**Financial Assistance for a Child in Need Section 17 Children Act 1989**

**Practice Guidance for Social Work Staff.**

A Section 17 Children Act 1989 (s17 CA 1989) payment is made to a Child in Need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. S17 payments are for the purpose of the Child in Need and made directly to the service user, a parent with parental responsibility or legal carer. This guidance needs to be followed when submitting any application for Section 17 Financial Assistance.

Please read this guidance alongside the on-line procedures chapter Financial Assistance Section 17 (s17) Children Act 1989.

1. **Financial Assistance to Service Users**

In the first place service users who request s17 funding need to show evidence to social work staff that financial support has been sought from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Should the DWP not be able to offer financial assistance service users need to be encouraged and supported by social work staff to make applications to alternative funders before completing an application for a s17 payment.

Alternative financial support could include (please see useful contacts below) but is not limited to:

* Family and friends contributions
* Kent Support and Assistance Service - KSAS
* Food Banks
* Local and National Charities
* Health
* Education

On successfully securing alternative funding all payments should be made directly from the funder to the service user, parent with parental responsibility or legal carer. If this is not possible social work staff who receive funding on a service users behalf must pass any payments to the Cashier to be paid into the s17 account. Evidence of funding received (letter email etc…) must be uploaded to **Liberi documents** signposted from **Liberi case notes**. Funding from alternative funders must be spent on the item requested sourced by the funder or service user with social work staff support. Should the service user no longer require the particular item requests can be made to the funder to spend the money on alternative provision for the same service user. If the service user no longer requires financial assistance the funding is to be returned to the source.

Social work staff needs to satisfy the team manager, service manager or Access to Resource Panel (ARP) that other options has been explored and there are no alternatives sources of funding. When funding has been declined elsewhere this must be evidenced by way of a letter telephone call or email uploaded to **Liberi Documents** recorded on **Liberi Case Notes**.

1. **S17 Payments**

S17 payments are one-off payments and are available to families on state benefit. This payment will not affect their benefit entitlement. For families not on state benefit a means assessment will be necessary to consider whether the service user or their family could repay a s17 loan payment. Social work staff will need to discuss these requests with their managers.

All requests for s17 payments need to have been assessed. This can be in brief for a crisis payment or by way of a Child and Family (C&F) Assessment. A s17 payment can also be requested at a Child in Need Review or Child Protection Case Conference as part of an outcome focused plan. The recommendations of the assessment or plan will evidence that a child has a need for s17 financial assistance. That is the items identified are essential in meeting the needs of the child and/or prevent the child suffering significant harm and/or the need for the child to be looked after by the local authority.

Along with the recommendations of the assessment/plan a S17 Expenditure Application SHWB 324 Form please see link from Financial Assistance Section 17 (s17) Children Act 1989 on-line procedure chapter. This Form needs to be filled in by social work staff, then authorised and signed by the team manager or service manager or ARP.

1. **Emergency S17 Payments**

In urgent cases social work staff will still need to consider the possibility of alternative funding, carry out a brief assessment of need, and/or update the C&F Assessment. The SHWB 324 Form needs to be filled in by social work staff and authorised and signed by the appropriate manager.

1. **Authorisation**

A team manager can authorise a payment of up to £50.00. Repeat request for funding needs to be taken to the Access to Resources Panel (ARP).

Requests for larger amounts need to be authorised by a service manager. The service manager can authorise a payment over £50.00 and up to £500.00. Any repeat request for funding needs to be taken to ARP.

1. **Access to Resources Panel (ARP)**

Requests for payments over £500.00 or those deemed to be exceptional would need to be made on a SHWB 324 Form with supporting evidence. This will be taken by the service manager (and team manager/social work staff where necessary) to ARP. The Panel will assess and authorise payment if the request meets the criteria for financial support. Any request for ongoing payments will also need to be agreed at ARP and will have timescales for reviews and an end date.

A request for an exceptional s17 payment may include though is not limited to:-

* A significant event
* A payment sets a precedent
* An ongoing payment
* Specialist Assessments

**Once authorised by the Team Manager or Service Manager S17 Payments can be made by:-**

* Cash (in exceptional circumstances)
* Cheque
* Journal Transfer
* Voucher/Store Accounts (such as Asda and Argos)
* KCC purchasing cards
* Travel Warrants
* Taxi services from the Children’s Transport Team
1. **Recording**

No payments can be made if the SHWB 324 Form is only signed by one person. Two signatures are required one from the staff member requesting funding and one from the manager/ARP approving the request. Management and ARP decisions and authorisation of payments need to be recorded on **Liberi Case Notes.**

On receipt of cash or other forms of payment social work staff and service users must sign to confirm they have received the payment. Receipts from families are essential and VAT receipts must be obtained for travel and goods. Signed and authorised S17 SHWB 324 Forms and receipts need to be uploaded to **Liberi Documents**.

All requests made to the Children’s Transport Team via the SHWB 324 Form receive a code that is specific to the service (i.e. each taxi firm has a specific code). This code needs to be acquired by the social work staff member and recorded on **Liberi Case Notes**. The SHWB 324 Form needs to be uploaded in **Liberi documents** signposted from **Liberi case notes**. Cross referencing codes and SHWB 324 Forms will ensure any funding for transport services can be identified to the service user enabling the spend to be monitored.

1. **Monitoring**

S17 payments are time limited and subject to review. This must be clearly stated to the service user.

All payments made to a service user need to be reviewed in **Supervision** after one month of being paid and not exceeding three months. The review needs to consider whether an update to the service user’s assessment/plan is necessary. This discussion needs to be recorded on **Liberi Supervision Case Notes**.

Service managers will meet with a finance officer monthly to oversee the budget in their area using the Oracle system. SCS DivMT will review the overall spend at their regular meetings.

**Useful Contacts**

Advice can be sought through the DWP National Jobcentre Enquiry Line is: **0345 604 3719**. Jobseeker’s Allowance, Income support, Incapacity Benefit or Employment and Support Allowance Telephone: **0345 608 8545**. For example Budgeting Loan, maternity grants. Website- <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>

Kent Support and Assistance Service- KSAS – To find out how to apply by going to the [KSAS website](http://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/care-and-support/benefits/kent-support-and-assistance-service) here or following the link below: <http://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/care-and-support/benefits/kent-support-and-assistance-service> or phone: **0300 333 5700**

Food Banks- : The Trussell Trust: enquiries@trusselltrust.org

Local and National Charitable Funding- for example: Churches, The Lions Club, Rotary Club, Frank Buttle Trust Tel: **020 7828 7311** info@buttleuk.org , Esmee Fairbairn Foundation Tel: **020 7812 3700** info@esmeefairbairn.org.uk

Health – Approach the Midwifery; Health Visitor and School Nurse Services and Sure Start for safety equipment.

Education – School Uniform Grants; Free School Meals; School Trips; The Eridge Trust

Children’s Transport Team can be contact on **03000 422859** or emailed on: homeschooltransport@kent.gov.uk