

# Payments to Thurrock Council Foster Carers – Guidance

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## 1. Payments to Carers

All Foster Carers, whether they are providing short term or long-term (permanent) care, and whether they are related to the child (a Family & Friend Carer – also called a Connected Person) or not, receive a payment based on the age of the child placed with them. A “Foster Carer” is a person approved to provide fostering placements by Thurrock Council.

This document outlines the scheme of allowances, fees, expenses and other payments to Foster Carers for Thurrock Council Children’s Services.

The document does not cover the situation where any Carer subsequently obtains an Adoption, Child Arrangement or Special Guardianship Order. If such Orders are made, the fostering allowance ceases to apply and the respective allowance policy should be referred to.

All payments to Foster Carers are processed by the Fostering Team responsible for the supervision and support of the Foster Carer. All fostering allowances are paid to Foster Carers weekly in arrears directly into their bank/building society account. A remittance advice slip detailing the payment is provided to the Carer. Allowances are automatically updated when the child reaches the age of 5, 11 or 16.

The Fostering Service aims to ensure that Foster Carers receive their payment without delay and that exceptional claims are treated fairly. Carers should speak to their Supervising Social Worker about any payment request or query.

The fostering budget covers all payments that are directly made to Foster Carers. Any expenditure on looked after children that is not a Foster Carer payment remains the responsibility of the child’s Social Worker. If the child’s allocated worker is unsure of where the responsibility lies for a particular cost they should consult the Fostering Service.

## 2. Fostering Allowance & Fee Payments and what they are

for

### 2.1 Weekly Standard rates

Child's Age	Allowance only	Allowance + Care Skills fee	Allowance + Care Skills Plus fee	High need rate (Enhanced allowance and fee)
0 to 4	£147	£347	£397	£497
5 to 10	£168	£368	£418	£518
11 to 15	£210	£410	£460	£560
16+	£252	£452	£502	£602

All rates will be paid on a per child rate. The Care skills fee is £200 per child per week, the Care Skills Plus fee is £250 per child per week. The High need rates include a £300 Carer skills payment per week per child and a £50 per week per child enhancement to the allowance. All fee payments are remuneration for the carer.

#### Parent and child placements:

These placements are paid a total rate of £694.00pw for a parent and child placement. This is comprised as follows:

- £147 per week allowance for child
- £147 per week allowance towards the cost of parents staying in the home
- £250 per week Carers Fee for child
- £150 per week Carers fee for work with the parent

As a specialist rate the Parent and child payment is paid separately from the rates and criteria described elsewhere. The rate is applicable where the parent is over the age of 18 and applies to placements where one or two parents are present alongside the infant.

- **For parent and child placement where parents are under the age of 18:** If the parent(s) are under the age of 18 and looked after then the standard weekly rates apply and not the parent and child rates.
- **For parent and child placements where there are more than one child placed.** This is for when parents have more than one child e.g. twins in a parent and child placement, then the parent and child rate is paid on the youngest child plus the standard weekly rate applicable for other children placed inclusive of Boarding Out allowance and fee.

### 2.1.1 How the Allowance is applied

To earn the fee element, Foster Carers must meet the criteria below and those who do not, start on the **Allowance only rate**. This allowance is only paid on placement of a child and ends as outlined in section 7.1.

### 2.1.2 How the Care Skills and Care Skills Plus fee is applied

**Care Skills** includes a skills payment of £200.00 per week per child (in addition to the allowance) for the duration on the placement plus the retainer time (see section 7.1). This is paid to the approved Carers in recognition of their skills. Carers move to **Care skills** when (not before):

#### For the first 12 months:

- Skills to Foster has been completed **and**
- The Carers have been fully approved **and**
- Carers regularly attend supervision **and**
- Carer logs are submitted on children placed as required

#### For all subsequent years

- TSD standards are completed **and**
- mandatory training is complete **and**
- the Carers have completed three training sessions per financial year (April – April) **and**
- Carers regularly attend supervision **and**
- Carer logs are submitted on children placed as required **and**
- All approved participate in the annual review process

It is expected that both members of each household will complete the mandatory training. For those Carers living too far away or unable to attend the required training, an individual arrangement for alternative training will be made via the Supervising Social Worker. Failure to maintain training as identified above without a reasonable explanation will result in being moved back on to core rates.

**Care Skills Plus** includes a skills payment of £250.00 per week per child (in addition to the allowance) for the duration on the placement plus the retainer period as described in Section 7.1 Care Skills plus is paid to carers with three years fostering experience who meets all of the criteria for the care skills fee **and**:

- Regularly provides emergency placements and urgent placements to UASC when vacant **and**
- Evidences the ability to meet/manage the following more complex needs:
  - Significantly challenging and risk taking behaviours
  - Complex educational needs and need for tailored education programmes
  - Significant attachment issues and/or substance misuse
  - Offending behaviour/Sexualised behaviour
  - Current child criminal exploitation, gangs and experiences of being trafficked
  - Children and Young People who have diagnosed mental health difficulties.

This is evidenced via a portfolio and annual review

### 2.1.3 How the High Need rate is applied

The **High Need Rate** is paid where a child placed has additional needs that would cause the Carer additional costs and require extra skill. This rate is made up of the Care Skills plus payment amount plus, a £50 additional skills fee payment to the carer and an additional £50 weekly allowance to reflect the higher need. It is paid for the duration of a placement plus the retainer period

This rate *may* be paid even if the training requirements for Care skills/Care skills plus are not met. This is due to the high need of the child and it is expected that Carers will work to meet their training commitments within 12 months.

Children who may meet the criteria for a high need rate are:

- A child who receives a service from their local Children with Disabilities service due to their own disability (not due to a siblings disability)
- A child who cannot access education or who's provision is less than half of full time
- A child who is placed from residential care/Secure and is settling in to placement (paid for up to six months)
- A child requiring a remand bed
- Multiple or profound difficulties with complex medical needs and high number of medical appointments
- Presents a sexual risk to other children and requires constant supervision as a result

The decision on whether the High Need Rate will be applied will need to be agreed with the Fostering Service Manager where one of these criteria applies. The payment will have a start and end date which will be kept under review. It is possible for this rate to be agreed for the duration of a placement.

### 2.1.4 Discretionary Payments

The service reserves the right to make discretionary payments. The service reserves the right to make discretionary decisions on the rate paid on a case by case basis. This should have written agreement from the Service Manager and be time limited for review.

### 2.1.5 Suspension or stopping fee payments when the criteria is not met.

Where foster carers do not meet the expectations set out above for care skills and care skills plus the Fostering Team Manager should write to the Foster Carer via email or letter setting out the areas that are not met and giving 14 days' notice that the fee will be suspended. If within those 14 days foster carers and the team manager can agree a realistic improvement plan, payments may be re-instated at the discretion of the Fostering Team Manager. The improvements do not have to be completed within the 14 days but the plan with clear timescales should be set.

In the event that foster carers do not respond or improvement is not shown in the agreed timescales the Fostering Team manager shall stop fee payments indefinitely and not re-start them until all of the terms of care skills and/or care skills plus are met.

For those receiving the high need rate who do not meet the standard for Care Skills as minimum a clear plan should be put in place with timescales to ensure the criteria are met. If progress is made on this plan then the fee will continue. If it becomes clear that the Foster is not progressing or choosing not to progress the fee payment will be suspended with 14 days' notice.

## 2.2 What the Allowance Covers

The core allowance payment is paid to the Approved Carers to offset the cost of fostering a child.

### 2.2.1 Appropriate usage of the allowance:

It is anticipated that Foster Carers will use their discretion as to how best to spend this element of the payment dependent on their circumstance. It is not required that they provide receipt or other proof as to how the allowance is spent.

The following is an indicative, not exhaustive, list of what should be provided for under the allowance:

#### **The Fostering Home:**

- A suitable bedroom for the child
- New equipment/toys etc.
- Extra heating costs
- Extra lighting
- Extra decorating costs
- Home Contents Insurance
- Car insurance (fully comprehensive)
- Pre-school and school club costs
- Babysitting costs

#### **Food:**

- Standard food requirements
- Special dietary needs

#### **Toiletries:**

- All basic toiletries
- All basic skin & hair products
- Haircuts

#### **Clothing:**

- Sufficient underwear and clothing
- School Uniform
- Winter clothing (including a jacket and coat)
- Suitable shoes for school, winter and summer

#### **School resources:**

- Books, pens, pencils, crayons, paint, paper, etc.
- Sports clothing and equipment
- Basic play/toddler group and nursery fees
- Replacing items of school uniform

- School day trips

**Transport:**

- All the transport costs including public transport that are incurred in normal family life
- This includes taking children to clubs, activities and the like

*Note: Some travel costs that relate to additional travel due to the fostering role are covered by expenses (see section 4)*

**All Religious Needs Including:**

- Prayer books/equipment
- Particular clothing
- Dietary needs
- Travel to place of worship

**Telephone/Internet:**

- Calls to birth family members
- Calls to children’s services
- Access to the internet as appropriate and for Carers to communicate with relevant other professionals

**Leisure Activities:**

- Recreational outings (Inc. travel and entrance fees)
- Cinema and theatre tickets
- Low cost clubs and activities -including travel to attend, including clubs/activities in the school holidays
- Christmas and birthday gifts
- Holidays up to £400 per year (£7.69 for every week a child is in placement)

**Savings:**

- Savings are automatically deducted at the rate of £7.15 per child per week and managed by Thurrock

2.2.2 Pocket Money

It is recommended that Carers keep a record showing that they have provided a child with pocket money. The following amounts are *indicative* and if the Foster Carer deems that a child in their care cannot managed money safely they may manage the use of this money at their discretion in consultation with the child’s social worker.

Child’s Age	Pocket Money per week
0 to 4	£3.50
5 to 10	£4.00



<b>11 to 15</b>	£10.50
<b>16+</b>	£17.50

Foster Carers have a role to educate children/young people in their care about how to manage their money, budget and to encourage them to save for their future. Children will need guidance and supervision depending on their age about budgeting skills, making choices and handling money.

### 2.2.3 Exceptional payments and particular circumstances

There is a small budget for payment of expenses incurred as a result of fostering which do not fit within the above structure. Any Carer expecting an exceptional expense claim should seek agreement in writing in advance. This will need to be agreed with the Fostering Service Manager.

## 3. Equipment

It is acknowledged that a certain amount of equipment is required in order for the Carer to undertake the role of fostering. Our expectation is that Foster carers will provide the following for children in their care according to age. In cases of financial hardship the carer may request an exceptional expense to cover the cost of new/replacement equipment.

If Foster Carers require something specific (e.g. a more expensive item to fit in with their furniture) it is expected that they would fund the difference.

### 3.1 Equipment expected for babies aged 0-3

Carers should provide the following:

- Cot (bed) and bedding
- Pushchair/buggy
- High chair
- Car seat
- Sterilizer unit
- Baby monitor
- Stair gate

The Fostering Service will be responsible for providing new cot mattresses as required, bearing in mind the recommendations that a new mattress should be provided for each new baby.

### 3.2 Equipment expected for children aged 3-10

Carers should provide the following:

- Bed and bedding
- Wardrobe
- Chest-of-drawers
- Car seat (if appropriate)

- Stair gate (if appropriate)

### 3.3 Equipment expected for children aged 11-18

Carers should provide the following:

- Bed and bedding
- Wardrobe
- Chest-of-drawers
- Desk and chair

### 3.4 Replacement Costs

If equipment needs to be replaced due to deliberate damage by a Foster child the cost will normally be met by the Thurrock Council or its insurers following an assessment by the Supervising Social Worker. For normal 'wear and tear' the Fostering Network advises that replacement should be met by the Foster Carer. If, however, there is excessive 'wear and tear' due to particular circumstances this cost may be met by the Fostering Service.

### 3.5 Luggage

When children move on from a placement, Thurrock Council expects carers to provide the child moving on with suitable luggage. Carers should never use plastic bags and can have luggage supplied at their request should they lack the funds to do so. Foster carers will need to demonstrate their reasons as to why they cannot afford to buy luggage from the boarding out allowance provided.

## 4. Expenses

### 4.1 Travel and parking costs

Mileage will be paid for any mileage which exceeds 50 miles per child per week for:

- Therapeutic appointments / programmes for the child
- Contact with family members – this is contact that has been agreed by the child/young person's social worker
- Travel to school where the school is not within 3 miles drive of the carers home

Reasonable costs include transport at 40.5 pence per mile for those using their own vehicle, public transport fares, and taxi fares (by prior agreement of Fostering Manager) when there is no reasonable alternative - receipts are to be submitted for payment to be made.

Mileage must be claimed on the Foster Carer mileage claim form and relevant receipts attached. Separate claim forms must be submitted for each calendar month. Mileage costs cannot be paid for any claims submitted more than three months after the costs were incurred.

### 4.2 Other expenses

Carers may contribute to service development by co-delivering training (e.g. skills to foster) and co-delivering recruitment events. They can be paid an attendance allowance of £50.00 per half day to cover costs of attending these meetings.

## 6. Respite Payments

All Approved Carers are entitled to two weeks (14 days taken consecutively or non-consecutively) paid respite per year (1<sup>st</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> March). The respite rate is calculated based on the children currently placed at the time the respite is required.

The principle for payments for respite is that the allowance follows the child and is paid once. The Carer who has respite receives their fee at their rate and the carer providing respite receives the fee at their relevant rate as set out below

Respite is paid at 1/7<sup>th</sup> of the weekly boarding out rate for each 24 hour period and for each period of more than 6 hours. For respite periods under 6 hours, 1/14<sup>th</sup> of the weekly rate is paid. The fee element will be paid by Thurrock and the boarding out element

*Carers can either request that Thurrock Council seek and pay other Approved Carers to provide respite (where such Carers are available) **OR***

*Under delegated authority, Carers can make their own arrangement for respite with family, friends or other appropriate adults. Approved Carers can then request that the respite payment is made to them directly so that they can pay the individual. **If you wish to do this you need to give notice to your supervising Social Worker 2 weeks in advance of the respite period.***

### 6.1 Additional respite

Thurrock Council may agree additional periods of paid respite to support Carers and children in exceptional circumstances. This is paid under the same arrangement as in section 6 and the same options are available to Approved Carers. Any additional respite should be agreed in writing prior to commencing.

## 7. When Payments start and end

Approved Carers are paid weekly in arrears by BACS. Allowance payments begin from the day the child or children are placed with the Carer and payments are for the full day.

### 7.1 Retainers where Thurrock gives notice that a placement will end or a carer gives 28 days' notice to end a placement

For Carers who are on Care skills, Care Skills plus, or Higher Need rates the fee per child per week skills recognition continues for following a placement ending; unless another child is placed (inclusive of emergency placements) as follows:

Length of placement	Continued payment
For respite placements	The fee will only be paid for the days the child is placed

For placements less than 56 days	The <b>fee</b> shall be paid for the full time the child is in placement plus one week
For placements greater than 56 days	The <b>fee</b> shall be paid for the full time the child is in placement plus two weeks

## 7.2 Retainers where carers give less than 28 days notice

Where carer's end placements without giving 28 days notice without the agreement of Thurrock Council (via the Fostering Team Manager), no retainer will be payable

## 7.3 EDT Rota and additional care payments

### 7.3.1 Payments for being on call

Thurrock Council will pay a retainer of £10.00 per day to Carers who agree to be placed on the emergency, out of hour's list and have a vacancy. Agreeing to go on the out of hours list is a commitment to being contactable, available and to take a placement if one is offered within your approval criteria.

- If you are in receipt of this payment and refuse an emergency placement within your approved criteria the fee will not be paid for that week.
- If you are not contactable and do not return calls or messages, the payment may also be stopped for that day
- At the discretion of the Fostering Team Manager a retainer can also be paid to hold a placement for a child at the same rate.

### 7.3.2 Payments for additional care to non-resident children provided by Foster carers

Carers may be asked to provide additional care to support a child who is not living with them and whom is not with them on a respite basis. Examples of this include:

- Assisting another Carer in transporting a child where that Carer cannot do so
- Attending to see a child who is due to be placed but the child is in hospital or residential care
- Providing support to children on the edge of entering care or those who have just left care

This will be a fee at the hourly rate of £4.50. This must be agreed by the fostering team manager

## 7.4 What happens to allowance payments when an allegation is made

If an allegation or care concern is raised *and* the children remain in placement, there is no change to the allowance payments. If the allegation is such that the children cannot remain then the weekly **fee** is paid at 100% of the rate being paid at the time the allegation was made. This will continue until

either the allegation is resolved or 16 weeks have elapsed (whichever is sooner) at which point it will cease.

### 7.5 What happens to allowance payments when an Approved Carer is medically unfit to foster

If a Carer cannot continue to foster as they have become seriously ill and is assessed as medically unfit to foster such that the children will leave then the fee payments will reduce to 75% of the **fee** paid at the time the children left the placement for a period of 8 weeks at which point it will cease.

### 7.6 What happens if a Carer is underpaid

Any Approved Carer who has been underpaid should notify their supervising Social Worker as soon as possible and Thurrock Council will make payment to correct this error as quickly as possible via a same day payment and within three working days of notification of underpayment.

### 7.7 What happens if a Carer is over-paid

Overpayments may occur if the arrangement of a placement is altered or ends in an unplanned way. In the instance of the former the overpayment will be recouped against the next payment to the Carer.

Where the placement has ended the Carer should contact Foster Carer Payments (contact details can be found on payment remittance advice) to arrange repayment immediately. The remittance advice clearly states what the payment covers, including child/young person's name(s) and placement dates.

In both cases the Carer should notify their Supervising Social Worker upon realising an overpayment has been made.

### 7.8 What happens if a child goes missing from the placement

Allowances will continue to be paid if the child is missing from the placement for up to seven nights after which the situation will be reviewed and the decision made as to whether the placement should continue. If the decision is for the placement to continue then payment continues. If the decision is for the placement to end then payment would end in the usual way.

In discussion with the foster carer we may agree to pay the fee only and hold the placement for missing episodes of greater than seven days.

## 8. Fostering and Insurance, Tax and Benefits

### 8.1 Insurance

All Foster Carers on approval (including respite, contract and short break carers) are provided with individual National Fostering Network membership, unless they request otherwise. Carers approved in an emergency, under regulation 24, will have legal membership only. The National Fostering

Network will send each Carer an individual pack and this contains important information about insurance, which Carers should read carefully. The National Fostering Network membership includes public liability insurance and access to free legal advice. You should inform your household and motor insurers that you are caring for other people's children. Further guidance on insurance is available from the Fostering Service (See Foster Carers Insurance for more details).

## 8.2 Tax

Foster Carers are regarded as self-employed for tax purposes, not employed, so are responsible for their own tax and National Insurance affairs. However, since April 6th 2003, all payments to Foster Carers have been exempt from tax up to the level of £10,000 per household a year plus an additional £200 per week for a child under 11 and an additional £250 per week for a child of 11 or over. In effect, this means the majority of Thurrock's Foster Carers' payments will be exempt from tax.

Foster Carers who have previously filled in Self-Assessment forms solely for foster caring may be sent a questionnaire by HM Revenue & Customs, which should mean they are removed from the system. However, if they do still receive a Self-Assessment form, it must be completed and returned, even if their net income from foster care is too low to pay tax and National Insurance on it.

Foster Carers cannot claim Child Benefit or Child Tax Credit for children being fostered, but are entitled to claim Working Tax Credit (WTC) if the level of their household income is low enough. The Childcare element of WTC is not claimable. Foster Carers should make a claim to WTC if they work at least thirty hours a week.

The other state benefit of Income Support is only applicable to Foster Carers of low income who do not work enough hours to begin to qualify for WTC. Foster Carers should make a claim to WTC if they work at least thirty hours a week. The other state benefit of Income Support is only applicable to Foster Carers of low income who do not work enough hours to begin to qualify for WTC. Foster Carers are eligible to claim Disability Living Allowance from the DWP for a Foster child with disabilities that are extensive enough to qualify for this benefit. It is paid to whoever is responsible for looking after the child on a day-to-day basis.

The main government guidance for Foster Carers can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

And Helpsheet 236:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/qualifying-care-relief-foster-carers-adultplacement-carers-kinship-carers-and-staying-put-carers-hs236-self-assessmenthelpsheet/hs236-qualifying-care-relief-foster-carers-adult-placement-carers-kinshipcarers-and-staying-put-carers-2018>

The first of these contains a great deal of information and is written in a user-friendly style. The second of these is specifically to help Foster Carers when drawing up the Self-Employment pages of

their annual Self- Assessment Return, and, as such, a fresh version is issued each tax year. The Council recommends that Foster Carers appoint their own accountant unless they feel particularly competent to do their own profit & loss account and Self- Assessment Return themselves, and it is advisable to get an accountant who knows about the foster care tax regime.

### 8.3 Benefits

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD FOSTER CHILDREN BE IDENTIFIED BY GIVING THEIR NAMES

ALL CLAIMS SHOULD BE DISCUSSED AND AGREED WITH THE SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER AND CHILD'S SOCIAL WORKER

Foster Carers who think that either they or the children/young people in their care may be eligible for these should seek independent advice from your Supervising Social Worker or the Welfare Rights Service. The Department for Work & Pensions has an excellent website [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk) with an A to Z that explains the various benefits in detail.

Child benefit cannot be claimed for foster children and the same is true of the Child Tax Credit, the childcare component of Working Tax Credit and school meals.

#### **Housing Benefit and Council Benefit;**

These provide help with rent and Council Tax for those on low incomes. The presence of a fostered child in your family will not make any difference to your benefit as they are not counted as part of your family and your payments are not counted as income. This may change should a child reach the age 18.

#### **Working Tax Credit;**

See earlier section 8.2

#### 8.3.2 Managing Disability Benefits (DLA, PIP, ESA, HB, Appointeeship and Capacity)

If Carers are looking after a child in receipt of DLA/PIP, a separate account should be opened in the Carers name to manage the DLA/PIP. This money should only be accessed by the Carer in consultation with their Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker.

The Supervising Social Worker, with assistance from the child's Social Worker, will ensure that any relevant disability allowances are claimed e.g. Disability Living Allowance (DLA) if under 16 and Personal Independent Payment (PIP) and ESA if 16 or over dependent on whether the young person is in education or not (or Universal Credit when introduced). Regular discussion should take place between them as to how this money should be used.

Young people aged 16 or over can claim ESA in their own right if they are medically unfit for work even if looked-after and are also in receipt of DLA/PIP. This includes those still in school, college or university.

Benefits need to be taken into account when assessing exceptional expenditure. Team Managers (Children's Services Social Work Teams) should discuss these cases with the Fostering Team Manager. Foster Carers should keep a record of their use of DLA/PIP discussed and recorded in supervision.

DLA (care) or PIP (daily living) – will not be taken into account when assessing fostering allowances. However, in respect of exceptional expenditure and enhanced payment schemes, the use of DLA (care) or PIP (daily living) will be taken into account. In the first instance DLA/PIP should be used to provide for additional needs, related to the child's disability. If a child in foster care is in receipt of DLA/PIP it is expected that this money should be put into a savings account. Any money being spent from the DLA/PIP should be done in discussion with the supervising Social Worker.

DLA (mobility) and PIP (mobility) – may not, by law, be taken into account as a source of income. However, where Thurrock Council is supporting the costs of a vehicle specifically for a disabled child, the mobility payment will be taken into account when calculating the amount of additional financial support to be provided.

Once a young person reaches the age of 16 they receive DLA in their own right until such time as a re-assessment claim for PIP has to be made. It is important that at this point some discussion takes place with the young person's Social Worker to establish how this money is managed by the young person, whether an appointee is required and whether they need appropriate advice on money management.

Supervising Social Workers must ensure that Foster Carers caring for children with disabilities are given adequate support in claiming Disability Living Allowance/PIP and that they receive the applicable increase in any other benefit they claim as a result. A Foster Carer looking after a child getting DLA (care) or PIP (daily living) may be due Carers allowance for example. Contact the Money Advice Unit for more information.

DLA (care) can be claimed from birth and Disability Living Allowance (mobility from 3+). PIP can be claimed from age 16, when DLA will be re-assessed.

It may be helpful to highlight issues regarding the Foster Carers being the benefit appointee for a child with disabilities, particularly where the Foster Carers are managing the child's benefit claim. Additionally, it may be helpful to highlight the need to undertake a 'Capacity' assessment on certain disabled 16 year olds in regard to their ability to manage their money and benefit claim. This then may result in the need for the child to have a broader appointee, particularly important where a child makes the transition to Health and Community Services – 0-25 Service.