immediately. This is intended to ensure that carers do not suffer undue financial hardship because of an allegation having been made against them and supports the possibility of the child/ren returning to their care. Should an investigation still be ongoing after the 28-night period, the Fostering Service Manager must agree any continuing payments to the foster carers.

6.5 FOSTER CARE ILLNESS

If a foster carer is unable to look after a child in placement due to illness and the child is required to move to another foster carer, the main foster carer will be paid the weekly child maintenance allowance and any professional fee for 14 days or until the child returns, whichever is sooner.

6.6. PREMATURE ENDING OF PLACEMENTS

Where a young person decides to leave a placement prematurely, the weekly maintenance allowance and the Carers skill fee can be paid for a further 14 days. The payments will cease after the 14 days or when another child or young person is placed with the foster carer (whichever is soonest).

In exceptional circumstances a foster carer may continue to be paid the weekly maintenance allowance and the professional fee for longer than the 14 days, if they are remaining 'on-hold' with a view to the child or young person returning to their care. This must be agreed by the Team Manager of the children's team and the Fostering Service Manager. It is not expected that this arrangement would continue for more than 6 weeks.

7. RECRUITMENT

Foster carers and staff are encouraged to recruit new foster carers from within their personal and professional networks as appropriate. A payment of up to £750 can be paid to the staff member or foster carer who introduces a potential new foster carer that's leads to them being approved and taking their first placement. Payment is made after the process has ended for the person to prevent multiple payments being made.

The breakdown of payments is: -

Initial Screening visit - £50
Completion of Stage 1 - £150
Get to panel / Approval - £200
First child in placement - £350
Total - £750

8. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER (SGO)

Special Guardianship Order A special guardianship order is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.

The local authority recognises the value and long-term benefits of supporting and helping a relative or friend to care for a child. Special guardianship care is not appropriate for every child and professional skill is needed in making what may be finely balanced decisions. All assessments must consider how far a placement will meet the assessed needs of a particular child or young person given their previous history and their current circumstances.

It is recognised that a foster carer might be able to provide permanency which is in a foster child's best interests but be deterred from applying for Special Guardianship because of the loss of the fostering allowance and any additional skills (fee) being paid in respect of the child. The Local Authority will ensure that a former foster carer has a period of financial stability upon becoming Special Guardian to a former foster child (please see Special Guardianship Financial Policy for more details).

9. STAYING PUT

Fostering allowances cease when a young person reaches 18 years or is no longer looked after by the Local Authority. However, under the care leaver's legislation, it may be possible for some payments to continue until the young person reaches 21 years, or 24 years if education is continuing. This is designed to enable young people reaching 18 to remain in the care of their foster carers and benefit from the on-going support and guidance provided to them at a critical point in their lives.

All young people are expected to claim housing allowance to contribute towards their Staying Put arrangements unless their earnings are such that they do not qualify for Housing allowance. Where carers are claiming housing allowance for their home the young person will not be eligible to apply

Please see further details in the revised Staying Put Policy.

10. DAMAGE AND LOSS CLAIMS

Foster carers are expected to have suitable fully comprehensive insurances for their property, including content insurance for their own personal possessions and for the property of the child they care for. It is recommended that the foster carer informs their insurance company that they are fostering. The insurance policy excess is the choice of the foster carer and is at their own risk.

The City Council will consider reimbursement, through an ex-gratia payment, of any loss suffered by foster carers as a result of theft or damage to their property by a foster child looked after by Southampton City Council and placed by them. This does not include the normal wear and tear of family life and fostering. A claim should firstly be made on

the foster carer's household insurance and only if this is refused can a claim be made to the Fostering Service for compensation. The city council does not cover foster carers insurance excess.

It is expected that foster carers take due diligence to ensure that damage does not occur, for example, supervising children adequately and taking sensible precautions to avoid damage.

Where a foster carer wishes to make a claim, the claim form must be completed and returned to the Supervising Social Worker. Any ex-gratia payments will require the approval of the Fostering Service Manager.

Following discussion with the social worker the child may be expected to repay all or part of the cost of the damage or loss.

11. PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

11.1 PAYMENTS OF ALLOWANCES AND FEES

Payments to foster carers are paid on a weekly basis via their nominated bank account. These payments should arrive in the foster carers bank account on a Friday. In the event of a Bank Holiday, the payments are generally processed and transferred a day earlier and arrive in the carers account on a Thursday.

Remittance advices are sent out to the foster carers on a weekly basis (usually on a Wednesday) with details of the payments made to them in relation to each child or children they are caring for. The remittance advice breaks down the payments into the allowance and fee elements. It also breaks down any other payments made to the carers such as one-off clothing payments or retainers.

Foster carers are expected to keep a copy of each of their weekly remittance advices to inform their annual tax returns as Southampton Fostering Service does not routinely provide annualised statements of payments made to foster carers.

Southampton Fostering Service will endeavour to ensure that all payments are made within these timescales but cannot be held responsible for any delay caused by systems failure, administration errors by the foster carer's own bank or any delays caused by a lack of information shared by the bank or foster carer.

11.2 EXPENSES

Claims for expenses must be made monthly. Any claims over three months old will not be made under any circumstances.

Foster Carers are expected to complete a log of all income and expenditure related to holiday, birthday and festival allowances together with clothing and personal expenditure.

This will help the carer to:

- Demonstrate what the money has been used for and thereby reduce any risk of complaint.
- Evidence expenditure to the Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker.

Foster Carers should retain receipts for their records as they may otherwise find themselves challenged by the Fostering Team or HMRC.

11.3 AUTHORISATION OF ALLOWANCES AND FEES

Payment of allowances, fees and other funds must be in accordance with the Policy and authorised by one of the following Officers:

	Authorising Officers
Standard Fostering Allowance (including emergency placements payments)	Fostering Service Managers/ATM/Team Manager and Placement Team Manager
Supplementary payments, and all other payments	Fostering Service Manager
Skills Level Scheme	Fostering Service Manager

The Officer authorising a payment must not be the same Officer who has recommended/proposed the allowance.

In exceptional circumstances and where needs arise, a Head of Service or the Fostering Service Manager may approve a payment outside of the scope of any of the payments detailed in this policy. This will be on a case-by case basis and submission should be made to the Fostering Service Manager in the first instance by the child's social worker or the supervising social worker.

11.4 FINANCIAL OVERPAYMENTS

All overpayments made by the Department will always be recovered in full except in exceptional circumstances. Foster carers should check their payments and remittance advices each week to ensure that they are right.

In the event of an over-payment carers should contact their supervising social worker or foster carer payments team immediately to discuss how to return the overpaid monies. Ideally any overpaid money would be returned in full immediately and will usually be reclaimed via the next week's foster carer payment run. However, in exceptional circumstances or in cases of financial hardship, Southampton Fostering Services will negotiate a payment arrangement to recoup these funds within a maximum 12-month timescale.

11.5 MINIMUM PERIOD

Child Allowances and the Carer's Fee are payable for the day of placement and will cease to be paid to a Carer on the day of departure.

Foster Carers are required to notify their SSW and foster carer payments team of any changes in a placement or absences from the Carer's home.

12. HMRC

Foster Carers are regarded as self-employed for the purposes of Income Tax and National Insurance contributions. Carers are strongly advised to keep records of all payments received. The Inland Revenue has set a threshold for tax purposes which exceeds the level of payments received by most Carers so most Carers will not have a tax liability. Foster carers are expected to register as self-employed with HMRC.

Carers are advised to refer to the pamphlet entitled "Allowances and Income Tax" issued by the Fostering Network, and to consult HM Revenue and Customs to check their own tax liability.

13. BENEFITS

13.1 Child Benefit

Foster carers are not eligible to claim or receive Child Benefit for a child they care for, and that child cannot be included in the foster family claim for benefits or Tax Credits. Anyone who does so is committing an act of Fraud. 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 benefits.

14. DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE AND CARERS ALLOWANCE

Some foster children are entitled to receive Disability Living Allowance due to their disability. Any Foster Carer who is caring for such a child should discuss making a claim for DLA with the child's Social Worker and their Supervising Social Worker at the Placement Planning Meeting.

There a child is placed who is, or may be, entitled to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) it will be the responsibility of the child's social worker to make a claim on behalf of the child. If a child is in receipt of DLA, prior to being cared for, the child's social worker should be involved in discussions with the parent relating to the transfer of the DLA to the foster carer and arrangements agreed at the Placement Planning Meeting.

The DLA benefit contains both a care and mobility component and is paid at different rates according to the child's needs. It is the responsibility of the foster carer to inform the child's social worker and their supervising social worker if a child in their care is awarded DLA. The foster carer will be responsible for spending the child's DLA in line with the following guidelines - carers will not be expected to make additional claims to Children's Services to meet costs that can be covered by the DLA.

The DLA is to be used to enhance the child's life and the child's social worker must be involved in decisions on how the DLA can be used to improve the child's life and the supervising social worker is responsible for monitoring how the money is spent in foster carer supervision.

Examples of how the money could be spent: -

- Activities that are costly i.e., horse riding, after school clubs.
- Provision of an escort to enable social events to be attended.
- Extra helper for an outing or holiday.
- Taxi fares for trips out.
- Special holiday for the child, which could include covering the family's expenses.
- Caravan expenses so that the child can have regular breaks in a familiar place.
- Extra support such as child sitting service.
- Individual equipment such as computer, communication aids.
- Laundry service and appliances.
- Replacement clothing where there is excessive wear and tear on clothing.
- Additional heating costs.
- Additional help with personal care.
- Contribution to replacement/repair to furnishings/property outside of daily wear and tear.
- Special toys to meet child's needs – which may be of therapeutic value.
- Domestic help to allow the carer to spend more time with child.

A record should be kept by carers of how the allowance is spent and this record should be shared with social workers and other members of the professional network on request.

Any items and equipment purchased using DLA are the child's property and must move with them. Any DLA money that has been saved should also move with the child if they move placement.

If the Local Authority suspects that a Foster Carer is using the award inappropriately this will be discussed with the Carer and if concerns persist the DWP will be asked to look into the matter.

Once a young person reaches the age of 16, they can claim DLA in their own right and it is for them to decide what the money is spent on. A "Welfare Rights Benefit Check" should be obtained for the young person as they approach the age of 16.

Savings levels could potentially affect future entitlement to benefits for a young person. Therefore, once a young person reaches the age of 17 the level of savings should be reviewed, prior to claiming possible benefits at the age of 18 and over.