

Appendix B: Fostering Service

Allowances and Fees 2015



Foreword

Our foster carers are highly valued individuals, working with us to support some of the county's most vulnerable children. In Suffolk, our vision is to be able to offer all of our Looked After Children the most appropriate placement to meet their needs.

We currently have a range of foster carers for babies and toddlers; however we do not have enough carers for older children, sibling groups, children with disabilities and children with complex and challenging needs.

At the end of March 2014, based on the ages of the Looked After Children and the approval age bands of foster carers, there were 200 spare placements for younger children. However, we were short of 130 placements for older children. Sadly, this continues to be the case.

Suffolk Fostering Service has continually tried to find new ways to recruit more carers for children it has difficulty in finding foster families for. We need to increase the number of local placements we are able to provide for older children, sibling groups, children with disabilities and children with complex and challenging needs. Suffolk County Council has considered this and would like to change the current payment scheme.

By increasing local placement choice for these children we will be able to maintain relationships with family and friendship groups and to minimise disruption to their education. We will also be able to offer good quality support and supervision directly to carers, offer training and development opportunities, and achieve closer, more effective working with the child's social worker.

In an online survey in December 2013 the majority of foster carers told us they thought that the current Skills Level Scheme was unfair, with fees not always reflecting the level of need of the child placed in their care. These concerns were also raised at consultation groups held by the Head of Fostering in February 2014.

We have listened to this feedback and we are proposing to introduce a new scheme that rewards existing carers for providing placements for older children, sibling groups, children with disabilities and children with complex and challenging needs. We are holding a formal consultation period from now until 20th April 2015 about the proposed changes to fostering fees and allowances which are set out in detail below.

The proposed model of allowances, which is set out in this booklet, represents our commitment to working with and supporting all foster carers in offering placements that match children of different ages and varying needs.

If the proposals in this booklet are agreed by Suffolk County Council's Cabinet, changes would be made from October 2015 onwards.

I would encourage you to read the information in this booklet and give your views on the proposals before the consultation ends on 20th April.



Cllr Gordon Jones
Cabinet member for Children's Services

Who are we consulting with?

We are seeking the views of Skills Level Carers, Mainstream Carers, Contract Carers and Connected Person / Kinship Carers as all these carers would be aligned to the proposed new model. LINK Carers are not affected by these proposals and will continue to be paid hourly expenses.

Consultation Proposals

Proposed Allowances and Fees Model

The proposed new allowances and fees model introduces the government's national fostering allowance rate and is a tiered scheme made up of five levels. Each level reflects the placement offer and capabilities of the foster carer. Eligibility criteria set out in this document details what the placement offer and capabilities for each level would be.

At each level, foster carers must be willing and have sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to offer the types of placements set out in the eligibility criteria to qualify for the fee payable at that level.

Carers would be able to offer multiple placements at different levels and could ask to change their level when a foster child for whom they have been caring for moves on. It is proposed that in between foster placements, and at every Annual Review, the carers' placement offer could be re-considered using the eligibility criteria. Carers must continue to meet the essential criteria to remain within a particular level.

Carers offering placements within levels 4 and 5 would be expected to care for children identified as suitable for them and their placement offer. Where placements are frequently declined by carers within these levels, consideration would be given to stepping-down the level to reflect a reduced placement offer.

It is proposed that respite foster carers are aligned to a level based on how their placement offer meets the eligibility criteria. Where a foster child is cared for by a respite carer who is aligned to a different level than their main carer, the respite carer would be provided with the fee and allowance for the level they (the respite carer) are aligned to. This is because the proposed tiered scheme is primarily based on the placement offer of the foster carer rather than the individual needs of each foster child.

Table 1: Proposed model of allowances and fees: The table below sets out the proposed model of allowances and fees based on foster carers' offer and capabilities:

Tiered Scheme Level	Allowance £	Fee £	Total Weekly Payment £	Plus Additional payment per year for holidays etc.
Standard Level One 0 - 1	119	0	119	476
Standard Level One 2 - 3	122	0	122	488
Standard Level One 4 - 10	134	0	134	536
Standard Level One 11- 15	154	0	154	616
Standard Level One 16 - 17	179	0	179	716
Intermediate Level Two 0 - 1	119	21	140	476
Intermediate Level Two 2 - 3	122	23	145	488
Intermediate Level Two 4 - 10	134	26	160	536
Intermediate Level Two 11 - 15	154	45	199	616
Intermediate Level Two 16 - 17	179	63	242	716
Advanced Level Three 0 - 1*	119	141	260	476
Advanced Level Three 2 - 3*	122	148	270	488
Advanced Level Three 4 - 10*	134	166	300	536
Advanced Level Three 11 - 15	154	196	350	616
Advanced Level Three 16 - 17	179	221	400	716
*See table 2				
Foster Plus Level Four 7 - 10	134	266	400	536
Foster Plus Level Four 11 - 15	154	296	450	616
Foster Plus Level Four 16 - 17	179	321	500	716
Specialist Level Five 7 - 10	134	366	500	536
Specialist Level Five 11 - 15	154	396	550	616
Specialist Level Five 16 - 17	179	421	600	716

Proposed Respite Entitlement

Carers would be entitled to up to 21 days paid respite each year. The respite period would be paid at the carers' usual total weekly rate. Where a foster child remains with their foster carers for part of the day before moving to a respite carer, this would be counted and paid as a half-day of respite. Respite carers would also be paid a half-day fee and allowance where they care for a child for part of a day when they arrive or return to their main carers.

Level 4 and 5 foster carers would be expected to take their respite entitlement outside of the school holiday periods.

For all carers, where a foster child needs to stay with alternative foster carers, respite requests would be discussed with your Supervising Social Worker so that suitable respite arrangements can be made.

Foster carers are encouraged to use their agreed delegated authority, as set out in the child's Care Plan, to make respite and support arrangements within their wider family and support networks.

Proposed Birthday, festival, holiday payments and other payments

One week's additional allowance would be payable each year to provide a foster child with birthday presents. One week's additional allowance would be payable each year to provide for each fostered child's cultural festival and festival gifts.

Two weeks additional allowance would be payable each year to provide a foster child with an annual holiday.

All fostered children would receive an equal level of financial support for their birthday, festival and holiday based on their age and irrespective of their carers' tier.

Under the proposed scheme, the achievement of qualifications would be rewarded on the basis of the carer's overall offer. Carers undertaking advanced training and development would do so to expand their placement offer and provide evidence of their eligibility for alignment to a different tier.

The fees payable to foster carers with a placement offer for disabled children would also be reflected by the tier to which the carer was matched in the proposed new model.

Proposed eligibility criteria

Subject to assessment by the Suffolk Fostering Service, all foster carers, including connected and kinship carers, could access any of the tiers where they demonstrate that they have the skills, experience and capacity to meet all the essential criteria for each level. Your placement offer and tier eligibility could be reviewed between placements and at every Annual Review. Where a foster carer wishes to provide an increased placement offer, a request, with evidence of how the eligibility criteria are met, would be made to the Head of Adoption and Fostering.

In making a decision, the Head of Adoption and Fostering would consider the evidence as to how the eligibility criteria are met and the needs of the Looked After Children population for additional placements within the requested tier. The Fostering Service would produce annual reports that provide information about the placement requirements of the Looked After population needed to inform future development of the scheme as set out in the table within the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Carers could elect to temporarily step-down their placement offer, and tier, if they wanted to take a break or balance the intensity of placements offered.

Due to the nature of the placement offer at tiers 4 and 5, it is likely that some placements would be made on a sole placement basis for the safety and wellbeing of the young person and others. The enhanced fee payable to these foster carers reflects the possibility that other placements they may have otherwise been able to offer could be 'blocked'.

Table 2: Proposed Eligibility Criteria

Tiered level & Placement offer	Carer Capacity
<p>Standard Level One Placement offer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defined and narrow approval i.e. Children aged 0-5 years or availability which excludes children from specific groups of need/behaviour 	<p>No previous experience of fostering or relevant work with children ESSENTIAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity to meet the Fostering Standards including a basic understanding of positive parenting strategies
<p>Intermediate Level Two</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placement offer Defined and narrow approval i.e. Children aged 0-5 years or availability which excludes children from specific groups of need/behaviour Short term placement / bridging to permanency 	<p>ESSENTIAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good understanding of positive parenting strategies Capacity to move younger children onto adoptive / permanent placements Commitment to training and professional development including completion of skills to foster training or equivalent prior to panel. Completion of a portfolio of evidence to meet skills to foster or equivalent Suitable bedroom capacity (room for each child) Evidence of ability to meet the Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC) standards applicable to carers <p>DESIRABLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience of fostering and/or relevant work with children Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC) completed Attendance at support groups
<p>Advanced Level Three *</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placement offer children aged 6-18 years with complex behaviours i.e. Recurrent bedwetting, sexualised behaviour, aggression, verbal abuse, stealing, lying, self-harming Sibling groups Children with moderate disabilities Permanence offer for unconnected child 	<p>ESSENTIAL - As for level 2 plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrable understanding of positive parenting strategies, child development and childhood trauma Established fostering experience and/or extensive relevant work with children Mentoring other carers and supporting the fostering service <p>DESIRABLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC) completed Child care/professional qualifications in working with children Capacity to provide emergency response as requested by the Fostering Service Attendance at support groups

<p>Foster Plus Level Four</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement offer A wide range of children aged between 7-18 years with complex, challenging and risk taking behaviours i.e. Smearing, self-harming, substance misuse, sexually harmful behaviour • Children with complex, multiple and severe disabilities • Sibling groups with complex, challenging, risk taking and/or harmful behaviours 	<p>ESSENTIAL - As for level 3 plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrable evidence of capacity to effectively implement positive behaviour management strategies to promote expected behaviours • Demonstrable evidence of ability to maintain placement stability where challenging and complex needs persist • Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC) completed and commitment to professional development and (advanced) training • Mentoring and supporting other carers through support groups
<p>Specialist Level Five</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement offer Offering the range of placements between 7-18 years for children with a diverse spectrum of challenging and complex needs, behaviours and backgrounds. • Flexible offer of multiple placements concurrently or if child's needs/behaviour indicates, a single placement. 	<p>ESSENTIAL - As for level 4 plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to implement de-escalation strategies in volatile situations including aggressive behaviour • Demonstrable evidence of building and maintaining positive relationships with birth families • Capacity to work within a prescribed model of intervention to address dysfunctional behaviour • Demonstrable evidence of positive outcomes for children and young people

Advanced Level Three *

Additionally, children aged 0-5 years who are placed with carers at tier level 2 would be paid at tier level 3 under the following specific circumstances:

- A high level of care arising from severe physical or learning difficulty
- A newly born child diagnosed with significant health needs (to be reviewed at 10 weeks)

Proposed Transition Process

If the scheme is approved we will agree a timescale by which your Supervising Social Worker will be asked to provide information about your terms of approval, placement history over the last three years and a view about which tier eligibility criteria the placements you offer are most likely to meet. Your Supervising Social Worker will discuss this with you and will record if you want to change your current placement offer in light of the new scheme of allowances and fees.

Your Supervising Social Worker and their line manager would use this information to make an initial tier alignment decision for each foster carer which will be moderated by a senior manager and the outcome shared with you in writing.

Your Supervising Social Worker would discuss the initial tier alignment decision with you. If you are satisfied with the initial decision you would not need to take any further action and you would automatically be transferred to this tier within an agreed timescale.

If you disagree with the initial tier alignment decision and consider that your placement offer meets the eligibility criteria for an alternative tier you would discuss this with your Supervising Social Worker.

A series of Tier Alignment Panels would be set up to consider all the evidence and make a final decision about tier alignment wherever there is disagreement about the initial decision. This would provide carers and SSW's with an opportunity to set out how the placement offer meets the eligibility criteria. The membership of the panel would be a foster carer, Head of Corporate Parenting, Head of Adoption and Fostering and a Professional Adviser.

Should you wish to challenge your initial tier alignment decision, your Supervising Social Worker would support you to complete an application to attend the Tier Alignment Panel.

All carers would receive written confirmation of their final Tier Alignment.

Please note: A copy of the proposed Pre-Alignment information form can be found at Appendix 1.

Proposed fee protection process

It is recognised that the implementation of the proposed model would reduce the allowances and fees to which some foster carers are entitled. The Suffolk Fostering Service is committed to supporting foster carers, and maintaining placement stability of all Looked After Children who are fostered, through this transition.

Foster carers who would see a reduction in their total weekly allowances and fees under the new model would be eligible to make an application to the Fee Protection Panel. The Fee Protection Panel would consider the following types of financial support to foster carers:

a) **Maintenance of existing allowance for a fixed period to enable foster carers to adjust their finances:** e.g. A Skills Level carer who permanently cares for a 5 year old boy and receives £360 per week. Under tier level 3 of the proposed new model, the carer would be entitled to £300 per week. The carer could be offered fee protection of £360 per week for up to three years after which time it would reduce to £300 per week.

b) Freezing of current allowance until such time as the new model exceeds this: e.g. A Skills Level carer permanently cares for a 13 year old boy and receives £400 per week. Under tier level 3 of the proposed new model the carer would be entitled to £350 per week. Agreement could be given to the allowance being maintained at £400 per week until the young person turned 16 and the allowance then matches the £400 per week under the new model.

c) Maintenance of existing allowance until current placement ceases: e.g. A Skills Level carer is providing a time-limited placement to a younger child whilst adopters are sought. The existing fee would be maintained whilst the child remained with the carers. Once the child moves on the carers would have the choice to continue fostering younger children at the new reduced rates or increase their placement offer to foster older children at an enhanced rate.

Fee-paid foster carers providing multiple placements would have their fee protection considered as a household, rather than per placement, because the proposed new model would remove the different fees for the first and subsequent children in a placement. In the majority of instances the proposed new model would provide a comparable or increased level of allowances across all placements. Although the first child rate decreases, the subsequent child rate increases. e.g. A primary-aged group of three siblings currently generate £880 per week (£360 + £260 + £260). Under the new scheme there would be a reduction in the first child rate but an increase in the subsequent child rate. The overall weekly allowance for these children would rise to £900 per week (£300 x 3).

How to have your say

Suffolk County Council is consulting with foster carers about the following parts of the proposed changes to their allowances and fees:

- The proposed levels and rates of allowances and fees
- The eligibility criteria
- The process for changing to a new model
- The fee protection arrangements and process

As part of the formal consultation period, there will be a series of carer consultation forums. Each consultation forum will deliver the same presentation to foster carers. The Forums are being held in different locations, three during school hours and one in the evening to enable as many foster carers across the county to attend as possible. There will be an opportunity to ask questions about the proposed changes and offer your views and comments. Every foster carer is invited to attend one of the consultation forums at the location most convenient for them

The dates and venues for these forums will be as follows:

Monday 9 March, 11am-1pm at:

The Small Hall,
Southgate Community Centre,
Caie Walk,
Bury St Edmunds,
IP33 2PJ

Wednesday 11 March, 6.30pm to 8.30pm at:

Elisabeth Conference Room,
Endeavour House,
8 Russell Road,
Ipswich,
IP1 2BX

Tuesday 10 March, 10.30am to 12.30pm at:

Feast and Auditorium Rooms,
Suffolk Foodhall,
Wherstead,
Ipswich,
IP9 2AB

Friday 13 March, 10.30am -12.30pm at:

Kirkley Suite,
Kirkley Centre,
154 London Road South,
Lowestoft,
NR33 0AZ

In addition there will be an opportunity to:

- Complete an online survey to provide your views on the proposals:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FosterCarer2015>
- Discuss the proposals with your Supervising Social Worker and to complete a hard copy of the survey if preferred
- Discuss the proposals in your fostering support group
- Feed your view back through the Foster Care Association

All carers are encouraged to submit their views, comments, questions and alternative suggestions about the new proposed new model. This can be by email to CYPBUSSUPPCorpParInbox@suffolk.gov.uk or by letter to:

FREEPOST RTAC-HSKL-CSAY
Suffolk County Council
Ipswich IP1 2EB

SECTION: Fostering Allowances Consultation

The deadline for submitting your views, comments, questions and alternative suggestions is midnight on 20 April 2015.

All consultation feedback will be considered by the Fostering Allowances Implementation Group. This group will refine the proposed model or re-design an alternative model, taking into account your views and comments.

On completion of the consultation and following refinement or redesign of the proposal, a report on the scheme of allowances and fees, including any amendments, will be presented to Suffolk County Council's Cabinet in June 2015. Once the scheme is approved, the final model will be published and shared with foster carers.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q) Why are Fostering Allowances being reviewed and changed?

A) During previous consultations many foster carers voiced dissatisfaction with the current scheme and agreed a review was necessary. Recent analysis of the current fostering allowances and fees model identified shortfalls in the scheme that do not support Children and Young People's Services' need to increase in-house foster placements to match the needs of Suffolk's Looked After population. There is a surplus of placements for younger children and a deficit of placements for older children, siblings and those with complex and challenging needs.

Q) What are the main differences between the current scheme and the one being proposed?

A) The new proposed model of allowances and fees provides for a tiered and flexible approach to incentivise existing carers and attract new foster carers to offer high priority service need placements. It would reduce allowances to carers with a limited or narrow placement offer. Carers offering to care for a wide range of older children with more complex needs would receive enhanced payments.

Q) Why not pay carers a fee based upon the needs of the child rather than the offer?

A) The new proposed model recognises that carers who bring skills and experience are often able to diminish challenging behaviours through positive parenting strategies. Additionally, the capability element of the scheme ensures that carers have the skills and experience needed to make the appropriate placement offer and allow for better matching to meet the child's needs.

Q) How would it be decided what level I will be on under the proposed scheme?

A) Alignment within the tier model would be dependent on the placement offer. For example, those carers offering flexible placements to older children with complex needs will be placed at higher tier levels than those offering placements limited to younger children or children with lower tier levels of need. Each supervising social worker (SSW) would provide information on the foster carers' placements including: background and experience of fostering, current placement offer, three year placement history (number and nature of placements), placement outcomes, training undertaken plus a rationale

for allocation to a particular tier. Each proposal would directly relate to the Tier Scheme Eligibility Criteria (Levels 1 to 5).

Your Supervising Social Worker (SSW) and their Team Manager would consider all relevant information and the moderator will allocate carers accordingly. Foster carers would be advised of their proposed tier alignment in writing and their SSW would promptly discuss this with the carers.

Q) Would I still receive my annual payment for having completed my NVQ/Diploma?

A) Under the proposed scheme the achievement of qualifications would be rewarded on the basis of the carers' overall offer. Carers undertaking advanced training and development would do so to expand their placement offer and provide evidence of their eligibility for alignment to a different tier.

Q) What would happen if I did not agree with the decision?

A) It is proposed that where there might be difficulty aligning a placement offer to a particular tier or where there is a difference of opinion from the carer/SSW, the decision would be considered by a Tier Alignment Panel (TAP) chaired by the Head of Corporate Parenting. In these instances, the relevant SSW would complete a TAP request form and present, in person, evidence for the proposed tier to the TAP. Foster carers would then be notified of the final decision by letter. All foster carers would have the right to challenge the initial decision.

Q) Would I be able to attend the Tier Alignment Panel (TAP)?

A) Yes, if you wished to although this would not be a requirement as your Supervising Social Worker would attend in person. The TAP would consider your placement offer not the needs of an individual child you currently have placed with you. If you wished to attend, the TAPs are proposed to be held on set dates over a limited period of time. You would be notified of the date and time allocation for you to attend.

Q) Would I be able to move between tiers? For example:

If I was at Level 3 but the child I am caring for has far greater needs than expected, could I move up a level?

A) Tier levels would be based on your placement offer to any Looked After Child therefore you would not move up a level. However, you could use the experience of caring for that child to demonstrate that you can offer subsequent placements at a higher tier.

Q) What would happen if the child I am caring for settles and presents less challenging behaviour, would I move down a level?

A) Because your placement offer would remain the same you would not move down a level. Your offer is not dependent on the needs of an individual child placed with you.

Q) Who would make the decision on tier changes and how?

A) It is proposed that evidence of your capacity to meet the requirements of a particular tier would be included in your annual review. However, you could also be considered for a change in tier level between placements when you may be able to demonstrate a placement offer at the higher level. A recommendation to increase the tier level would be considered by the Head of Fostering. Any decision to increase a tier level would be taken in the context of the needs of the Looked After population in Suffolk, at that time.

Q) Could I lower my placement offer temporarily if I've had a couple of challenging placements?

A) Yes, you could elect to step-down your placement offer and receive a different tier rate. This decision would be discussed with your SSW and would be agreed by the relevant fostering team manager.

Q) What if I have one child age over 11 and one under 5? Under the proposed scheme, would I get the same fee for each child?

A) It would depend on the placement offer. For example, carers could offer more than one placement at different levels e.g. A teenager with complex needs at Tier 4 and a 'move-on' baby placement at Tier 2.

Q) When would the new scheme take effect?

A) It is proposed that Fostering Allowances at the new rates would be paid to existing carers from 1 October 2015. New carers to SCC would receive the new allowances from the date of implementation. This would include the new reduced allowance rate as well as any enhanced fees. The reason that new carers would start on the new scheme earlier than existing carers is to allow sufficient notice of any changes to existing carers and to enable the alignment process to be completed.

Q) Would there be a restriction on how many carers could access each tier?

A) The proposed scheme is based on the needs of our Looked After Children population. How many carers are required at each level would vary at any given time to meet demand.

The table below shows the number of available placements, including connected persons placements and the number needed to meet the demands of the Looked After Children's service. The placements needed are based on the age and complexity of need of children currently placed in fostering placements.

PLACEMENT REQUIREMENTS by Looked After Population Need

	Current Available Placements	Placements needed	Total Placements
Standard Level One 0 - 1	23	0	23
Standard Level One 2 - 3	26	0	26
Standard Level One 4 - 10	41	0	41
Standard Level One 11- 15	11	0	11
Standard Level One 16 - 17	3	0	3
Intermediate Level Two 0 - 1	8	0	8
Intermediate Level Two 2 - 3	30	0	30
Intermediate Level Two 4 - 10	19	0	19
Intermediate Level Two 11 - 15	40	0	40
Intermediate Level Two 16 - 17	23	0	23
Advanced Level Three 4 - 10	42	25	67
Advanced Level Three 11 - 15	65	41	106
Advanced Level Three 16 - 17	13	16	29
Foster Plus Level Four 7 - 10	2	12	14
Foster Plus Level Four 11 - 15	16	17	33
Foster Plus Level Four 16 - 17	3	7	10
Specialist Level Five 7 - 10	5	4	9
Specialist Level Five 11 - 15	4	6	10
Specialist Level Five 16 - 17	0	2	2
TOTAL PLACEMENTS	374	130	504

We have a duty of care and legal responsibility to provide a 'sufficiency' of placements for looked after children in Suffolk. Our aspiration is to recruit sufficient carers to provide placements for the majority of the children and young people in need of a foster placement by 2018. Our aim is to provide children and young people with high quality placements which meet their needs and are as near to their home community as possible.

Where placements are supported by professionals and carers who have strong professional relationships and are able to work closely together, really positive outcomes can be achieved.

Q) What transition arrangements would there be?

A) Under the proposed scheme, there would be scope for protecting current payments to some existing placements. It is proposed that carers are provided with one of the following types of protection depending on their individual circumstances:

a) Maintenance of existing allowances for a fixed period to enable the foster carers to adjust their finances: e.g. A carer permanently cares for a five year old boy and receives £360 per week. Under Level 3 of the new model the carer would be entitled to £300 per week. The carer could be offered fee protection of £360 per week for three years after which time it would reduce to £300 per week.

b) Freezing of the current allowance until such time as the new model exceeds this: e.g. A carer permanently cares for a 13 year old boy and receives £400 per week. Under Level 3 of the new model the carer would be entitled to £350 per week. Agreement could be given to the allowance being maintained at £400 per week until the young person turned 16 and the allowance increases to £400 per week.

c) Maintenance of existing allowance until current placement ceases: e.g. A fee-paid carer is providing a time-limited placement to a younger child whilst adopters are sought. Existing allowance would be maintained whilst child remained with the carers. Once the child moves on the carers would have the choice to continue fostering younger children at the new reduced allowance rates or increase their placement offer to foster older children at an enhanced rate.

Fee-paid foster carers providing multiple placements would have their fee protection considered as a household, rather than per placement, because the proposed model would remove the different fees for the first and subsequent children in a placement. In the majority of instances the proposed model would provide a comparable or increased level of allowances across all placements because, although the first child rate decreases, the subsequent child rate increases. For example: a primary-aged group of three siblings currently generate £880 per week (£360 + £260 + £260). Under the new scheme there would be a reduction in the first child rate but an increase in the subsequent child rate. The overall weekly allowance for these children would rise to £900 per week (£300 x 3).

All cases would be dealt with on a 'case by case' basis by the Fee Protection Panel (FPP).

Q) Would there be any additional payments or benefits under the new scheme?

A) Yes, additional entitlements would be:

Four additional weekly allowances per year (2 weeks payable each year for holiday/holiday activities; one week for birthday and one week for religious festivals – or two weeks for religious observance where birthdays are not celebrated)

- Mileage at 45p per mile for contact/meetings or petrol costs for longer journeys
- Loan of essential equipment and computers
- Insurance against damage to your property or belongings caused by the foster child
- Up to 21 days paid respite
- An initial payment of £50 in respect of children placed 'out of hours'
- Regular placements
- Choice of placements
- Career/income 'progression' based upon increased placement offer through experience and professional development
- Membership to the Fostering Network which includes two 24 hour helplines (legal advice and stress counselling), legal assistance and legal protection insurance
- Membership to the Foster Carer Association

Q) I am a contract carer; what would happen to me?

A) There is a small number of contract carers in Suffolk. We will use the period of consultation to review your circumstances with you. As part of these discussions you would be given the opportunity to transfer to the proposed new model.

Q) What if I disagreed with the outcome of the TAP and/or FPP?

A) Under the proposed process, you would be invited to raise any areas of disagreement in your application to the TAP and/or FPP. If you chose to attend the TAP then you would also have the opportunity to put forward, in person, any evidence to support your view. The decisions of the panels would be final. This is because the panel would have considered all the information available. They would have oversight of all the decisions made so would be able to ensure decision are fair for all foster carers.

If you wished to make representations to the local authority about how the process had been undertaken (not about the decision itself) then you could do so via Customer Rights - Telephone: 01473 260711 Email: customerrights@suffolk.gov.uk

Q) How will the child's needs be assessed to determine at which tier they need to be placed?

A) All requests for placements are made by the child's social worker who provides an assessment in a prescribed format giving all the known information about the child's level of need at the time of the placement request. All requests for placements in normal office hours are seen by the County Resource Panel, or agreed by the Head of Corporate Parenting.

When identifying a placement for the child, the Central Resource Team would look to match the needs of a particular child to the foster carer's offer. Where the placement is made out of hours, the standby service will have access to information about carers approved for emergency placements.

Q) Why are national minimum rates being used instead those of the Fostering Network?

A) The allowance level set by the Department for Education is considered sufficient to meet the costs of a carer caring for a child, and is the amount that Suffolk proposes to pay as a basic foster care allowance/ Special Guardianship Allowance.

In addition to this, currently around 35 children each year (and rising) are placed with friends and family foster carers and are subsequently made subject to Special Guardianship Orders. The amount of financial support payable to foster carers and Special Guardianship arrangements is determined by the level of financial support deemed suitable to ensure the carer is able to meet the needs of the child. Special Guardianship payments must have regard to the rate paid to local authority foster carers.

Under the proposed scheme, carers who wish to increase their skills, experience and placement offer would be able to progress to tier level 2 and beyond and would receive a fee in addition to the allowance.

By paying the allowance at the amount deemed appropriate by law to meet the child's needs, and not the higher rate championed by Fostering Network, we will be able to increase the number of carers who receive a fee for placements for older children and those with more complex needs.

Q) What happens if I take a child in an emergency whose needs are at a different tier to my offer?

A) An example of what would happen is provided in brief within the consultation document.

The fundamental principle that underpins the proposed scheme is that carers will be paid at the rate that has been agreed, based upon the capability element (demonstrated levels of skill, experience and commitment to development) and the placement offer they are making. Some of the criteria would be determined by the child's needs which will be known, even in an emergency, such as disability, whether it is a sibling group, or the age of the child. Other characteristics may become known over time, or may be a reaction to the loss, anxiety or separation suffered through coming into care in an emergency.

If the child consistently and persistently displays behaviour which is beyond the offer and capabilities the carer is currently assessed for and they are able to meet these needs on an ongoing basis, then there is opportunity to review the fee entitlement through an annual review, or when a placement comes to an end. The experience would be an opportunity to demonstrate increased capacity and to expand the offer to progress up the tiers. Conversely, the experience may result in the carer wishing to remain at their agreed level and request careful matching for subsequent placements.

If the child does not present the challenges the carer is equipped to deal with, even beyond a 'honeymoon' period, or the carers positive parenting strategies result in improved behaviour and positive changes in the child, the carer can use their skills to mentor and support other carers.

Q) What are the income tax implications for the fee element?

A) The fee element would potentially be taxable income depending on your personal circumstances. The current tax free allowance for 2015/16 will be £10,600. Further information about tax allowance for fostering is available at: www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering.

Q) Would kinship or connected carers be paid less than the other carers?

A) The criteria for payment would apply equally to all foster carers, whether related to the child or not.

For more information on the proposed Fostering Allowances Model please contact your SSW or email your query to CYPBUSSUPPCorpParlInbox@suffolk.gov.uk

OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE

PRE-ALIGNMENT INFORMATION FORM

To be completed by the supervising Social Worker (SSW)

Foster Carer(s)		SWW	
CHARMS ID		Manager	

Current level of approval with any preference match	<i>e.g. Short term & short break 1 child, 2 if siblings; male/female; age range 0-18 years, preference match 0-2 years.</i>
Please indicate whether the carers are currently mainstream, skills level, connected/kinship, contract.	

Background Information including fostering experience (e.g. Length of time, varying approvals)
Please use bullet points:

Three year placement Chronology	
Number of Placements	
Nature of placements e.g. Ages, children with disabilities, complex and/or harmful behaviours, teenagers, duration of placements (Consider this in relation to the Carer Capacity as set out in the tier model)	

Summary of outcomes for each of the placements above (e.g. Successful move-on to adoption, reunification, planned moves, breakdowns, reduction in risk taking behaviours etc.)

Training and development including Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC), NVQ/Child Care Diploma, level of commitment to training and support groups, mentoring, activities to support the fostering service etc.

Proposed placement offer including rationale for allocation to a specific level (refer to Tier Model - If carer and SSW are NOT in agreement, please identify clearly what the differing proposals are.)

Proposed tier - SSW/Teammanager

Proposed tier - Foster carer(s)

SIGNATURES:

FOSTER CARER _____

FOSTER CARER _____

name:

name:

Supervising Social Worker _____ name:

Management decision on tier level alignment with rationale if required
Level:
Comments:

Please cross boxes if relevant to indicate consideration by additional panel(s) required.

Fee Protection Panel (FFP) Tier Alignment Panel (TAP)

Please complete relevant FPP and/or TAP Form

name of manager: _____ Signature: