

Title/Status-	Section 17/23/20 Financial Assistance
New document or revised	New
Date legal review	10 th August 2023
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Responsible Head of Service	Kelda Claire
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Social Worker Practice Standards – Section 17/23/20 Financial Assistance

1. Introduction

This practice standards guidance is provided for when assessing the level of financial assistance required to meet the needs of a child, parent, or carer under Section 17, 20 and 23.

Before giving any assistance or imposing any conditions, a Local Authority shall have regard to the means of the child concerned and of each of the child's parents.

In order to appropriately and efficiently apply these responsibilities, this document outlines the Local Authorities expectations regarding practice and requires all staff who may request financial support from the s17/23/20 budget, to be fully aware of these expectations and be able to justify any application for resources accordingly.

2. Provision of Financial Assistance

Financial assistance in terms of goods or services, or in exceptional circumstances cash, can be provided to a child, parent or carer under the following sections within the **Children Act 1989**;

Section 17 - General duty to 'safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in need. A 'child in need' is a child who needs additional support from the local authority to meet their potential.

Section 20 - Accommodated children who cannot live with their parents.

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Section 23 - Provision of accommodation and maintenance by local authority for children whom they are looking after.

Section 24 - The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Transitions into Adulthood guidance made Children's Services financially responsible for all young people leaving care until their 18th birthday and to offer support and advice until the age of 21 (25 if in education) to eligible care leavers. The Children & Social Work Act 2017 extended this duty up to 25 for all care leavers who require a continued service. The **finance policy** should be read and applied, for guidance/criteria for assistance for goods and services for Care Leavers.

Financial assistance to purchase services will only be provided as an alternative to direct services where there is evidence that it is required to meet the assessed needs of the child or young person.

To address identified needs to safeguard and promote a child's welfare where there is no other legitimate source of financial assistance.

The services provided by a Local Authority in the exercise of functions conferred on them by this section may include giving assistance in kind or in cash.

Assistance may be unconditional or subject to conditions as to the repayment of the assistance or of its value (in whole or in part).

The management of the budget and compliance, as well as the Local Authority financial regulations, within which this document operates, rests with the budget holder.

Social work staff shall be mindful of issues of risk and liability when purchasing goods.

3. Criteria for Financial Assistance

The Core Criteria for all types of financial assistance are:

All financial assistance must be time-limited and subject to review by the Service Manager, at a maximum of 12 weeks initially for childcare costs and a maximum of 6 weeks for all other assistance. The period for which funding has been agreed must be clearly communicated by the team worker to the person in receipt of the assistance.

- The payment must be to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, where in the absence of financial assistance could escalate needs and greater risks;
- An allocated worker will usually be actively involved with the family at least for the duration of the payments and if the financial assistance is more than one off

emergency assistance, this must be assessed as part of an assessment or through the review of a child's plan;

- All alternatives should be explored with the family to assist in accessing and utilising their existing resources to the best effect and support the family in becoming self-sustaining, prior to any application for funding;
- Payments should be made directly to the supplier or provider of services. Monies should not be given directly to the family or carers except in exceptional circumstances;
- At point of request for financial support it should be confirmed that there are no alternate sources of finance from the Benefits Agency, Housing Benefit, family or friend contributions, other agencies, charities. If theft is alleged, a crime number should be provided;

4. Accessing Financial Assistance

Due to financial processes/audit requirements that Business Support must adhere to, where possible, please ensure that advanced notice of payments is given to your local Business Support Team.

Only where invoicing, BACs or PCard payments are not appropriate should cash payments be requested, and under no circumstance should a worker purchase items and claim via Expenses. Cash payments should not be promised to suppliers. Please speak to your local Business Support Team if you are unsure of the appropriate method of payment, and they will advise accordingly.

When Financial Assistance is required refer to the process map (Appendix 1).

All financial assistance requests must be completed by the worker via the [Financial Request Form](#) and approved by the appropriate delegated power.

Any requests from Business Support for further information, evidence of authorisations, forms to be completed etc. will be in line with audit requirements and the practice standards, so staff must ensure that you provide all of the relevant information as soon as possible to avoid delays in payments.

5. Types of Financial Assistance

5.1 One off payment

These should be used to overcome a crisis, following the best assessment that can be achieved in the following circumstances:

5.2 Clothing and Equipment

The provision of clothing, furniture, bedding, or safety equipment can only be provided where an assessment determines items identified as essential to meet the needs of the child and/or prevent the child suffering Significant Harm or significant need and/or the need for the child to be looked after by the local authority.

- The assessment should address where needs are identified what avenues the family have taken to address the issue themselves, including family members support, via benefits and how family resources are being utilised;
- Where the family are unable to access support. Access to community resources should be considered. Liaison with the benefits agency, advice agencies and charitable organisations locally that can be accessed, and specific grants should be sought.
- Community Links, below are some useful links to access clothing and equipment, however also contact your CFWS link to find out if other local provision is available;

Furniture Recycling – **Worklink** (Hinckley)

Furniture Recycling, Clothing and Household Goods – **SOFA** (Loughborough)

Baby Basics – <https://www.babybasicsleicester.co.uk/>

Submission for funding should include efforts undertaken to seek alternate sources of funding.

5.3 Emergency Food Provision

- Food provision should be as cost effective as possible. In the first instance try local food banks and **community fridges**
- Food items include the following essentials – Baby formula milk, Bread, Milk, Cheese, Eggs, Pasta, Cereal
- **Emergency** meals in the event of groceries not being able to be bought can be given, however this is limited to £5 per meal per person

5.4 Travelling Expenses

This provision is available to support the transport of children, parents, carers, or extended family member to attend assessments, activities, appointments, emergency hospital visiting, *contact and support groups which are essential to a child's plan or to comply with court direction.

- An assessment must ensure and agree that they could not reasonably be expected to travel using their own means due to medical, situational, financial, or geographical reasons. This support is to be provided through bus tickets, train tickets or reimbursement of own, family or friend's petrol costs (see petrol rate below).
 - Taxis are **not** the first option to be explored and will not be approved unless all other avenues of travel have been exhausted and the cost of travel has been evaluated against the benefits to the child of the appointment. Alternative cost-effective means of transport should be considered in the first instance
 - Should a taxi be agreed then only council approved Taxi companies can be used for the transportation of children. These can be accessed through the Transport Team via the "Request for Transport" workflow step within the Mosaic Start menu.
 - GP confirmation of medical conditions reported to impact upon capacity to travel or use public transport are to be provided to the Local Authority by the parent, carer, adult family member;
 - Reimbursement of petrol costs to be subject to driver and vehicle being appropriately licensed and insured. The rates of payment for fuel, has to be based upon average miles per gallon for the vehicle used for an agreed distance between home to meeting, the cost identified to be agreed prior to submission for approval. The current reimbursement rate is 0.15p/mile, however there may be circumstances where this rate can be flexible.
- * All contact funding is to be needs based and requires prior managers approval, where funding is agreed the most cost-effective means needs to be applied.

5.5 Child Care Costs

This includes financial assistance for day nursery, child minder, after school clubs and play scheme provision. This provision must be part of a Child in Need or Protection Plan where it is essential to safeguard the child's welfare and prevent the need for the child to be looked after by the Local Authority.

In providing assistance for Child Care there is a responsibility to ensure the service provided is appropriate and of sufficient quality to ensure the provision is of value to the child and provides a safe environment.

- In every case where applicable free child care resources should be used.
- Where free child care cannot be accessed or the use of child care is required for a short time or for a specific event, consideration should be given as to whether the needs identified meet the criteria of supported through the S17/23 criteria
- Child care provision must be to meet the **needs** of the child, not the parent/carer. As such any child care provision to be sourced must have an Ofsted rating of 'Good' or above and be registered. Any queries, advice and support regarding the identification of such resources can be accessed via the [LCC website](#)
- Child care provision to be agreed for a maximum of 12 weeks initially and for subsequent periods of up to 6 weeks thereafter. A review to be held before each further period of child care is provided.

5.6 Specialists Assessments and DNA/Hair Strand Testing/Drug Testing/other Specialist Assessments

If special assessments or testing is required as part of child protection planning prior to care proceedings (pre proceedings public law outline PLO) to ascertain if a child is at risk of harm, then these need to be agreed by Head of Service.

- Any agreement for the above needs to be via a CDM as part of the PLO process and/or direct contact with Head of Service.
- In the event of drug testing agreed, if part of a Child Protection plan, then costs will be attributed to S17 therefore needs to be recorded. If part of pre-proceedings, then the costs will be picked up by legal.

5.7 Interpreter and Translation Costs

Where English is not the first language for children and carers, workers need to ascertain if the child and/or carer is able to understand and speak English to the level that they can complete their intervention in a meaningful way.

If the child and/or carer is not able to understand or speak English to the required level, then an interpreter must be arranged. Consideration is to be given to whether this could be an extended family member or family friend or community worker including teaching staff with the carers permission if it will not be detrimental to the intervention. It is important that any section 47 enquiries or disclosure interviews always have an independent professional interpreter.

If a professional interpreter is arranged please refer to the corporate guidance on the [intranet](#) for how to arrange this. Key documents such as assessments, child protection case conference minutes, plans and court documents should always be translated. Professional Interpreters **should** always be used for assessments; Case Conferences; and court proceedings.

Children and Family Services require that consideration is given to using the benefit system to provide financial support before expenditure under the Children Act is authorised.

5.8 Certificates such as Birth, Death and Passports

The provision of such certificates can be supported where replacements are required to support identity/application/entitlement needs.

5.9 Other Types of Payments not covered by this Guidance

- When a service user requests financial assistance because of a failure of arrival of benefits or tax credits. (Please note if administrative or procedural failures are leading to Children Act expenditure make sure your manager is notified);
- When the service user has been denied benefits because of her/his immigration status, particularly if Job Centre Plus staff are claiming that the person is not 'habitually resident' in the UK or the person has 'no recourse to public funds' as a condition of their stay in the UK;
- If a young person is being Accommodated under S20, in independent living or is being financially supported under S24. (The benefit position of young people and care leavers is often complex, detailed advice should be sought in individual cases);
- If a service user is requesting assistance with a one-off item of expenditure and is in receipt of Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance;
- Where a child with a disability is approaching their 16th birthday and, Looked After or not, advice is required in relation to benefits;
- Where a service user is requesting financial assistance in order to provide care for a child as an alternative to that child being looked after.
- C&F Services is not fundamentally a long-term income maintenance agency and whilst interim arrangements can be made, these need to be time limited.
- Assistance towards driving licence and tests should not be coded against S17/23 as workers need to go through Corporate Parenting.

A guide to benefits for people who foster or adopt, which also covers informal, or family and friend carers is available on [GOV.UK](#) along with other benefit guides for families, children

with disabilities, pregnant women, carers and young people and the current rates of benefit and tax credits. In addition, [Help for Households](#) site gives guidance on Childcare support.

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Service Manager Practice Standards – Section 17/23 Financial Assistance

Approval of Financial Assistance

All requests for financial assistance should be made by the team worker. Goods and services should be purchased where possible through 'P cards', purchase orders/invoices, BACs and only where these payment options are not available, cash through Imprest requests. Please ensure that workers are not promising cash payments to suppliers.

Managers need to ensure that a level of challenge and scrutiny is conducted, to ensure that the finance assistance request is **needs** led.

Allowable expenditure – one off payments

This is for guidance only; exceptions may be considered and need to be discussed with the line manager. For care leavers please refer to the [Finance Policy](#).

Type of goods/services	Maximum Payment
*Hotel room	*£150 per family
One off clothing allowance – unaccompanied	£150
Utilities (heat, power)	£25
Essential Clothing	£100
Toiletries	£10
Meals - Emergency	£5 per meal per person
Mobile phone	£50
Phone credit	£10

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Emergency household equipment	£100
Baby essentials	£20
Emergency Groceries	**Up to £100 per family

*When booking accommodation staff are expected to find the most cost-effective accommodation ensuring that minimal nights are agreed. Managers need to ensure that the total cost is calculated and approved by the appropriate level (see Financial Approval table below). Areas such as London may not meet the guide of £150 per family therefore in these circumstances agreement from the line manager if exceeding the guide of £150 should be sought.

**Emergency groceries should be assessed depending on the size of the family, however in all circumstances community fridges, foodbanks should be accessed unless it is out of hours.

Cumulative costs for each child over a financial year must also be taken into account when deciding the appropriate level of delegated authority and should also be available to support the discussion in context. For instance, weekly session for an agreed period of 6 weeks at £80 (total £480) would require service manager sign off.

Managers to ensure that when agreeing to financial assistance that the service expenditure log/case notes are checked to determine when last payment was made and for what goods/services.

In all cases the child's worker will make their request to their team manager only via the finance request form who will review work undertaken and will confirm approval for submission to the appropriate approver (see approval limits table below). Amounts exceeding £201 or seen as being required under exceptional circumstances will be referred to the service manager who will identify any additional actions that may need to be undertaken before making the request for payment.

It is expected that all proposed expenditure is submitted for approval and agreement through the delegated power. Where the team manager is unavailable, delegation can be given to the duty managers or other team managers for the approval of single items within the prescribed financial limits. This should be reported to the team manager upon return.

Where the budget holding service manager is absent any financial assistance or a single item above approved limits, will require approval from another service manager, with an automatic notification to the budget holding service manager for their return.

Repeat request for funding needs to be taken to the Head of Service. Where ongoing services have been identified as a need and require approval, for the provision of services over a period of time.

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Approval Limit

Financial Approval Limits	Authorised to Sanction
£1 - £200	Team or Duty Manager
£201 - £1,500	Service Manager
£1,501 - £10,000	Head of Service
£10,001 and above	Assistant Director

6. Monitoring Spend

Managers are responsible for monitoring spend and ensuring that staff are challenged over what is being spent.

Any spend that is agreed will be recorded on individual monitoring tracker by business support.

Financial payments are time limited and subject to review. A payment to a Child in Need will be reviewed in supervision a month after the payment has been made and not exceeding three months and recorded on the child's case file on Mosaic. It is the responsibility of the service manager to monitor the budget.

S17/23 spend must be reviewed by the Service Manager on a monthly basis to ensure that where financial support is time limited that payments are ended by the agreed end date, and any non-compliance is addressed appropriately.

In the event of ongoing financial assistance required for a particular child/family then this will need to be agreed between the Service Manager and Head of Service, and in the event of total spend exceeding £10,000 approval from the Assistance Director should be sought.

7. Auditing Expenditure

On a bi-monthly basis via the ICM service managers and team managers should review year to date spend and ensure compliance against these standards.

A report will be produced and presented to SMT detailing areas such as recurrence of payments, large payments, non-compliance of expenditure, trends in spend etc.

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Appendix 1

The process below should be followed when S17/23 financial assistance is required;

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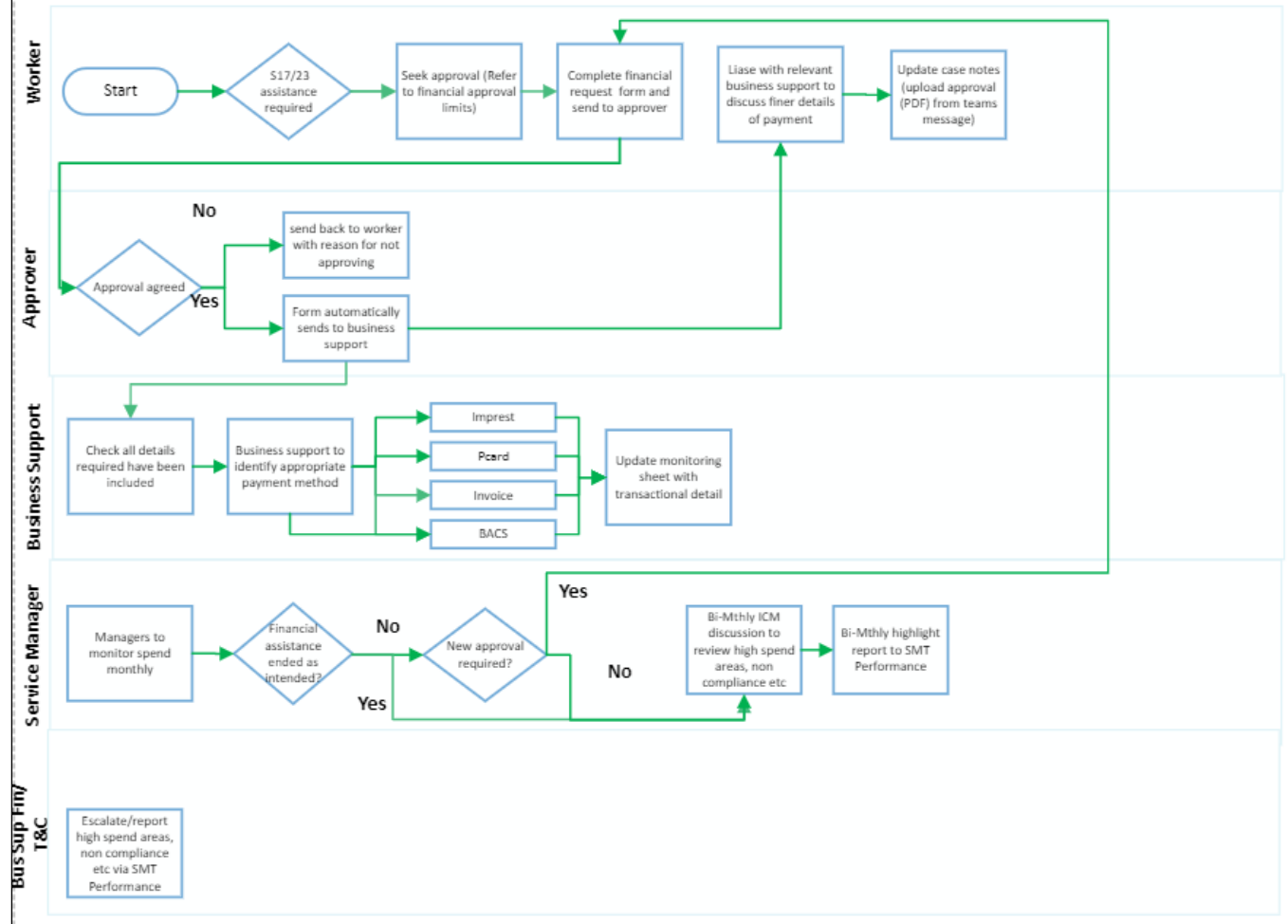
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S17/23 Request Financial Assistance Process



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