



FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SOCIAL SERVICES

ADAPTATIONS TO FOSTER CARERS' HOMES POLICY

Policy Owner	Craig Macleod, Senior Manager: Children
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INTRODUCTION

Foster carers provide loving homes and life-changing care for children who can no longer live with their birth families, giving them a brighter, happier future. Fostering can involve looking after children of all ages, from babies to teenagers, who come from different backgrounds.

Flintshire Social Services values the care, love and commitment given by its foster carers to the children and young people living with them. However, it is recognised that the role of a foster carer can sometimes be challenging, juggling work and caring commitments, as well as welcoming new children into the home with limited space; but with the right support, training and resources, carers are making a huge impact on the lives of children in Flintshire.

By the introduction of this policy, Flintshire is supporting foster carers in making necessary adaptations to their home to provide adequate space for children and young people to live and thrive in their care. The grant funding will complement the existing range of support provided to foster carers, and this funding is another step forward in securing local and stable placements for children.

POLICY OBJECTIVES

As a local authority it is our objective to ensure that Flintshire has sufficient and suitable foster care placements, for children and young people of all ages, which is in their best interests and meets the well-being outcomes of the child/children and young people. This policy aims to meet the following objectives:

- Increase the range and choice of available placements for children who require a home outside of their birth family, locally
- Enable skilled and able foster carers to extend the number of places they are able to offer, or to maintain existing placements as circumstances or needs change
- Seek best value for money from the range of placements available by using them in the most efficient and effective way,
- Any placements made are first and foremost in the best interests of the child/children,
- Secure stability or permanence for a child/children

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This Policy has been developed with the following principles underpinning our approach to supporting children, young people and foster carers in Flintshire, as guided by the legislation covering this policy: Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Children Act 1989 and Special Guardianship (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018:

Children should be able to live in a stable family-based setting that supports their well-being and meets their outcomes

Placements should always be in the best interest of the child/children, and where appropriate consider the child's voice and choice

Every child and carer is treated with dignity and respect

Be equitable regardless of placement type

All partners will work together to prevent, manage and solve any placement issues or changes in circumstances

Be fair and transparent throughout the process

GRANT FUNDING FOR ADAPTATIONS

This policy enables Flintshire to offer grant funding to foster carers to assist them with the cost of making adaptations to their home to provide adequate space, which is of a sufficient standard, for children and young people to live and thrive in their care. This funding aims to complement the range of support provided to foster carers.

Grant funding can be used to: adapt or convert an existing room into more useable space, extend a property to create extra room(s) or help towards purchasing a new larger or more suitable property.

Applications for granting funding will be considered up to a maximum of £36,000, with a £20,000 maximum grant for the relocation to a more suitable property; however the maximum grant funding may be increased in exceptional circumstances. Social Services will consider individual applications and determine what exceptional circumstances would apply; please refer to the criteria for exceptional circumstances.

Flintshire has the discretion to waiver up to £10,000 of grant funding, dependent on the financial assessment of the foster carer and/or property owner and the proposed child placement arrangements.

Grant funding will usually be repayable to the local authority, on a sliding scale, if any of the following clawback conditions are triggered within a 10 year period or sooner if the child reaches maturity (18 years of age) or has a life limiting condition:

- Sale or transfer of the property
- Resignation or death of the foster carer(s)
- Termination of approval
- Notice given on the individual placement by either Social Services or the foster carers
- Foster carer(s)/ property owner wishes to repay the grant funding

Clawback triggered within (from the date of the signed financial agreement)	Percentage of grant funding repayable
1 – 2 years	100%
2 – 4 years	75%
4 – 6 years	50%
6 - 10 years	25%

The provision of a Local Land Charge, for £10,000 or less, or a Legal Charge, for more than £10,000, will be registered against the property by the local authority to safeguard the grant funding for the clawback period outlined above.

Flintshire Social Services reserves the right to waiver any grant funding that remains payable to the local authority due to individual and/or exceptional circumstances, this decision will be made by the Foster Carer Adaptations Panel.

Flintshire Social Services introduces this grant funding with a flexible, shared-cost approach, therefore there is an expectation that the foster carer will provide 100% financial contribution towards the costs of any additionality to the works or house move. The financial contribution will be ‘means tested’ as part of the application process – please refer to the ‘Grant Funding Application Process’.

Any approval of grant funding will be subject to the availability of funding. If the scheme experiences a high demand, applications will be considered on their individual merit against the published criteria whilst ensuring it meets the child/children’s best interest.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility for this policy applies to the following carer(s), children and their housing accommodation:

- approved or prospective foster carers of Flintshire County Council
- existing or prospective adoptive families of those children which Flintshire County Council is responsible for
- Family and friends / carers of children who are under a Special Guardianship Order
- Family and friends under a Child Arrangements Order would be considered if the application is made at the time of the Court Order
- Children who are under the parental responsibility of Flintshire County Council, between the ages of 0 and 18,
- Accommodation can include privately owned, mortgaged, leasehold (99 years remaining) and council rented homes. *Other housing accommodation such as privately rented or social housing are subject to the consent of the property owner and will be considered with their approval.*
- carers who are committed to their caring role for the long term, or at least until the child reaches 18.

[Foster carers of children with a disability who require funding for adaptations should apply for the Disability Facilities Grant (DFG), administered by Flintshire County Council]

CRITERIA

In order to qualify for funding for adaptations or towards the purchase of a more suitable property, at least one of the following criteria must be satisfied with the agreement from the local authority that the adaptation is necessary in order to meet the child/ children's needs and cannot be reasonably met in any other way:

- Promote and secure a placement in the best interests of the child/children

- Provide stability and/or permanence for an existing placement, due to changing needs and outcomes of the child/children
- Secure extra capacity for current or potential fostering placements
- Secure new long term placements
- Enable siblings to be placed together
- Meet the needs of children with multiple disabilities
- To meet health and safety requirements which would otherwise result in a child being moved

Exceptional circumstances, which would include: the complex and multiple needs of the child/ children, the family circumstances and any property limitations, will all be considered by the Foster Carers Adaptation Panel when appraising the application for funding.

Applications will only be considered where it is evidenced that all other options and resources have been exhausted and have been deemed to not be in the best interests of the child/ children.

PROCESS FOR APPLICATIONS

Carers interested in making an application for funding should discuss their plans with the local authority's Fostering Service initially, to ensure that there are no other alternative options or resources available to meet the need for additional living space.

All applications for funding must be completed on the 'Grant Funding for Adaptations Application Form' and accompanied by any other information that the Council considers necessary to be able to consider the application fully.

The local authority will undertake investigative works regarding the application prior to its consideration to determine viability from the outset. This will include (but not exclusive to): feasibility report and initial designs by Building Surveyor, property survey findings, property ownership details, property valuation and financial checks on the carer(s)/ property owners to determine affordability/ equity available in the property. It is also fundamental that the property owner gives full consent (as mortgagor) to the

application and conditions of the grant, if different from the foster carer(s), together with any mortgagee (lender).

The application will be considered by the Foster Carers Adaptations Panel, which consists of local authority officers from Social Services, Fostering Service, Finance, Housing and Assets and Regeneration, within 28 working days. The application will be considered in line with the available funding, the eligibility and criteria as outlined within this Policy.

The local authority will undertake a cost benefit analysis to ensure that any proposed works provides the authority with the best value for money, considering the child/ children's best interest.

The local authority will advise whether the application for funding has been approved or refused in writing within a reasonable timeframe, together with the value of funding that has been approved. Where the application has been refused, the local authority will provide a written statement of the reasons for refusal and details of the appeals procedure.

Any grant funding approved will be available for 12 months from the date of approval. Extensions to this timeframe will be required by the Foster Carers Adaptations Panel.

Foster carers will be given information on the grant funding conditions from the start of the process and will be included in the grant application form. A financial assistance agreement will need to be signed prior to any works commencing and funding being spent. Due to the potential large sums of money that may be involved and the requirement for a Legal Charge to safeguard public funding, carers and property owners are encouraged to seek independent legal advice and will be offered a contribution towards this, to a maximum of £250, per application.

For further information, please refer to the supplementary documentation 'Grant Funding Application Process'.

APPEALS

All grant applications for funding will be considered against the published criteria. If the application does not meet the criteria, the local authority will inform the carer(s) in writing of the reasons for refusal.

Where the carer(s) is refused funding and they wish to appeal against the decision, they should appeal to the Council in writing within 15 working days of the date of refusal stating the grounds for appeal.

All appeals will be considered by the Chief Officer of Social Services and the decision by the Chief Officer will be final in respect of that individual case and will not be binding upon any future applications made by that or any other applicant.

For further information, please refer to the supplementary documentation 'Grant Funding Process'.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION:

- Grant Funding for Adaptations Application Form
- Grant Funding Application Process
- Draft Financial Assistance Agreement