

# Hillingdon Fostering Service Financial Policy



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## Document Control

This policy is effective from April 2025- March 2028

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### Version history

<b>Version</b>	<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Description of change</b>	<b>Author</b>
1.1	Children Social Care	April 2025		
1.2	Children Social Care	April 2026	The financial policy was amended to remove ambiguity in how the policy was applied and to set out clear tiers for allowances, improving consistency and understanding in its application.	Donna Hugh

### The version numbering system

- 0.x (e.g., 0.01, 0.02): Draft versions for internal work-in-progress. The number increments with each set of changes before formal review.
- 1.0: First approved version. This signifies the document has been formally reviewed, approved, and is now the official baseline.
- 1.x (e.g., 1.1, 1.2): Minor revisions for small changes after approval (typo fixes, clarifications) that don't alter the document's core substance.
- 2.0: Major revisions indicating significant updates requiring a new, full approval cycle (policy overhauls, substantial content changes).

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish a comprehensive framework detailing the remuneration provided to foster carers by Hillingdon Council for the care of Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People. This includes specifying the structure of the placement fee, incentivised payments, and other related expenses as set out within the policy document.

## 1.2 Remuneration Framework

The remuneration framework is designed to support the foster carer in meeting the daily needs of the child in their care.

This includes covering expenses for food, utilities, entertainment, and developmental activities, essential for the child's growth into adulthood.

The weekly allowance is split equally, with 50% allocated to the foster carer in recognition of their role, and 50% allocated to the child or young person to support their individual needs. This structure ensures that both the carer's contribution and the child's requirements are appropriately resourced. Foster carers should document their spending in their logs.

The guidelines provided here represents a baseline for the standard of care expected, serving as a comprehensive guide. For costs beyond those listed, foster carers should consult with their supervising social worker for advice.

Approved and registered Hillingdon Foster carers receive this remuneration in recognition of their expertise, experience, and ongoing commitment to providing care for the child or children placed with them.

This fee also compensates for the carers' engagement in training and development activities, aimed at enhancing their ability to support children, many of whom may have complex needs due to previous experiences of loss, separation, or abuse.

Foster carers are expected to complete at least four days of training or equivalent learning each year to enhance their skills and knowledge, including meeting the Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards. This policy ensures that a broad range of training opportunities is available and accessible to all foster carers, including connected persons, to support the varying needs of children, as outlined in the Fostering Service Threshold Policy.

By aligning financial support with the three levels of provision Standard, Enhanced, and Specialised, this policy ensures foster carers are appropriately equipped and remunerated, based not only on the assessed needs of the children in their care, but also in recognition of the carers' expertise, skills, and experience. Tiers are reviewed

regularly (3-6 months), and carers may not remain at the same level throughout a placement. Where sustained positive progress is made, reviews will consider whether a child's needs can be met within the Standard tier.

Children placed under a Step Across arrangement will receive the Specialised rate for the first three months of the placement. After this period, the rate will be reviewed and may be adjusted to the Enhanced or Standard level, depending on the child's ongoing needs. If a child is not in school or an educational setting, the Enhanced rate will apply for a limited period of 6 months. Once the child returns to education/tuition, the rate will be reviewed and adjusted to the most appropriate tier based on their progress and support needs.

### **1.3 Administration of the Scheme and Payment Process**

On initial approval, all foster carers are sent an 'account details form' by the Fostering Service on which they should enter all their relevant personal and bank/savings account details, into which all payments will be made. This information will be kept confidential and is used by the finance team, to arrange for payments to be credited directly to the carer's account.

Once the account details form is received, the foster carer will be set up as a supplier for the 'Local Authority by Hillingdon Category Support Team' who manages all contracts for Hillingdon. They will additionally set up the foster carer on the 'Provider Portal' system and send the foster carer their account log in details via email from [categorysupport@hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:categorysupport@hillingdon.gov.uk).

The foster carer should check the Provider Portal on a weekly basis to access and print their weekly 'Remittance Advice' (payment information). The details of the payments to be made will be placed on the 'Provider Portal' on Thursday and will be credited to the foster carers account on the next day (Friday).

Foster carers are advised to download their remittance advice and keep both an electronic and paper copy for their records. The remittance advice provides a detailed breakdown of any payments made.

Both the Finance Team and the Fostering Service must be informed immediately of any change of account details, change of name, or payment address etc. If a child ceases to live with the carer, it is the responsibility of the foster carer, to advise their supervising social worker immediately.

The duty fostering social worker/supervising social worker completes a service request form to initiate any payment of the remuneration fee and any additional payments to foster carers. Payments are paid one week in arrears; therefore, the payment received on a Friday will cover the period ending the previous Saturday.

### **1.4 Review period**

This Policy will be reviewed regularly. We will review it at least every three years; however, some of the amounts in this policy may be changed annually to consider

inflation and cost of living. Some of the rates detailed here are linked to national determined rates and we will ensure that the Council will modify these rates to match the central government decisions.

## **1.5 Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Foster Carer/s**

Upon approval, foster carers are required to sign a 'Foster Care Agreement' that sets out the requirements of the fostering scheme.

### **Fostering Services**

Upon approval, all foster carers are allocated a named supervising social worker who is their key contact point and link with the fostering service and local authority.

The fostering service is committed to supporting carers in managing the financial aspects of their role. This includes providing clear guidance on allowances, fees, and entitlements, ensuring carers are equipped to meet the needs of the children in their care. Supervising social workers offer ongoing support and advice to help carers navigate financial responsibilities, maintain transparency, and access additional resources when required.

## **2. Special Guardianship Order Remuneration Fee and Adoption Remuneration Fee**

### **2.1 Foster carers**

Foster carers who go on to become Special Guardians or Adopters will continue to receive the standard tier of remuneration for two years after the child is no longer looked after, minus the prevailing rate of Child Benefit.

After this two-year period, continued financial support may be provided based on the child's assessed needs and subject to a means test. Where applicable, the standard remuneration (minus Child Benefit) may continue until the child turns 18, or until the end of any academic course they are enrolled in at that time.

The Weekly tiered fostering remuneration fee for 2025 – 2026 is listed in Appendix 9.

### 3. Part A: Items Contained Within the Weekly Remuneration Fee

#### A.1 Pocket money allowance

Pocket money allowance is included within the weekly fostering allowance and should be provided at the following rates:

<b>8–13 years</b>	£15 per week
<b>13–16 years</b>	£20 per week
<b>16+ years</b>	£25 per week

The Pocket Money Allowance is provided for children and young people and for their general and personal needs. Foster carers are expected to provide children with their pocket money each week or save the money on their behalf.

How the Pocket Money Allowance will be provided to the child and any specific conditions/arrangements attached to its use should be set out in the child's placement plan or LAC review where appropriate.

#### A.2 The Clothing and Footwear Allowance

The Clothing and Footwear Allowance can be used flexibly to purchase items directly by foster carer/s as necessary for young children and be provided directly to older children and young people on a weekly/monthly basis or as required. The use of the allowance will differ from child to child and should be set out in the child's/young person's placement plan and be agreed by the foster carer/s, supervising social worker and the child's/young person's social worker and/or leaving care personal adviser at the initial placement planning meeting or subsequent placement plan review.

The Clothing and Footwear Allowance should be used to purchase both casual clothing/footwear and to supplement the School Clothing/Footwear Allowance.

Carers should use the Hillingdon Clothing and Footwear Allowance Worksheet (Appendix 1) to demonstrate how the allowance has been used and what items of clothing or footwear have been purchased. This is required for audit purposes and to ensure children and young people have received their full entitlement for each financial year and particularly when they move between placements (it is advisable to retain receipts for foster carer/s records).

Carer/s of young people aged sixteen and over should ensure the young person has sufficient suitable clothing/footwear for formal/ interview situations, education/training/employment opportunities and for their future move to independent living.

Children and young people must be provided with new, good-quality clothing and footwear; second-hand or hand-me-down items should not be used.

### **A.3 Savings**

#### **£10.00 Per Week**

As a corporate parenting principle, Hillingdon Children's Services aims to support and encourage children and young people to develop a custom of saving money for their future life and independent living needs by providing a weekly Savings Allowance.

The Savings Allowance should be saved by the foster carer and placed in an account for the child/young person.

Foster carers should ensure children/young people make short term savings for items/activities from their pocket money and understand the Savings Allowance is for longer term requirements and cannot be accessed until the child/young person reaches the age of 18. Accrued savings need to follow the child if they move to other places or return home.

Foster carers must keep a record of how much has been saved for the child/young person and how/where it is held.

Foster carers/social workers should ensure all children/young people are given a yearly balance of their savings. See Appendix Two

The detailed arrangements for where the savings are held and how savings are added should be set out in the child/young person's placement plan.

How the savings will be transferred to and used by the young person at the age of 18 should be set out in the young person's Pathway Plan.

### **A.4 Travel**

The remuneration fee provides for the cost of any journey within a 30-mile radius of the fostering household per week. This is to cover transport for full-time education, health appointments, leisure activities, and family contact. Any journey beyond the 30-mile radius can be claimed for, with the first 30 miles deducted from the claimable mileage. Additional mileage will be paid at the HMRC mileage rate for 2024. Where applicable, Congestion Charge fees incurred as part of essential journeys may also be claimed with appropriate receipts.

2024-2025	First 10,000 Business Miles in the tax year	Each Business mile over 10,000 in the tax year
Car	45p per mile	25p per mile

Where foster carers have a Motability Scheme car on behalf of a child/young person in receipt of DLA/PIP, the mileage rate is 14.4p per mile.

Where appropriate and depending on an assessment of need that takes account of age and maturity, young people should be encouraged to use local public transport. This is undertaken to help them develop their life skills so that they can take advantage of education, training and employment opportunities, stay connected with family and friends and develop leisure and cultural interests, thereby avoiding social isolation.

All young people under the age of 16 are entitled to free bus travel when they have a valid Oyster Photocard. All students and work-based learners up to the age of 19 are entitled to free bus travel and all other young people aged 16 and 17 travel at the child fare.

For young people placed outside of the Hillingdon area, and in situations where it is not possible to obtain a free travel bus/train pass relevant to his/her locality, additional funding can be requested.

- The remuneration fee is intended to cover routine transport costs within a 30-mile radius of the fostering household. This includes travel for education, health appointments, leisure activities, and family contact.
- Journeys beyond 30 miles can be claimed separately. However, the first 30 miles must be deducted from the total mileage claimed.
- Additional mileage beyond the 30-mile threshold is reimbursed at the HMRC-approved mileage rate, which for 2024–2025 is:
  - 45p per mile for the first 10,000 business miles.
  - 25p per mile for each mile over 10,000.
  - 14.4p per mile if using a Motability Scheme vehicle for a child or young person receiving DLA/PIP.

## **A.5 Leisure Allowance**

Children in placement can access a wide range of discounted or free local facilities provided by the council offers that vary over time and these are in addition to the Merlin Pass available to fostering households and any individual support outlined in the child's care plan.

The Leisure Allowance further enables children and young people to take part in leisure activities, day trips, or short breaks with their foster carers, complementing the free opportunities available in the Borough.

This allowance may be used for hobby, sport, or leisure club memberships, or to contribute towards social activities, with foster carers supporting each child to participate in at least one social activity per week and helping older young people choose activities that can be sustained through their own income or benefits as they approach adulthood.

## **A.6 Education**

Standard materials that are required for children and young people's school attendance and activities are provided for within the remuneration fee. If specific major items are required foster carers should contact their supervising social worker regarding payments for 'one off' educational situations. This includes but is not limited to school uniform, stationery, arts and crafts equipment and related materials. For example, memory keys/sticks, notepads, pens, arts and other materials.

The remuneration fee provides for the purchase of a yearly set of standard school photographs.

The remuneration fee contains £10.00 per week for school trips and activities. Foster carers should contact their supervising social worker regarding additional financial support to enable young people to undertake major school field trips, holidays and other activities before they are booked. The request may need to be presented to HARP.

## **A.7 Birthday Allowance**

**£100.00**

The birthday allowance is included in the weekly allowance to purchase a gift or gifts and to provide a contribution towards the cost of celebrations. Only in exceptional circumstances and following discussion with the supervising social worker and child's social worker should the allowance be given in cash.

## **A.8 Christmas/ Festival**

The Christmas/festival allowance is included in the weekly allowance to purchase a gift or gifts and to provide a contribution towards the cost of celebrations. Only in exceptional circumstances and following discussion with the supervising social worker and the child's social worker should the allowance be given in cash. In addition, foster carers are also expected to use amounts accrued from the weekly allowance to contribute to the cost of festival presents and celebrations.

## **A.9 Annual Holiday Allowance**

Foster carers are expected to take children or young people on any holidays they plan. An annual holiday allowance of up to £500 may be provided on request as a contribution towards a holiday of at least five days. This allowance is paid in addition

to the weekly remuneration fee and should be used to support holiday-related expenses for the child or young person.

The annual holiday allowance is paid upon request and must be agreed in advance. Foster carers should discuss holiday plans early with the child's social worker and supervising social worker. Any funding must be approved by a Service Manager before arrangements are finalised. Costs will not be reimbursed without prior agreement, and the full allowance will only be paid if it reflects the actual cost of the holiday. Holiday plans should be discussed in LAC reviews, and carers must ensure appropriate travel insurance is in place.

#### **A.10 Phone contact**

The cost of phone calls made by the foster carer in connection with their fostering activity and those made by the child/young person are covered in the weekly allowance.

Foster carers should enable children/young people to have reasonable use of their landline or mobile phone to facilitate and maintain contact with family, friends, social workers and other appropriate adults. The reasonable use of phone facilities should be set out in the child/young person's placement plan.

For older teenagers it may be appropriate to provide a pay-as-you-go sim card, this should be subject to an assessment of need and risk, and the level of the allowance set out in the child/young person's placement plan.

Where children/young people require contact abroad foster carers should provide phone cards or purchase cheap rate overseas access. Foster carers to consider the use of options such as WhatsApp.

Foster carer should not enter mobile phone contracts for children or young people in their care.

#### **A.11 Holiday Clubs and Activities**

The weekly allowance covers the cost of most holiday clubs and activities during term time and school holiday periods, including our Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, and is provided in addition to the other support already available to fostering households.

#### **A.12 Exceptional Payments**

Where specific situations arise that are outside of the scope of this policy and guidance, foster carers should contact their supervising social worker regarding payments for exceptional and 'one off' situations.

### **4. Part B: Items Paid Additional to the Weekly Remuneration Fee**

## **B.1 Equipment Allowance**

### **Up To £500.00**

The Equipment Allowance is paid in situations where a newly approved foster carer requires equipment to offer a placement. The foster carer should provide a detailed list of all items required and submit the list to their supervising social worker for approval (by the Service Manager and/or Assistant Director).

Once an Equipment Allowance has been provided, it is expected the foster carer will replace items as required based on reasonable 'wear and tear.'

All Emergency Equipment Allowances must be explored with the supervising social worker and authorised by a Service manager.

## **B.2 Initial Clothing Allowance**

### **Up To £200.00**

The Emergency Initial Clothing Allowance is paid in situations where children/young people are placed with insufficient clothing for everyday needs.

When a child/young person is first placed, foster carers should make a list of the clothing that the child/young person has arrived with and another list setting out what clothing is required.

Carers should use the Hillingdon Clothing Allowance Worksheet (Appendix 1) to demonstrate what clothing the child/young person has and what items of clothing need to be purchased.

Applications for the Initial Clothing Allowance should be made via the supervising social worker and agreed by the Team Manager.

## **B.3 School Clothing/Footwear Allowance**

Foster carers should use the weekly allowance to cover the child's on-going school clothing and footwear needs.

In situations where a child/young person is placed and does not have the required uniform or equipment a Commencing School Payment will be considered subject to an assessment of need; additional payments will be considered when a child commences Secondary School and on Transferring Schools.

## **B.4 Respite Care and Day care**

When a child is in a respite placement the allowance will "follow the child" and for the number of nights the child receives respite, the allowance will be paid to the carer providing the respite care.

Once respite is agreed, the fostering allowance is transferred to the respite carer for the duration of the respite period both carers cannot be paid simultaneously. Overnight respite or day care must be agreed in advance with the supervising social worker and the child's social worker and must align with the child's care plan.

Respite placements must be matched by professionals and must not be arranged directly between carers. Day care is paid at a maximum of £15 per hour, not exceeding the daily fee and allowance rate.

### **B.5 Placement Introduction and Move-on Allowance.**

Expenses associated with placement introductions and placement moves will be paid to foster carer/s to cover the cost of introductory meetings, overnight stays and transfers to other foster carers/adopters/special guardianship carers/birth family.

The costs will be reimbursed at actual costs as agreed in advance with the supervising social worker and authorised by the fostering Team manager in consultation with the Service Manager. All associated costs should be discussed and agreed with the supervising social worker in advance.

### **B.6 Placement Retainer and Reserved Placement Allowance**

Retainers may be offered in certain circumstances to support a child's transition, based on their individual needs. Where used, they will be included in the child's transition plan and reviewed regularly. As retainers are not automatic, any request must be discussed with the Team Manager and Supervising Social Worker, with final approval from the Service Manager or Assistant Director.

### **B.7 Children and Young People absent from placements**

In situations where a child/young person is absent from a placement the foster carer will receive the full remuneration fee for a period of up to 7 nights if the care plan is that the child/young person will return to the placement. The foster carer will continue to receive the remuneration fee for a further 21 days if the child/young person remains missing and the care plan is for them to return to the placement. The remuneration fee ceases after 28 days (child/young person missing for 28 days). Any additional funding based upon review will need to be presented at Harp for consideration.

### **B.8 Parent and Child Placements**

In situations where a parent and child are placed together a remuneration fee will be paid for each child.

Where a cared for child (aged 16 or 17) has a baby/child who is resident with them in the placement, they are eligible to claim:

- Child Benefit
- Child Tax Credits
- Income Support
- Healthy Start Vouchers
- Sure- start Maternity Grant

The child/young person's social worker should assist them to claim all available benefits, once in payment the pocket money and clothing allowance for both parties will cease to be paid as part of the remuneration fee. The cared for child should use their benefits to cover their pocket money, clothing needs and their baby/child's needs, this will assist with an assessment of their parenting ability. The weekly allowance paid to the foster carer should be used to supplement the benefits received by the parent to ensure all the child's needs are met.

## **B.9 Damaged Items**

To assist foster carer/s the Fostering Service will consider reimbursement of any damaged items or damage to the foster carers home where this has been caused by the child/young person in placement. Before any replacement items can be purchased or ordered, it is essential an assessment is made of the damage by the supervising social worker, and a written request is provided to the Assistant Director. Damaged items will be replaced with the same, or a similar item.

Payments will not be reimbursed if money is spent without having first been explored with the supervising social worker and authorised by the Service Manager/Assistant Director before requesting reimbursements, foster carers should always consult their insurance company about any damage or loss to establish their right to make a claim. As per the fostering agreement carers are expected to have home and contents insurance, and they should inform their insurer when they become foster carers. The Fostering Network can provide advice on fostering friendly insurance companies.

## **B.10 Allegations and Complaints against Foster Carers**

If an allegation or complaint is made about a foster carer and as a result the child/young person is moved (for the duration of the investigation), the foster carer will continue to receive the remuneration fee for the duration of the investigation if the investigation is concluded within twenty-eight days.

Where the investigation takes more than twenty-eight days to conclude, the remuneration fee reduces to a 50% rate. Consideration can be given to waiving the reduction with agreement from the Assistant Director.

# **5. Part C: Transitions Expenses and Subsistence**

## **C.1 Summary**

Foster carers and kinship carers should be provided with guidance around permissible expenses during a child's transition: this should set out the roles and responsibilities within these arrangements.

- a. What is included:
  - Accommodation.

- Car parking fees.
- Public Transport/Taxi fares.
- Fuel/mileage.
- Subsistence allowance towards meals. (See Subsistence Allowance)

**NB:** Reimbursement of fuel is preferred where the cost of mileage is greater.

b. What is not included:

- Subsistence allowance for extended family members.
- Food and drink purchased, which is included in the accommodation costs or when the accommodation provided is self-catering.
- Personal purchases, snacks, cosmetics, cigarettes, stationery etc.
- Alcohol.
- Entry fees to activities and outings, not previously agreed with the adoption service.
- Items for the child, such as clothing, toys and equipment.
- Any other miscellaneous items.

**NB:** Expenses incurred during the transition will only be reimbursed when the request is accompanied by supporting receipts.

## C.2 Subsistence Allowance

Food and Beverages

Hillingdon Council will pay up to £30 per day subsistence per adult, but where an accommodation provider provides breakfast, this will be reduced to £25 per day.

Meals will be reimbursed as follows, per adult:

<b>Breakfast</b>	Up to £5.00 – where it is not included in the accommodation costs
<b>Lunch</b>	Up to £10.00
<b>Evening Meal</b>	Up to £15.00.

## C.3 Children of Foster Carers and Kinship Carers

Foster Carers and Kinship Carers will be required to meet the expenses of any cared for children during the transition, including the child to be placed for adoption as this will be covered by the child's fostering allowance.

## C.4 Additional Transition Costs

Financial assistance for travel costs will also be provided in respect of a child's transition, and specifically, relating to introductory meetings such as, 'Bump Into'

meetings which form part of the child's preparation, and 'Life Appreciation Day' events, but only when these form part of the agreed transition plan.

Expenses incurred via these events will require prior approval from the Assistant Director responsible for the fostering service and as outlined above any accommodation required to assist in facilitating these events will be arranged by Hillingdon Council.

Hillingdon Council will reimburse Foster Carers and Kinship Carers mileage at the standard rate, where this mileage exceeds the allocated 30 miles per week included within the fostering remuneration fee.

### **C.5 How to claim Mileage and Subsistence**

As outlined above, Foster Carers and Kinship Carers will be required to evidence receipts relevant to all expenses claimed.

In respect of fuel receipts, Hillingdon Council takes a 'reasonable' approach to reimbursing fuel and travel costs. Mileage may be reimbursed at a rate of 52.2 pence per mile. However, where this significantly exceeds the cost of fuel, then reimbursing fuel costs will be the council's chosen payment option.

All receipts should be forwarded to the Supervising Social Worker within Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service within four weeks of the expenses being incurred. (Unfortunately, Hillingdon Council cannot reimburse expenses where a receipt is not provided). Any claims which are not made within three months of the expenditure risk not being met.

### **C.6 Air Travel**

The Council will coordinate and arrange any flights required as part of the planning and transition process. These will be booked using the cheapest Economy Class fare (or equivalent), buying tickets with fixed dates and times. The cost of tickets will be considered within an overall 'value for money' approach and factors such as the predictability of travel plans, airline schedules, and connection times will be considered.

Flights will be booked by Hillingdon Council in liaison with the registered adoption agency. If the Foster Carers or Kinship Carers need to make any additional changes to the travel arrangements this must be discussed with their Supervising Social Worker and the Family Finding Social Worker and any changes in fees/costs may need to be met by the Foster Carer or Kinship Carer.

### **C.7 Coach and Train Travel**

Coach and Train tickets will be booked by Hillingdon Council in liaison with the Supervising Social Worker and Family Finding Social Worker and Foster Carers or Kinship Carers. The Supervising Social Worker and/or Family Finding Social Worker will consult with the Foster Carers or Kinship Carers regarding appropriate coach/train times.

Train travel will be booked in a class equivalent to UK Standard Class, buying tickets with fixed dates and times. If the Foster carer or Kinship Carer is in possession of a rail card this should be highlighted at the time of application for Hillingdon Council to benefit from any relevant discounts.

## **C.8 Accommodation**

The requirement for accommodation to facilitate a transition, where distance is a challenge or a prohibitive factor, will be considered at the 'linking and matching' stage and when planning the child's transition.

Where it is agreed accommodation is required for the Foster Carer or Kinship carer, to ensure the robust support of the child during transition, Hillingdon Council will coordinate and arrange all accommodation and will provide reasonable financial support in relation to suitable accommodation, based on the needs of the individuals involved, for example, Bed & Breakfast accommodation, Airbnb, hotel or self-catering accommodation.

Hillingdon Council will make any required bookings ensuring best value for money and the accommodation will be purchased from in council approved providers. In exceptional circumstances individual arrangements will be made to meet the needs of the children and to ensure value for money.

Only in exceptional circumstances, where prior agreement has been reached and agreed by the Assistant Director with responsibility for the fostering service, will Foster Carers, or Kinship Carers arrange their own accommodation, meet the costs and then seek later reimbursement.

A cap on accommodation expenses may be asserted where Foster Carers or Kinship carers select to use accommodation considered to be disproportionate in cost. A contribution from Hillingdon Council might only be made in such instances. Discussion and negotiation around such instances are essential prior to the transition commencing or any relevant meetings taking place and will require the agreement of the Assistant Director with responsibility for the fostering service. Failure to do so may result in Foster Carers or Kinship Carers being liable for the costs incurred.

## **6. Staying Put**

The 'Staying Put' arrangement in the UK allows young people who have been in foster care to remain with their foster families beyond the age of 18. The financial aspect of a Staying Put arrangement can be complex, as it involves various sources of funding, including the young person's entitlement to benefits such as Universal Credit, which may include a housing component, and potentially their own personal contribution.

### **6.1 Financial breakdown of staying put fee**

Here is a simplified breakdown of how the Staying Put fee is calculated for Hillingdon Foster Carers, considering these factors:

**Universal Credit Housing Element:** Young people in a Staying Put arrangement might be eligible for the housing element of Universal Credit, depending on their circumstances. This component is intended to contribute towards their housing costs. The amount received can vary based on the young person's age, income, and the local housing allowance rates.

For financial year 2025-26, a care experienced young person within Hillingdon can claim the one-bedroom rate of £230.14 per week. This fee will be adjusted for children residing in staying put arrangements outside of the borough of Hillingdon to reflect the one-bedroom rate of the area within which they reside.

**Personal Contribution:** The young person might also be expected to contribute towards their living expenses, including the Staying Put arrangement. This contribution could come from their earnings, other benefits, or savings. The expectation of a personal contribution should be reasonable and consider the young person's need to maintain a standard of living that allows for personal and social development.

For financial year 2025-26 a care experienced young person in receipt of universal credit is expected to make a personal contribution of £10 per week direct to their foster carer.

**Calculation of Staying Put Fee:** The total Staying Put fee will be calculated by considering the cost of providing care to the young person, including accommodation, food, utilities, and other household expenses. From this total, Hillingdon Council will then deduct the young person's contribution (including the housing element of Universal Credit and any personal contribution). The remaining amount would be the fee that needs to be covered by Hillingdon Council to ensure the Staying Put arrangement is financially viable.

For the financial year 2025-26 Hillingdon council will pay a remuneration fee of £259.86 per week, in addition to the young persons combined contribution of £240.14 per week through the housing element of Universal Credit claim and their personal contribution. Totalling £500 per week remuneration for a staying put placement.

This payment will always total £500 per week and the amount payable by Hillingdon Council will be adjusted where the local housing allowance differs from that within the Borough of Hillingdon.

## 7. Financial Incentives and Supports

### 7.1 Council Tax Reduction

Hillingdon Council provides a valuable benefit to all Hillingdon approved foster carers by contributing 25% of their annual council tax bill. This support recognises the essential role foster carers play in the community.

This allowance applies for the full 12-month period in which the foster carer remains approved.

Foster carers must either:

- Have a child in placement,
- Receive and complete a placement within 3 months in any 12-month period,
- Receive and complete a placement within 3 months of approval in a 12-month period,
- A respite carer can only claim once they have completed the equivalent of 3 months (90 days) of fostering within any 12-month period,

To qualify for the payment or the 25% rate where applicable. If a foster carer's approval covers less than 12 months of the council tax year, or if no placement is made within the required timeframe, the payment will be pro-rated to reflect the actual period of eligibility.

To access this support, foster carers must provide a copy of their current council tax bill, enabling the council to apply the 25% rebate to the total amount payable for that year.

## **7.2 Utilities Payment**

Hillingdon Council is committed to offering substantial support to our registered foster carers, recognising the essential role they play within our community. To this end, we provide a utilities allowance totalling £1,000 per annum.

This payment is specifically designed to assist with the household's utility fees, including gas and electricity, and to also cover the costs associated with conducting the required gas and electrical safety checks in your home. These checks are vital for ensuring a safe living environment for both the foster carers and the children in their care, aligning with the council's dedication to upholding high safety standards.

The payment is distributed in two six-monthly instalments of £500 each, claimable in **April** and **October**, ensuring foster carers receive consistent financial support throughout the year. This utilities allowance is intended to cover a full 12-month period of approved fostering. In instances where a foster carer's approved status spans less than twelve months within the year for which the allowance has been granted, a pro-rata repayment will be required.

To remain eligible for the utilities allowance, foster carers must have a child in placement or a placement within three months of approval or in the last three months.

This approach ensures fairness and enables the Council to sustain its support for foster carers efficiently, reflecting our holistic commitment to the welfare of our foster families and the children who depend on them.

For foster carers joining after the **April or October** payment periods, it is necessary to wait until the next scheduled claim date to benefit from this allowance, as additional payments outside these established dates cannot be accommodated.

To receive these payments, foster carers will need to provide in-date copies of their household gas and electricity safety checks to evidence compliance with fostering regulations.

### **7.3 Merlin Pass**

Hillingdon Council is pleased to continue offering complimentary Platinum Merlin Passes to our valued foster carers. This ongoing initiative reflects our appreciation for the dedication and commitment of our foster families, providing opportunities to enjoy memorable experiences together.

Every approved foster carer, along with their birth children under the age of eighteen residing in the fostering household, will be eligible to receive a Platinum Merlin Pass. Cared for children living within the fostering household will also become eligible to receive their own Platinum Merlin Pass following the completion of their second looked-after child's review within the placement.

The Platinum Merlin Pass offers unlimited access to a wide array of the UK's most popular attractions, including theme parks like Alton Towers Resort and LEGOLAND® Windsor Resort, historical sites such as Warwick Castle, and fascinating SEA LIFE Centres, among others. These experiences are not just about fun; they also provide educational value and the opportunity for foster families to create lasting memories together.

This initiative demonstrates Hillingdon Council's commitment to supporting foster families by providing enriching experiences that foster growth, learning, and joy. It is our way of saying thank you to the foster carers and children within our community, ensuring they have access to enjoyable and meaningful leisure activities that enhance their quality of life.

### **7.4 Hillingdon First Card**

Foster Carers can access the Hillingdon First card scheme, a programme designed to enrich your experience within the borough by offering exclusive discounts, offers, and preferential rates on a wide range of products, services, and facilities.

### **7.5 Key Benefits for Foster Carers**

**Local Discounts:** Enjoy discounts and special offers at hundreds of participating local businesses across the borough, including eateries, clothing stores, travel services, leisure activities, and hair and beauty salons. Simply present your Hillingdon First card

at the time of payment to avail of these benefits. Please note, the acceptance of the card is subject to the discretion of each shop manager, and it cannot be used for online purchases.

**Library Membership:** The Hillingdon First card also serves as your library card, granting access to borrow books, talking books, and explore a vast online digital library. If you are an existing library member looking to replace your old card with a Hillingdon First card, or if you need to reactivate your membership after a period of inactivity, simply visit one of our libraries for assistance.

**Leisure Centre Rates:** Benefit from preferential rates at local leisure centres. For detailed information on these rates, directly contact the leisure centres such as Botwell Green Sports and Leisure Centre, Highgrove Pool and Fitness Centre, Queensmead Sports Centre, and Hillingdon Sports and Leisure Complex.

**Parking Discounts:** The card provides preferential parking rates in council car parks and on-street parking bays. For seamless payment, you can use your card at pay and display machines or link it with the PayByPhone app for convenient payment on the go.

For foster carers, the Hillingdon First card is a token of our appreciation for the incredible work you do. By easing access to various services and facilities, we hope to contribute positively to your fostering journey and the quality of life in Hillingdon.

For more information on where you can redeem these fantastic offers and to explore the full list of participating businesses, please visit [Hillingdon's Business Directory](#). This resource is your guide to making the most of your Hillingdon First card benefits, supporting local businesses while enjoying everything the borough has to offer.

## 7.6 Hillingdon Leisure Link Card

The Leisurelink scheme is proud to continue to support our community's foster carers by offering an exclusive opportunity to save on a wide variety of leisure activities. This initiative recognizes the dedication and hard work of foster carers by making leisure and fitness activities more accessible and affordable. With the Leisurelink card, foster carers and their families can enjoy a rich array of discounted activities at selected leisure centres, fostering not only physical health but also providing invaluable bonding experiences.

Key Benefits of the Leisurelink Card for Foster Carers:

- **Cost-Effective Leisure:** For a minimal fee of just £2, foster carers can unlock substantial discounts on numerous activities, including swimming, gym access, fitness classes, and select junior activities, ensuring there is something enjoyable for every family member.
- **Enhanced Family Time:** The LeisureLink card is designed to promote healthy, active lifestyles and encourage memorable family moments, providing a cost-effective way for foster families to spend quality time together.

- **Exclusive Discounts:** Discounts vary based on the day and time, offering flexibility and the opportunity to save on your favourite activities when it suits you best.
- **Library Benefits:** Additionally, if you are an adult Hillingdon library member, your LeisureLink card extends to concessionary rates for borrowing talking books and CDs, adding more options for family entertainment and learning.

Eligibility and Application Process:

The LeisureLink card is available to all approved foster carers and children under the age of 18 residing in the fostering household. Eligibility extends to those dedicated individuals and families who provide a nurturing and supportive environment for children in need.

To apply for your LeisureLink card, please speak to your supervising social worker. Upon successful application, you and your eligible household members can start enjoying the benefits of discounted access to a host of leisure activities, designed to enrich your fostering journey and enhance the well-being of your entire family.

## 7.7 Blue Light Card Membership

The Blue Light Card offers a range of benefits, recognising the hard work and dedication of those in the fostering community with exclusive access to discounts and offers both online and in-store.

Benefits of the Blue Light Card Membership:

- **Extensive Discounts:** Enjoy a wide range of discounts across various sectors, including retail, travel, restaurants, and entertainment. Whether you are shopping for essentials, planning a family holiday, or looking for a night out, your Blue Light Card brings a world of savings to your fingertips.
- **Online and In-Store Offers:** With the Blue Light Card, you have the flexibility to save both online and in physical stores. Participating businesses offer significant discounts exclusively for members, helping you make the most of your purchases.
- **Exclusive Access:** Membership grants you access to the Blue Light Card's website and mobile app, where you can explore the latest deals, find participating businesses, and stay up to date with new offers tailored to first responders and those in the caring professions, including our foster carers.
- **Support for Local and National Businesses:** The scheme supports a mix of local independents and national brands, allowing you to save money while supporting businesses across the UK.

To activate your membership and start enjoying these benefits, further details will be provided on how to sign up and make the most of your Blue Light Card by your Supervising Social Worker. Hillingdon Council is proud to support our foster carers with this valuable resource, making your fostering journey a little more rewarding.





### 8.3 Agreement to Repay Overpayments of the Fostering Remuneration Fee

1. I/We.....(FULL NAME).....have read these documents and in consideration of the Fostering remuneration Fees paid to me/us as an authorised foster carer for the London Borough of Hillingdon, I/we agree to repay any part of the remuneration payments made to me/us on behalf of the child/children/young person(s) in my/our care to which it transpires I/we was/were not or should not have been entitled for any reason whatsoever even if due to:-
  - (i) Any mistake or error in the calculation of the Remuneration Fees.
  - (ii) A failure of any employee of the London Borough of Hillingdon in providing correct and timely information in respect of placement details.

2. I/We acknowledge that I/We am/are hereby bound to repay any Remuneration Fees reclaimed by the London Borough of Hillingdon.

3. Overpayments will be recouped in the following manner:

- Initially from any retainer payments due
- The balance over a maximum of six weeks

(In exceptional circumstances, should this method of repayment cause financial hardship, individual cases can be discussed with the fostering manager)

Full Name and Address (including Post Code)

.....  
.....

Signed.....Foster Carer/s

Signed.....Supervising Social Worker

Date.....

This form **MUST** be signed in the presence of the Supervising Social Worker and a copy should be retained for the carer/s records.

## 8.4 Notification of Change of Details Form

### Please return slip to:

Finance Officer  
Children's Finance Team  
Exchequer Services  
ADDRESS

Please include new contact details; e-mail address, landline and mobile telephone number etc.

Full Name and Address (including Post Code)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Signed.....

Date.....

This form **MUST** be returned in the prepaid envelope and a copy should be retained for the carers records.

## 8.5 Confirmation of receipt of Fostering Service Financial Policy

This form should be signed by each foster carer/s at the beginning of each financial year and confirms receipt of information relating to the new financial year's Remuneration Fees. Additionally, it also provides information relating to foster carers' National Insurance, Income Tax and Welfare Benefit responsibilities.

Full Name of  
Carer/s.....

Address.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Telephone  
Number.....

I (ADD FULL NAME) confirm receipt of Hillingdon's Foster Carers Financial policy and information relating to Income Tax, National Insurance and Welfare Benefits responsibilities. I confirm that I understand the responsibilities regarding my Income Tax, National Insurance and Welfare Benefits liabilities and that I/we will take responsibility for ensuring any liability is discharged appropriately.

Signed.....Foster Carer/s

Signed.....Supervising Social Worker

Date.....

## 8.6 Child/Young Person, Financial Assessment Form

Income:

Item	Amount (£)
Clothing Allowance	
Pocket Money	
16-19 Bursary Scheme	
Traineeship Allowance	
Modern Apprenticeship Allowance	
Earnings (Part and Full Time)	
Other	
Sub-total 1	

Less fares related to work/training/study	
Sub-total 2	

Deduct sub-total 2 from sub-total 1 to produce sub-total 3

Sub-total 3	
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If sub-total 3 is over £90.00, one third of the surplus amount is the young person's contribution. This will be deducted from the pocket money and clothing allowance until it exceeds these amounts. When this occurs the pocket money and clothing allowance will cease the social worker or placement supervising social worker will collect the amount of contribution exceeding pocket money and clothing allowance.

This form will need to be completed by the young person living in foster care (16- and 17-year-olds) with their foster carer or personal advisor.

### **Young People should be provided with information about the reduction and contributions process**

Young people should be issued with a Contributions Notice setting out the following:

1. The level of reduction of their allowance/s
2. The level of their contribution
3. When the reduction or contribution will commence
4. How the reduction will be made or how the contribution will be collected
5. What the young person can do if their circumstances change
6. What the young person can do if they do not agree with the assessed reduction or contribution.

## **8.7 Income Tax and National Insurance Issues for Foster Care Arrangements**

All foster carers should note that they are legally required to register as self-employed.

Where children (looked after) are living with their foster carer/s under a “Fostering” arrangement, the Income Tax and National Insurance rules that apply are set out in the HMRC ‘Shared Lives Carers’ – ‘Qualifying Care Relief’ Guidance.

The ‘Shared Lives Carers’ – ‘Qualifying Care Relief Guidance’ sets out that “Foster Carers” (and “Staying Put” carers, “Shared Lives” carers) receive tax exemptions up to a given ‘qualifying amount’ for each cared for child living with them.

The Qualifying Care Relief system enables foster carer/s to earn up to a given amount without paying Income Tax or Class 4 National Insurance Contributions on their caring income. The Income Tax free allowance consists of two elements:

- Firstly, a fixed amount per foster care household per year (for 2017 - 2018 this is set at £10,000).
- Secondly, an additional amount per week per child (£200 per week under the age of eleven [0-10], £250 per week age eleven to their eighteenth birthday [11-17] 2017 - 2018) and £250 per week per adult aged eighteen and above.

The £10,000 per year applies once per household regardless of how many cared for children are placed. The additional amount applies per child/young person per week. Where there is more than one paid foster carer in the household, the allowance is shared equally by both carers.

The tax-free allowance is only available to households with three or fewer placements. However, sibling groups are counted as one placement.

The tax-free allowance only applies to the foster carer’s income from caring. If they have income from other sources, they will pay tax on that income in the normal manner.

If the foster carer/s exceed the allowance they will have a choice of using the ‘simplified’ method or the standard profit and loss method to calculate their taxable profits. The carer/s will also be liable to pay Class 4 National Insurance Contributions on their taxable profit. Under the simplified method, a carer’s taxable profit is the income they receive from caring which exceeds their tax-free allowance. Where foster carer/s do incur an Income Tax and Class 4 National Insurance liability and they have not used their personal allowance this can be used to offset this liability.

Individual carers should consult their local HMRC office for guidance on their circumstances and liabilities.

In practice HMRC will treat the taxable profit from foster care as earnings from self-employment for National Insurance Contributions purposes.

Foster carer/s should note that they may be able to claim Working Tax Credits which are administered by HMRC. Fostering care is counted as work for Working Tax Credit purposes. The carer's taxable income is included in the total household income used to assess the amount of tax credits to which they are entitled. So, where the carer is paid less than their tax-free allowance, their income from caring for tax credits purposes is also nil.

HMRC is aware that a number of foster carers may not have registered for Class 2 National Insurance Contributions because they make little or no taxable profit. Foster care is deemed as self-employment and as such carer/s should register as self-employed. All self-employed people aged 16 and over who are below State Pension age are liable and must register to pay Class 2 National Insurance Contributions. Failure to do this may affect their entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance, Maternity Benefit, State Pension and Bereavement Benefit. However, self-employed carers may be able to apply for Carers Credits which have replaced Home Responsibilities Protection, and those with low taxable profits may be able to apply for a Small Earnings Exemption.

To claim a Carer's Credit, foster carer/s must complete form CF411A available from HMRC ([www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)).

If carers have not previously registered as self-employed, they can obtain further information by calling the Newly Self-employed Helpline on **0300 200 3504**.

If they are currently registered to pay Class 2 National Insurance Contributions, they can obtain further information by calling the Self-employed Helpline on **0845 915 4655** instead.

HMRC Help sheet 236 sets out information about the 'Shared Lives Carers' – 'Qualifying Care Relief Guidance' - Fostering and "Staying Put" Income Tax and National Insurance framework. <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/helpsheet/hs236.pdf>

The following short HMRC films provide information for foster carers about their income tax and national insurance responsibilities.

HMRC Webinars:

- <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/webinars/self-employed.htm> HMRC Site

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjtJaQ4x8HM>

Foster Care

### **Welfare Benefits for Foster Care Arrangements**

Foster carers should note that income from fostering does not count as 'income' in the determination of a foster carer/s entitlement to means tested benefits. However, any payment received when there is no child in placement is counted as income (retainers, introduction payments etc). In addition, foster carers should note that when the youngest foster child reaches the age of 16, they will be required to transfer from Income Support to Jobseekers Allowance. If the foster carer has a child of their own, they are required to switch from Income Support to Jobseekers Allowance when their own child reaches the age of 5 (if the foster children are age 16 or older).

At present foster carers can choose to claim a means tested benefit or working tax credits, the decision as to which is preferable should be based on a 'Better Off' assessment which may be completed by the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). This choice is likely to change once Universal Credit is fully implemented. Given that each carer will have a unique set of personal circumstances they should always check with both the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HMRC regarding their individual circumstances.

Foster carers should always inform the DWP and HMRC if their circumstances change and should always check with the DWP and HMRC regarding their personal circumstances and how payments for foster care may affect their means tested benefits or any Income Tax or National Insurance liability.
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## **8.8 Enhancement policy**

This policy relates to enhancement payments made to foster carers registered with the London Borough of Hillingdon, as outlined below.

The weekly remuneration fee paid to foster carers is intended to cover the costs associated with caring for the majority of our cared for children. All children in care have additional needs and require a level of enhanced parenting and support. The fee reflects the expected level of work, care, and skills employed by the foster carer in meeting these needs. The childcare element of the payment is designed to cover the daily living costs of the child. All rates are reviewed and benchmarked annually.

### **Enhanced Payments**

In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate to adjust the standard fostering remuneration fee to better reflect the professionally assessed needs of the child and the foster carer's capacity to meet those needs. This adjustment is guided by a tiered system that aligns:

- The level of need of the child, and
- The skills, experience, and qualifications of the foster carer.

Enhanced payments may be considered for foster carers who:

- Accept emergency or short-term placements, and
- Have demonstrable experience in supporting children with complex trauma or high-level emotional and behavioural needs.

To qualify for an enhanced payment, substantial evidence must be provided, and the foster carer must demonstrate the relevant skills and experience required to meet the child's assessed needs. Enhanced payments are not automatic and are subject to professional assessment and approval.

### **Procedure for requesting an enhanced payment.**

Requests for enhanced payments must be evidence-based and submitted through the High-cost Approval and Review Panel (HARP) process. The Supervising Social Worker, in partnership with the Child's Social Worker, is responsible for preparing a HARP report that outlines the rationale for recommending an enhancement.

#### **The HARP Report Must Include:**

- A clear description of the child's assessed needs, and the level of care provided by the foster carer that is above and beyond the standard expectations.
- Details of the foster carer's relevant skills, experience, and qualifications, particularly where they are supporting children with complex trauma, emotional or behavioural needs, or accepting emergency/short-term placements.
- An outline of the support package in place to help the child achieve their outcomes, including how the foster carer will work in partnership with other services to deliver this support.

**Principles of Enhanced Payment:**

- Enhanced payments are intended to recognise periods of more intensive care required to stabilise and support a child.
- These payments are time-limited and subject to regular review.
- It is expected that, with quality foster care and multi-agency support, the child's needs will reduce over time, and the enhancement will no longer be required.

All enhancement requests must be supported by substantial evidence and are subject to approval through the HARP process.

**Decision making:**

The request for an enhanced payment needs to be presented as a written report to the Assistant Director and ratified at the HARP panel. If agreed, all enhancements are subject to a 3-month review period.

**Appeals:**

If a foster carer wishes to appeal a financial decision made through the HARP (High-cost Approval and Review Panel), the following process applies:

- Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Assistant Director.
- All appeals will be considered and responded to within ten working days of receipt.

Once a HARP decision has been made, it cannot be appealed immediately a period of 3 months will need to pass for a review. A further period must pass before any reconsideration can be requested. This is to ensure consistency and fairness in decision-making. For guidance on when an appeal may be possible, please contact the Team Manager or Supervising social worker.

## 8.9 Fostering Remuneration Fee 2025 - 2026

Weekly tiered remuneration fee for 2025 - 2026

Tier	Remuneration Fee	Threshold criteria	Total weekly payment each child	Support and Training
Standard	<b>£500</b> each child	This level applies to children who present with typical needs and behaviours associated with trauma and require standard care and attention. It is suitable for foster carers with either entry-level or prior experience, who have a basic understanding of child development and safeguarding. No previous fostering experience is required, but a commitment to learning and providing consistent care is essential.	<b>£500</b>	Pre-approval training, mandatory induction, and regular supervision.
Enhanced	<b>£1,000</b> each child	This level supports children who have specific emotional, educational, social or health needs. It is suitable for foster carers with experience in managing complex behaviours and supporting vulnerable children, including those with additional needs.	<b>£1,000</b>	It is suitable for foster carers who have experience or relevant training such as DDP, trauma-informed care or PACE, or certified courses and are confident working with professionals to meet these needs. Formal qualifications like NVQ 1&2 are helpful but not essential.
Specialised	<b>£1,500</b> each child	This level supports children with significant and complex needs, including those transitioning/stepping across from residential or secure accommodation. It is suitable for experienced foster carers who have managed	<b>£1,500</b>	Specialist training and professional support to manage complex placements is required. While qualifications like Level 3 and certified training (e.g., DDP, trauma-informed care, PACE) are helpful, they are not essential. A

		<p>complex placements, such as parent-child arrangements or children with disabilities. Carers should have relevant training and be confident working closely with professionals to address these complexities.</p>		<p>commitment to ongoing learning and working closely with professionals such as MAPS, other therapeutic services and CAMHS is key. A foster carer is expected to always be available for the child in their care.</p>
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