

# **Shropshire Council**

## **Children's Placement Service**

### **Payment Arrangements for Foster Carers**

**April 2023**

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## **1. Introduction**

This document outlines the scheme for payment to foster carers offering family-based care to children and young people looked after by Shropshire Council.

The arrangements outlined in this document represent a continued commitment by the Council to family-based care and a real attempt to recognise the skills and expertise of carers and reward them accordingly. It is also an attempt to reinforce the fair and transparent payment structure. This is coupled with the Council's commitment to continue to pay foster carers children's allowance payments in line with regional partners, and payment for skills which are designed to both recruit new carers and retain existing carers by offering competitive payment amounts.

We believe that not only does the scheme afford carers the status they deserve by introducing a process whereby their expertise can be measured, but also raises the profile of family-based care in Shropshire and therefore renders us more effective in carer retention and recruitment.

**More importantly, by constantly striving to increase the skill base of all our foster carers we should see a consequent improvement in placement stability leading to better outcomes for Shropshire's looked after children.**

The scheme is only available to foster carers approved by, and registered with, Shropshire Council. It is designed to recognise the range of skills and experience that carers and prospective carers possess, as well as the time and commitment involved in caring for children who are looked after by this Council.

The scheme includes all approved foster carers and connected person foster carers. It does not apply to Supported Board and Lodgings carers, whose payments have been considered elsewhere.

## **2. Standards and Levels of Payment**

Foster carer payments encompass two elements. First, child allowances which are expected to cover the care needs of the child and second, payment for skills which is the reward element paid to carers for being a foster carer or connected carer that continue to meet the role and expectations as carers under the 2011 Fostering Regulations. Rates can be reviewed annually. However, there cannot be a guaranteed increase in any allowance or fee. If there is to be an increase, new payment rates will be consulted upon with carers and new rates circulated to all foster carers at the beginning of each new financial year.

There will be 3 levels of payment for skills all of which involve payment of a fee in addition to the child allowance. Child allowances are only payable if there are children in placement.

Care plus payments, which are fee payments are a higher rate of pay which will only be used in accordance with the criteria contained in this policy. This is paid alongside child allowance payments.

### 3. The Payment Levels

#### Payment for Skills

Level	Training Needed and Level Expectations	Assessment	Weekly Fee (per child)
<b>Level 1 Connected Person Foster Carer's</b>	Skills to Care training course  Completion of training, support and development standards.  Completion of Carer Record Sheets  Engaging with Supervision with your SSW  Attendance at meetings related to the child	Form C  Assessment  as specified under the Fostering Regulations	£130
<b>Level 2 Approved Foster Carers</b>	Completed all above criteria, plus  Skills to Foster training course  (Foster Carers Complete Skills to Foster training instead of Skills to Care)  Level 2 will be paid from approval under the agreement that completion of all induction training courses within the first 12 months will be adhered to.  As set out in training and support strategy and commitment to attend Core Training courses. Progression of Personal Development Plan and successful completion of competency document.	Form F assessment  as specified under the Fostering Regulations to determine suitability to care for any child requiring a foster placement	£160
<b>Level 3 Experienced Foster Carers</b>	Completed all above criteria, plus  Completion of all Core courses and several Enhanced courses as set out in training and support strategy and at least two enhanced	Form F assessment  as specified under the Fostering	£250

	<p>courses including the Solihull Trauma module and successful completion of the competency workbook.</p> <p>Meeting the requirements set out in section 4. progression through the scheme</p>	<p>Regulations to determine suitability to care for any child requiring a foster placement</p>	
<p><b>Care Plus</b></p> <p><b>Foster Carers</b></p>	<p>Completion of above criteria, meeting the requirements set out in section 4. progression through the scheme, and below.</p> <p>Care Plus carers can and will offer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solo placements for hard to place young people,</li> <li>• Parent and baby placements</li> <li>• Remand placements,</li> <li>• Placements for complex young people as defined by Children’s Services</li> <li>• Placements to divert from residential care</li> <li>• Step-down from residential care</li> </ul>	<p>Form F assessment</p> <p>as specified under the Fostering Regulations to determine suitability to care for any child requiring a foster placement</p>	<p>£610</p> <p>(Flat Rate – Not Per Child)</p>

The children’s allowances will be as follows:

Age of child	Weekly Rate £’s
0-4	135.54
5-10	154.54
11-15	199.55
16+	236.66

**To note : All allowances are inclusive of Child Benefit and Foster Carers/Connected Foster Carers should not request and receive these or the Child Element of Universal Credit.**

Payments of skills and allowances are paid every 2 weeks and carers are now paid in arrears.

The Payment for Skills Fees are weekly payments available to carers throughout the year, regardless of whether a child is placed with them. If a Foster Carer has a period with no placement, they will be paid at the lower end of the skill level for that period; i.e Level 2 £160 per week and Level 3 £250 per week. Level 1, £130 is paid to Connected Person Foster Carers when the child is in placement due to the specific approval. This is not offered in most other local authorities or independent fostering agencies; most have now moved to a fee per bed approach where carers only receive payment if they have a child in placement. Shropshire have made the decision to retain their open fee approach as our experience is that very few carers have a vacancy for a period of time exceeding two weeks, and therefore we do not want to financially disadvantage our carers by losing their income when they have short breaks between placements.

As a minimum, carers who are approved as mainstream foster carers for Shropshire Council will start at Level 2 to reflect the role, expertise and skills required to care for any child for whom they are not the birth parent. It may in some situations be possible for carers to commence their fostering career with Level 3 dependent on their experience of fostering elsewhere or previous relevant professional childcare experience, however this would need to be clearly evidenced within your assessment. Decisions regarding this will be made by the Team Manager and the Service Manager prior to the applicants' presentation to Fostering Panel and evidence of their experience will be detailed in their Form F assessment. If carers wish to challenge their skill level, they can do so via communication through their supervising social worker as part of their fostering assessment. Skills fee payments begin when you take on your first full time placement.

Following discussions at the annual foster carer review, the evidence for progression of Payment for Skills will be presented to the appropriate Team Manager in Children's Placements Service as this is an operational decision-making process. The final decision regarding approval, however, once all the required criteria have been met, rests with the Service Manager who will consider the evidence presented and the Team Manager's views. If carers are unhappy about their skill level, they can make representations through Shropshire's complaints process.

The payment for Skills is dependent on the type of assessment that has been undertaken and progression through the skill levels is subject to the conditions set out below.

**Examples of total financial support:**

Level 1 Skills fee and allowance for one child 0-4 years - £265.54

Level 1 Skills fee and allowance with two children 5-10 years - £569.08

Level 2 skills fee and allowance with one child 0-4 years - £295.54 per week

Level 2 skills fee and allowance with two children 5-10 years – £629.08 per week

Level 3 skills fee and allowance with one child 11-15 years – £449.55 per week

Level 3 skills fee and allowance carer with two children, one 5-10 years and one 11-15 £854.09 per week

Care Plus skills fee and allowance with one child 16+ years £846.66 per week

### **To Note**

#### **Respite Carers Skills**

Carers who only provide respite care and do not have a full time placement do not receive a weekly skills payment. Respite only carers will be paid a £50 per night per child skills fee (up to 3 nights) , as well as pro rota childrens allowances.

For respite placements lasting more than 3 nights, carers will be paid a weekly skills fee instead. The level of skill fee for the specific respite period of 4 nights or more will be based on the circumstances around why the respite carer was needed. This will be at either Level 2 or 3 Skills fee levels. The relevant Team Manager will make the final decision about the level of skill payment.

## **4. Progression through the Scheme**

### **Progression from Level Two to Three**

To progress from Level Two to Three, carers must have undergone a Form F assessment to care for non-specified looked after children and been fostering for a period of **two** years or more. Completion of the Training Development and Support standards and completion of induction training modules must be completed within a set period of time of 12 months from approval. Carers will be required to complete a competency workbook that evidences their skills and experience to operate as a level Three carer, as well as completed additional core training and potentially completed some enhanced training. The progression document must be supported by and signed by the supervising social worker and the Team Manager. The decision regarding progression rests with the Service Manager who will have the responsibility to review the progression documentation in order to formulate a decision.

Supervising Social workers must stress that the competencies are only one element of the overall criteria that must be met for progression, and actual performance plays a significant part. 'Performance' will be measured by paying close attention to outcomes for children in placement.

Research indicates the following areas are crucial in determining whether a placement has been successful and supervising social workers assessing the case for progression will pay close attention to these areas:

- Did the placement(s) last as long as needed?
- Did the child (ren) participate in decisions affecting their day-to-day care in placement?
- Was contact maintained with family, friends?
- Did the child's well-being improve as a result of the placement?
- Was the child supported to engage in a healthy active lifestyle?
- Were the child's health and educational needs met as well or better in the foster placement than before?

- Was the child's identity (racial, cultural, and religious) respected?
- Was the child able to move-on successfully with the minimum stress and disruption?
- Was the child generally satisfied with the placement?

Clearly, these factors are not solely in the hands of carers and other professionals need to play their part in contributing to a successful placement outcome. It is important, however, for assessing social workers to identify the role played by carers in attempting to deliver on the aforementioned outcomes.

In addition to the requirements for family time with birth families set out in Section 9, the following skills and duties are required of carers at the following levels (all the criteria must be fulfilled to achieve the relevant skill level) and all progression is subject to case-by-case decision making:

### **To Note**

Carers offering a connected person's placement for a specified child can progress to level Two if they undergo a further period of assessment using the Form F assessment template to consider their skills and experiences to offer care for non-specified looked after children and if they have the space to accommodate another child.

Any request to be considered to care for non-specified looked after children will be subject to the conditions of the Form F assessment, approval considered by the Fostering panel and decision by the Agency Decision Maker.

However, in almost all connected person arrangements, the expectation of the Local Authority is that a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) will be pursued and finalised within 6-12 months of placement. This does not preclude connected carers from undergoing a Form F assessment following the making of an SGO order, they would however have to meet the statutory requirements for the completion of a Form F assessment.

### **Care Plus Payments**

To operate as a Care Plus carer to offer care for a complex child or complex sibling group, carers must have fulfilled all of the above/below criteria and been fostering for a period of **two** years or more or have considerable transferable skills from a previous role that equips them for managing a complex child or sibling group. There must be confidence from the Fostering Service that carers have the skill and experience to manage a placement of this type. Payment at the Care Plus rate will remain under continual review by the fostering service and the children's social work manager and will only remain payable for the duration of that placement or until the child or children are no longer deemed to be in need of a care plus package.

Should an allegation that has reached the threshold for an investigation under s47, Children Act 1989, be made against a foster carer whilst being assessed for progression, then the process would be suspended until appropriate investigations are completed.



Once the allegation investigation is completed the supervising social worker will complete a report of outcomes with a recommendation as to whether the next competency level of progression should continue or not, and any relevant recommendations regarding the carers continued practice and level of competence highlighted as an issue in the complaint/investigation.

The Team Manager will have discretion to agree progression in such matters although foster carers can make a written representation to the Service Manager should they wish to challenge the decision of the Team Manager.

### **Level Three**

Progression to Level Three by a carer from Level Two is when the following additional competencies are fulfilled: -

- A minimum of 2 years fostering, or relevant child related professional experience
- Flexible approach and commitment to the placement of children 0-18, this will mean carers accepting children 0-18 in order to operate as a level 3 carer.
- Completion of the eleven mandatory courses
- Additional training course as detailed in foster carers training and support strategy (by both carers in a two-carer household) and any training as identified as part of annual review or safeguarding investigation
- **Take children who have been in residential placements and are stepping back into a family care arrangement**
- Be available to offer care in an emergency and unplanned manner, preferably with one carer at home full-time
- Demonstrate an ability to work independently of the social worker in 'partnership' with other professionals responsible for delivering against the child's care plan
- Engage in regular mentoring or "buddying" and/or training of other carers
- will be able to supervise family time with birth family as identified and within the child's care plan

*NB: Mentoring or buddying can be defined as follows: The foster carers mentoring role as one in which the more experienced carer would support a more recently approved carer in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance and develop the less-experienced carers professional and personal growth. As such they will provide guidance to their colleague about a specific issue, coach them in developing a particular skill, facilitate their development by sharing resources, contact and networks, challenge them to move beyond their comfort zone with particular issues that may arise in placement, help the carer to reflect and develop following challenging or difficult issues as they arise, when the carer doesn't wish to initially discuss particular issues with their supervising social worker.*

## **Care Plus**

Care Plus payments will be applied to any carer who is already operating as a level Three carer where it is identified that a placement is needed for a child or young person with particular needs, this may be, but not exclusively be for mother and baby placements, remand placements, placement breakdowns to then prevent a move to residential care, complex presenting behaviour of a young person for example CSE or criminal exploitation or a step down from residential care. These can be solo placements, or they can apply to a situation where there is more than one child in placement and the needs of one child require a care plus approach. N.B if care plus payments are in place, this fee will cover care for all children in placement and not a fee per child.

Care Plus payments will only be paid for the duration of the placement and whilst the child's needs are assessed to require it. If the placement comes to an end, the carer will revert to their previous level of pay. If the child in placement settles over time and they no longer require the skills of a Care Plus arrangement, decisions about the need to revert to the previous skill level and previous payments will be made on an individual basis. There can be no expectation that care plus payments will continue for the duration of a placement.

## **5. Exceptional Skills payment**

We expect a high standard of care and commitment from all foster carers to enable children in their care to achieve outcomes against their care plan. Levels One, Two and Three skills payments are the financial reward given for this. However, we also believe that for certain children the level of skill and commitment required for a period of time may mean that a carer has to go "above and beyond". The request to pay an exceptional skills payment needs to be requested by the supervising social worker to the Team Manager. Decisions regarding payment will be made by the Service Manager in consultation with the relevant Team Manager.

It is anticipated that exceptional skills payment will relate to larger sibling groups, teenage placements or younger children with significantly challenging behaviours.

Requests for an exceptional skills payment will be made after each successful three-month period in placement.

These payments are discretionary and will be paid where the carer has been able to demonstrate care skills and commitment "above and beyond" that has met a child or young person's needs and has achieved excellent outcomes as determined by the child's care plan and placement plan

An exceptional skills payment of £250 can be made for a child covering a three-month period of outcomes achieved. If a second three-month period of outcomes is achieved a new application and decision will be reached. The maximum payment for any single child in one year is therefore £1,000.

**Criteria for exceptional skills: a child has been in placement for a minimum of three months and has achieved exceptional outcomes against their care plan sustained for a three-month period**

**AND**

**The skills and commitment of the carers have gone “above and beyond” good quality standard care and have they been a primary contributor to enabling the child to reach these outcomes**

**Example:**

- School attendance has been below 60% and has increased in excess of 85%.
- The child has for the first time engaged in a social or leisure activity that has significantly promoted their opportunity to develop peer friendships, age-appropriate independence and to improve their self-esteem.
- The child’s previous anti-social behaviour in school or the community has been seen to make significant improvements verified by external parties.
- The child’s complex health needs have been attended to, including extended attendance at hospital.

## **6. Demonstrating Competency: Examples**

Use of existing processes as evidence e.g. Childs feedback to IRO and CLA reviews, foster carer agreement, foster carer record sheets, diary, supervising social worker visits to carer - both announced and unannounced - Health and Safety checklist, Safer Care plans and supervision records.

Other sources of evidence e.g. use of feedback from child’s social worker via end of placement reports/review document and feedback from parents.

Portfolio approach by carer and completion of the competency workbook, other sources, videos, group discussions.

Other evidence-based assessment processes e.g. Ofsted, Training Support and Development (TSD) standards.

Standardised format regarding content and recording of supervising social worker visits to carers incorporating checklist against competencies/criteria, contact sheets, supervision records etc.

**This is not an exhaustive list and carers can provide a range of evidence they feel reflect the work they have done and what they have achieved for children in their care.**

## **7. Family Time with birth family and friends**

Maintaining family time with birth family and friends is a duty of the Local Authority and an important part of the child's life during separation, whether this is temporary or to be permanent in the long term. As corporate parent's we will always seek to support a child to maintain a level of contact so as to promote their welfare and their continuing relationship with their birth family and as such a carer, on behalf of the Local Authority, is expected to support the agreed plan of contact in a child's Care Plan. Observations of family time between children and their family members is often a fundamental aspect of court proceedings and ongoing care planning and as such all observations made by carers should be provided to a child's social worker.

We recognise however that supporting and facilitating family time with birth parents can be a challenge and below we identify core responsibilities that reflect the level of expertise of the carer.

**Level 1 (Connected Person Foster Carer):** carer will facilitate and may be expected to supervise family time with birth family as part of a child/s care plan if the identified risks are minimal and can be managed in agreement with all parties i.e. child's social worker, supervising fostering social worker, carers. This includes taking and collecting children from family time sessions and having direct contact with parents through a supervising worker (this is determined on a case-by-case basis and should take into account the situation and logistics of all placements in care at the time).

**Level 2 (Foster Carer):** carer will facilitate and may be expected to supervise family time with birth family. This includes taking and collecting children from family time sessions and having direct contact with parents or through a supervising worker if necessary (this is determined on a case-by-case basis and should take into account the situation and logistics of all placements in care at the time).

**Level 3 and Care Plus:** carer will be expected to supervise family time with birth family as identified and within the child's care plan (this is determined on a case-by-case basis and should take into account the situation and logistics of all placements in care at the time).

In all cases a risk assessment will be undertaken by the fostering supervising social worker and child's social worker in collaboration with the foster carer. Where the assessments identify risk, an action plan to minimise and manage any risk to the carer or the placement stability will be put in place and agreed by all parties i.e. foster carer supervising fostering social worker, and child's social worker.

## **8. Training and Support**

All carers will have the opportunity to attend carer forums. These forums offer the possibility for carers carrying out similar tasks to meet each other, share their experiences and learning. It is encouraged that all carers attend such forums and encourage new carers to do likewise.

Following approval from Fostering Panel, Foster Carers are expected to complete the Training and Development Standards (TSD's) which are set out by the Department for Education and show the areas of skills and knowledge that all carers need to achieve and evidence in the first 12 months of their Fostering journey (18 months for Connected carers). It is a statutory requirement that these are completed as set out in Fostering regulations for all foster carers.

### **Induction**

During the first 12 months, carers will have the opportunity to attend a number of courses which make up the induction training offer. Each of these courses will provide evidence to assist in meeting the TSD's as well as providing specific knowledge and skill development in a variety of areas. Inclusive of skills to foster there are 6 induction courses that must be completed by all carers, and these should be completed within the first 12 months of approval.

### **Core**

Once carers have successfully completed their induction and TSD's, core training courses will be available to attend. These core training courses are designed to further develop carer's skills and confidence within the role, these courses need to be completed within the second year of fostering.

### **Enhanced**

These courses are designed to focus on specific topic areas and will not be applicable to all carers. If you feel that you would benefit from one of these courses at any point during your fostering journey, then please book to attend.

### **Bespoke**

Carers can use supervision with their Supervising Social Worker to discuss in depth their training needs and any bespoke training will need to be identified on their Personal Development Plans.

It is the responsibility of the supervising social worker, in discussion with the carer, to identify each carer's training needs beyond the core training identified below. These needs will be discussed, agreed and updated at each annual review.

There are courses that all foster carers at Levels One, Two, Three and Care Plus are expected to attend. These are:

- First Aid
- Making a Difference at PEPS
- The ABC of Special Educational Needs
- Solihull Approach (Parenting Model) – Understanding your Child
- Raising Awareness of Safeguarding and Protecting Children
- Exploitation Training
- Trauma and Loss
- Understanding Behaviour
- Safer caring including Allegations
- Attachment
- Family Time
- Health journey for looked After Children
- Reporting and Recording

### **Supervision**

As well as the training and support offer to all of our carers, both foster carers and connected person foster carers are provided with a supervising social worker and frequent supervision meetings on a regular basis (agreed by you and your supervising social worker, ranging from every 4-12 weeks). When approved, your supervising social worker will go through a supervision agreement and timescales will be agreed with you. As an approved foster carer under any skills level, you are required to make time and engage with supervision on a regular basis.

## **9. Additional payment information**

In addition to any increase in allowances and/or the payment for skills levels the following additional payments will also apply:

### **Mileage Allowance**

The child's allowance covers payment for the first 35 miles a week for a child 0-11 years and the first 70 miles for a child 11 years plus. Any miles on top of this can be claimed and will be paid at **0.45p** per mile. This can include travel school, family time, travel to health appointments and travel incurred in supporting the child to meet tasks and undertake activities within their care plan. This will include travel to clubs up to two per week per child. This does not include holidays, day trips or shopping expeditions. Mileage claims need to be made within the last 12 weeks to your supervising social worker. The decision to pay mileage allowances for periods beyond 12 weeks will be made by the Managers discretion on a case by case basis.

### **Holiday Allowance**

*The carer/s should be able to evidence how this grant contributes to either a family holiday with the young person/s or additional holiday activities for the child or young person.*

There is a holiday grant of **£398.00 per child** payable during the first week of June.

A holiday allowance of **£300.00** will also be paid to foster carers payable during the first pay week in June. This is to be used to contribute to the cost of taking their looked after child on holiday.

A Holiday Allowance of £110.00 to Shared Care and Respite Carers payable during the first week in June *if they take the young person on holiday to support the adult costs.*

### **Birthday Allowance**

(Birthday allowance will be paid one week in advance of the birthday.)

(Allowances are paid fortnightly unless alternative arrangements are made in exceptional circumstances.)

**£199 per child**

### **Christmas/Festival Allowances**

(Christmas Allowance will be paid in advance of the Christmas payment run, usually within the 1<sup>st</sup> week of December)

(Allowances are paid fortnightly unless alternative arrangements are made in exceptional circumstances.)

**£199 per child**

### **School Uniforms**

(Where required and agreed with the supervising social worker and team manager)

Children starting infant or junior school **£87.00**

Children transferring to secondary school **£222.00**

(Payable in August, or the month prior to the child starting school)

### **Initial clothing**

This is a discretionary allowance and applications should be made to the relevant Team Manager. Social Workers should seek the co-operation of those who hold parental responsibility to make sure that the child has adequate personal clothing and personal effects collected from home to take with them when they are looked after. In relation to the revised allowance's structure, an initial clothing allowance may not be required in each case but can be applied for up to a maximum amount of:

<b>0 - 4 years</b>	<b>£100.00</b>
<b>5 - 7 years</b>	<b>£100.00</b>
<b>8 - 10 years</b>	<b>£150.00</b>
<b>11 - 13 years</b>	<b>£150.00</b>
<b>14 - 15 years</b>	<b>£200.00</b>
<b>16+</b>	<b>£200.00</b>

### **Guidance for Pocket Money and Savings**

Please refer to separate policy.

### **Young Persons in work-contribution to care**

When a young person is over the age of 16 and is working, they are expected to contribute towards their maintenance. The young person will be expected to contribute directly to the carers in this way unless in full-time education, or when it can be proven that they cannot secure a job, grant or benefits.

The boarding out allowances will be reduced by this amount accordingly. It is essential therefore that the Link Social Worker (CPS) is informed if a young person is working.

£10 per week for young people on a youth training scheme or one-third of the young person's wage income.

### **Referral Bonus**

Foster carers receive a bonus of £500 for their own household if they refer in a new household who go on to be approved as Foster Carers for Shropshire by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) following a positive recommendation at Fostering Panel, and commence their first placement.

### **On call bonus**

An on-call bonus of £50 per night to carers who have agreed a potential emergency placement out of hours (who are directly contacted by the service or ESWDT between 16:00 – 08:45, all day on a Saturday or Sunday or all day on a Bank Holiday to discuss a placement). The on-call bonus of £50 per night will be for a maximum of 72 hours. If the child is placed into this agreed emergency placement, then an additional £50 will be paid.

### **Respite Bonus**

Full time carers who are able to offer an additional offer of a respite placement in an emergency will receive an additional bonus of £100 per child along with the pro rota allowances for the additional respite child.

### **Care Plus Retainer**

There may be certain circumstances, usually with Care Plus placements, whereby a retainer might be considered. This is to secure a placement or reward a carer for work carried out when the child hasn't yet been placed. It is intended to support the foster carer whilst the child is not yet in placement. In certain circumstances, a retainer could be paid to keep a placement open for a particular child. The retainer will be paid at the carer's normal fee level. For Care Plus retainers, the carer will be paid £200 per week.

## **10. Holiday arrangements for Carers**

Please refer to separate Foster Breaks policy.



## **11. Ceasing the Skills based payment**

The fee will be paid from the date of a foster carers' first placement, then paid 52 weeks per year irrespective of a child being in placement, including where it has been agreed that a carer needs a natural break in between placements. Longer breaks, unless agreed with the Children's Placement Team Manager, will result in skills-based payment being suspended (unless mitigating circumstances exist).

The other two exceptions to this rule are:

Firstly, when a carer refuses to take a placement on **two successive occasions** which has been deemed by the Children's Placement Service as a suitable match i.e. children and young people 0-18 in accordance with the criteria for each level unless unusual and mitigating circumstances are evident, the skills-based payment will be withdrawn.

Secondly, where it is deemed that a carer is not operating at their assessed skill level, a recommendation can be made to move a carer to a lower skill level.

Decisions regarding a change of skill level are made by the Service Manager in consultation with the appropriate Team Manager.

*NB: The offer of placement must be within the carers' registration criteria and deemed by the CPS duty system as appropriate. (Whilst age preferences will be considered, carers need to understand that this is a simply a preference and all our carers are approved as carers for 0-18). If refusal on two occasions occurs, this is likely to trigger an annual review. This will not apply in cases where a formal agreement has been made not to place to protect a child already in placement for a specific period.*

If a carer remains without a placement for 12 consecutive months or more (for whatever reason), then a reassessment and panel re-approval must take place before caring can resume.

## **12. Ending of placements**

All carers will be expected to give 28 days' notice of their intention to end a placement and (in exceptional circumstances 7 working days may be considered). No placement will end, irrespective of the time frame, without first having attended a placement consolidation meeting and oversight of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

Foster carers may be faced with suspension from caring and their fee payment temporarily withdrawn should they demand that a child be removed from their care with immediate effect. Removing children from foster placements in this manner is totally unacceptable and contrary to the best principles of placement stability. However, suspension will not follow if there are serious and clearly evidenced health and safety and safeguarding issues.

### **13. Safeguarding Allegation against carers**

If a carer is suspended and children removed following an allegation the skills fee will be paid for up to 8 weeks following the date of a Strategy Meeting recommending investigation. The allowance for the child will cease immediately.

Whether or not payments continue beyond the 8-week point is discretionary and will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Team Manager, who will consider any mitigating circumstances leading to a delay in resolution which may be outside the carer's control.

In cases where concerns have come to light regarding a Foster Carers' practice which do not meet the more serious allegations threshold, then CPS reserve the right to suspend the fee until such issues are investigated and addressed following a Concerns Meeting and subsequent investigation. However, every effort will be made to prioritise completion of any such investigation, and it is expected this will be completed in no more than 28 working days.

### **14. Carer ill health**

If a carer is unable to take a placement on the grounds of ill health, we would need this certifying within 7 days by a GP. If the certification is not provided, the fee payment will cease. After receipt of certification up to or on the 7<sup>th</sup> day the fee will be paid at the full rate for the first two months of sickness absence; half-rate for the following two months at which point payments would cease until a resumption of fostering occurred. The fee would be reinstated at any point during this four-month period should fostering resume. On returning from a break due to certified sickness the foster carer in question must foster for an unbroken period of four months before gaining entitlement to these arrangements for a further period. If a carer remains inactive due to ill health for a period of twelve months or more a re-assessment, plus a medical will need to take place before they can resume their fostering career.

### **15. Tax and National Insurance Implications**

Receiving a reward element as a carer can be of concern to some people, in relation to tax and benefits. It is hoped the following notes will be of help:

When you start fostering there is no one to tell HMRC about your income, **except you**. You will need to complete a Self-Assessment tax return each year and send it to HMRC.

All foster carers are treated as self-employed for tax purposes. There is a specific tax scheme foster carers can use called Qualifying Care Relief. The scheme calculates a tax threshold unique to the fostering household and when compared with their total fostering payments, determines if a foster carer has to pay any tax from their fostering or not. For many foster carers their total fostering payments are below their tax threshold and they do not have to pay any tax.

Anyone who is self-employed must register to pay Class 2 National Insurance Contributions. If a foster carer has no taxable profit from their fostering, or if they have taxable profit (the amount over the threshold) by up to £6,725 (2022-23) (£6,515 in 2021-22), they will automatically not have to pay Class 2 National Insurance Contributions.

The individual circumstances of the foster carer will determine if this is the best option for them or whether they have to make other arrangements to maintain their National Insurance record, for example applying for National Insurance credits or opting to pay the Class 2 contributions voluntarily. Further information about tax and national insurance is available from HM Revenue and Customs [HMRC's help-sheet 236: A help sheet explaining qualifying care relief, the tax scheme for foster carers](#). You can also go to the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) and type HS236 in the search box.

Foster Carers are able to find out more about this subject by contacting The Fostering Network's member helpline on 020 7401 9582 open Monday-Friday, 10 am - 3 pm and email [info@fostering.net](mailto:info@fostering.net)

Foster carers can also contact HMRC's National Insurance Helpline on 0300 200 3500 Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm, Saturday: 8am to 4pm, closed Sundays and bank holidays. You can find more information about national insurance on the Government's website [www.gov.uk/national-insurance](http://www.gov.uk/national-insurance)

***To Note: The Fostering Service has a responsibility to inform their foster carers of the requirement to register as self-employed and to remind foster carers to think about their national insurance contributions. However, the fostering service are not tax and national insurance experts and will signpost accordingly e.g. to The Fostering Network, HMRC etc. It is the foster carer's responsibility to make sure they register with HMRC and arrange national insurance contributions accordingly, taking into account their individual circumstances. The Local Authority holds no responsibility for notifying HMRC about self-employment, national Insurance or other related areas relating to a foster carer.***

### **Fostering and Universal Credit**

Carers may be able to get additional financial help through Universal Credit whilst caring for a child. You should never claim for Child Benefit or Child Tax Credits whilst acting as a Foster Carer or Connected Person Foster Carer as both of these elements are paid within the Childrens Allowance.

Fostering Network provide helpful information leaflets on national insurance, tax, benefits and pension contributions.

At the end of each financial year, Shropshire Council is responsible for providing carers with a statement of their reward element. This statement will be made minus the agreed costs of providing a service.

### **Making Tax Digital**

Making Tax Digital is a UK Government plan to change the way that tax works in the UK from 2024. It means that many foster carers will have to change the way they complete their self-assessment for income tax. Under the new plan, foster carers will need to send in quarterly tax returns (a return every three months) and use 'compatible software' to do all tax administration online. The Fostering Network is working with HMRC to make the case that foster carers should not be included in this change.

Find out more by visiting the

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/finances/tax-and-national-insurance>