

Appendix 5
Analysis of Foster Carer Allowances

Skills Payment

The current Skills Framework sets out a four level Payment For Skills (PFS). The model has minimum entry requirements for new carers at each level (1 lowest, 4 highest) and also allows existing carers to progress up through the levels if they meet the Task, Skills, and Competencies (TSC) requirements. A weekly skills fee is paid to carers in addition to weekly maintenance allowance payments. Currently this skills payment is paid at 100% for the first and second placement then at 50% for 3rd and subsequent payments.

The current Rotherham Council skills framework agreed by Cabinet in 2019 means that carers who offer a home to more than two children receive a 50% reduction in their weekly skills payment for any additional child placed. The rationale for this is that prior to 2019 a skills payment was paid as a single payment to the foster carer assessed to have reached a level of expertise and ability, in the 2019 it was agreed that the weekly skills payment would be uplifted and paid for the first two children but would be “capped” for any subsequent children placed.

Feedback from foster carers and regional benchmarking has highlighted that RMBC could make a small adjustment to allowances linked to third and subsequent placement allowances and be able to increase the number of placements current foster carers offer.

The Council have benchmarked fostering allowances across the Yorkshire and Humber region, the benchmarking was completed across the region to demonstrate the variance.

Rotherham Current Skill level payment for 3rd plus child	Lowest regional Payment for 3rd plus child	Highest regional payment for 3rd plus child	Proposed RMBC Uplift Position for 3rd plus child
Skill level 1 £50	£50.00	£102.10	£100.00
Skill Level 2 £62.50	£61.21	£102.00	£125.00
Skill Level 3 £87.50	£86.71	£ 277.76	£175.00
Skill Level 4 £180	£112.21	468.48	£360.00

The service has already identified 3 fostering families who would consider extending their approval if the full skills payment was offered for a third child.

Currently 8 children are placed as a 3rd or 4th in-house fostering placement. Implementing this proposal would increase the cost of these placements by circa £87.50 per week per child (£36.4k per annum).

A 50% payment for a third placement decreases the likelihood of attracting established IFA foster carers to Rotherham.

Foster carer mileage

When Rotherham looked after children need transport, e.g., for family time with siblings/ birth parents it is best if this is provided by adults who they trust and know them well. Often foster carers transport the looked after children living with them to key appointments and education.

The current foster carer mileage rate is 40p per mile.

All Rotherham Council Employees received an increase in the mileage rate in April 21 to the HMRC tax free rate of 45p, but the increase was not applied to foster carers as they are not direct employees of Rotherham Council.

Day Care

Foster carer day care is often used to support placements and carers where there are emergencies, to support in house placement of large sibling groups and for when children have been excluded from school. Whilst several of our carers often support each other as part of the wider fostering community, there are times where day care support as a more formal offer to support a child at risk of placement breakdown.

Feedback from foster carers is that the current hourly day care rate is not comparable to other payments made to domiciliary /childcare settings which provide care to children. For this reason, they are reluctant to offer to support, this is especially the case for older children. The proposal is to increase this payment to strengthen the formal support available

The current day care rate paid across the board regardless of the age or need of the child/young person is £3.50 per hour.

Comparisons has been made with our neighbouring LA's and IFAs, our rates are not competitive. Both pay foster carers 1/7th of the basic and 1/7th skill payment to provide care and focused respite to children who are risk of placement breakdown or on the edge of care.

The proposal is we implement the same payment rate.
(Calculated at 1/7 basic rate + 1/7 of Skills rate)

Age 0-4 Level 1 - £32.32

Age 5 -10 Level 2 - £37.56

Age 11-15 Level 3 - £49.00

Age 16+ Level 4 - £80.91

A formal day care offer would be used to prevent placement breakdowns as part of a wider package of support.

Complex care payment

RMBC does not currently offer an increased payment to foster carers caring for children with more complex needs e.g., children who have previously been in residential care, Teenagers in crisis requiring emergency care

Step down to Foster Care

Some children's needs are initially met by residential care however for most children residential care will not be their forever home or long-term solution. Rotherham Council work hard to identify children who no longer need residential care to 'step down' to foster care. This means children are not out of a family setting for longer than necessary and the cost of care is less. Despite lengthy and focused work with IFA providers, the service has not been able to identify any IFA agency to support us with any successful or lasting stepdown arrangements.

This led the service to develop and pilot an RMBC Rotherham step down to foster care offer, which included bespoke support and additional allowances. To date we have had one successful step down and a second placement due to progress in September 2022.

The stepdown offer includes a competitive payment package; a skills level 4 payment of £360 per week and a complex need payment of £200 per week, for the first 12 months, reviewed every 3 months. This is accompanied by a support package delivered by the designated Supervising Social Worker for Step down, guided by the fostering mapping assessment and includes a bespoke training offer for foster carers.

The service would aim to grow an estimated 12 placements linked to step down over the next 12 months. These would be a mix of new carers and current carers who already foster for RMBC, as this offers a progression for carers beyond the current skills level 4.

This proposal may attract in house foster carers to offer teenage placements and increase the number of children placed inhouse, avoiding the costly use of an IFA at £72.5k per annum, or an external residential placement at £270.5k per annum , an inhouse step down package at a cost is £39k per annum. This would be a targeted area of focus to identify in-house or recruit new foster carers to consider this and is currently a gap in provision.

Emergency Foster Care for Teenagers

When an unplanned/ emergency occurs which results in a teenager being unable to stay with their parents/ carers, if no alternative can be found, they may have to be cared for in an unregistered emergency placement or may progress straight to residential care. This means teenagers requiring unplanned/ emergency care are not cared for in a family placement. The use of unregulated placement should not happen and is only used as a last resort, when working with a child or young person who is in crisis and their safety is at immediate risk., rigorous assessments and plans are developed. These are on balance decisions that are made where there is clear evidence that the immediate risk to the child outweighs the risks of placing a child in an unregistered placement and is always a last resort and is robustly supervised and overseen by a Social Work Service Manager.

The offer of support to foster carers for teenagers, delivered by the fostering service, would involve bespoke training to support foster carers to work with the young person, their family and other significant people to support reunification.

The payment package would involve a skills level 4 payment of £360 per week, a complex payment of £200 per week, and the child's age-related weekly allowance, giving a total cost of £750 per week. In comparison an emergency placement is £8,400 per week, and an external residential placement is £5,200 per week.

The fostering team aim to recruit one household in the 3rd and 4th period of current financial year and a further household in 20223/2024.

Enhanced payment - Foster Care

A small number of children with enhanced needs e.g., complex behaviour or health needs, which can place additional demands and pressures on carers, have to wait too long to find their forever family-based placement. If the only family-based placement available is with an IFA provider this can mean children have to move away from their family network, community, and school.

The criteria for an 'enhanced care' payment would be, teenagers on the edge of residential care, children with disabilities or complex health need, children who are assessed at high risk of CSE/ CCE, children/YP who potentially pose a risk of sexually harmful behaviour / sexualised behaviour or children/YP with history of violent behaviour towards adults/carers. These children are already linked with universal and more specialist services such as, health, Child and Adolescent Mental Health service and the Rotherham Therapeutic Team.

The weekly Out of Area/Residential panel would review the level of enhanced or complex payments as a minimum every 6 months, and it is anticipated that with support the presenting needs of the young person will reduce, and the additional enhanced/ complex payments would reduce.

An enhanced foster care offer for Rotherham Council Foster Carers would involve an enhanced carer payment, £33k per annum. For children with enhanced needs this would avoid the use of an IFA placement at £59k per annum.

The offer for foster carers would contribute to the aim within the 2022/23 fostering budget profile to reduce IFA placements. This is an ambitious target however the benefits for the child and the budget savings it will create both a positive impact.