

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council - Children's Services

Draft Policy on S.17 payments

1.0 Provision of s.17 Financial Assistance

- Financial assistance in terms of goods or services, or in exceptional circumstances cash, can be provided to a child, parent or carer under Children Act 1989 **Section 17(6)** to address identified needs to safeguard and promote a child's welfare where there is no other legitimate source of financial assistance.
- The services provided by a local authority, in the exercise of functions conferred on them by this section, may also include giving assistance in kind or... in cash.
- Assistance may be unconditional or subject to conditions as to the repayment of the assistance or of its value (in whole or in part).
- Before giving any assistance or imposing any conditions, a local authority shall have regard to the means of the child concerned and of each of the child's parents.

2.0 Criteria for s.17 Financial Assistance

The Criteria for s17 financial assistance are:

- The payment must be to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child;
- An allocated worker should be actively involved with the family at least for the duration of the payments and if the financial assistance is more than one off emergency assistance, this must be assessed as part of an assessment or through the review of a child's plan. In relation to one off emergency payments for families who are not open to Children's Social Care, an assessment will need to be undertaken either by the MASH, First Response Service, Locality Social Work Team or Early Help Service. This decision will be made by the MASH Team Manager and will be based on levels of need.
- In the event of an emergency payment being agreed, a rationale to support the payment should be recorded in case notes and supported by a full assessment at a later date. If an assessment is not deemed

necessary, a Team Managers decision should be clearly recorded on file articulating the rationale behind this.

- The assessment needs to consider the need for ongoing support and advice in respect of finances and budgeting for the family.

All alternatives should be explored with the family to assist in accessing and utilising their existing resources to the best effect and support the family in becoming self-sustaining, prior to any application for funding (see [Local Resources, Looked After Children – Leaving Care and Transition](#)).

- At point of request for financial support it should be confirmed that there are no alternate sources of finance from the Benefits Agency, Housing Benefit family or friend contributions, other agencies, charities. Evidence needs to be uploaded in Liquid Logic and recorded on the child's file under case notes;
- Payments should be made directly to the supplier or provider of services. Monies should not be given directly to the family or carers except in exceptional circumstances;
- All financial assistance is a one off payment. There may be exceptional circumstances where multiple payments are required; these are to be considered on a case by case basis and must be subject to review and time-limited. The period for which funding has been agreed must be clearly communicated by the social worker to the person in receipt of the assistance;
- If theft is alleged, a crime number should be provided and recorded in case notes. The responsible Service Manager must be made aware of any occasions where this is alleged.

3.0 Types of s17 Financial Assistance

3.1 One off payments

These should be used to overcome a crisis, following the best assessment that can be achieved in the following circumstances:

Specific Guidance – Allowable expenditure

- Food - method of payment goods only, in exceptional circumstances cash;
- Gas - method of payment direct payment only, in exceptional circumstances cash;
- Electricity - method of payment direct payment only, in exceptional circumstances cash;

- Clothing - one off payment, method of payment goods only, in no circumstances cash;
- Toiletries - one off payment, method of payment goods only, in exceptional circumstances cash;
- Nappies and baby milk should be given in appropriate amounts, no cash provided.

3.2 Clothing and Equipment

The provision of clothing, furniture, bedding or safety equipment can only be provided where an assessment determines items identified as essential to meet the needs of the child and/or prevent the child suffering **Significant Harm** and/or the need for the child to be looked after by the local authority.

Specific Guidance

- The assessment should address where needs are identified what avenues the family have taken to address the issue themselves, including family members support, via benefits and how family resources are being utilised. The assessment does not need to be a completed Single Assessment in circumstances where an emergency payment is required however a rationale to support the payment should be recorded in case notes.
- Access to community resources should be considered. Liaison with the benefits agency and other charitable organisations locally that can be accessed and specific grants should be sought.
- Submission for funding should include efforts undertaken to seek alternate sources of funding.

3.3 Travelling Expenses

This provision is available to support the transport of children, parents, carers or extended family member to attend assessments, activities, appointments and support groups which are essential to a child's plan or to comply with court direction.

An assessment must ensure and agree that they could not reasonably be expected to travel using their own means due to medical, situational, financial or geographical reasons. This support is to be provided through bus tickets, train tickets or reimbursement of own, family or friend's petrol costs (currently this is paid at 15 pence per mile).

Taxis are not the first option to be explored and will not be approved unless all other avenues of travel have been exhausted and the cost of travel has been evaluated against the benefits to the child of the appointment.

Specific Guidance

- GP confirmation of medical conditions reported to impact upon capacity to travel or use public transport are to be provided to the Local Authority by the parent, carer, adult family member;
- Reimbursement of petrol costs to be subject to driver and vehicle being appropriately licensed and insured. The rates of payment for fuel, has to be based upon average miles per gallon for the vehicle used for an agreed distance between home to meeting, the cost identified to be agreed prior to submission for approval.
- Only council approved Taxi companies can be used for transportation. These can be accessed via the Business Support Team.

3.4 Specialists Assessments and DNA/Hair Strand Testing

If special assessments or testing is required prior to care proceedings (pre proceedings public law outline PLO) to ascertain if a child is at risk of harm then these need to be agreed by the responsible Service Manager.

3.5 Interpreter and Translation Costs

Where English is not the first language for children and carers, workers need to ascertain if the child and/or carer is able to understand and speak English to the level that they can complete their intervention in a meaningful way.

If the child and/or carer is not able to understand or speak English to the required level then an interpreter will be required. Consideration is to be given to whether this could be an extended family member or family friend or community worker including teaching staff with the carers permission if it will not be detrimental to the intervention.

If a professional interpreter is required the following process are to be followed:

Telephone: The social worker will contact Big Word and use the most up to date access code. The access code can be provided by Business Support.

Home visit: The social worker will email business support with details including language required, time, date, venue. Business support will make the booking and confirm with social worker and Business support will process for payment.

Specific Guidance

- Any costs associated with the translation of assessments or Court documents will need to be agreed by the responsible Service Manager.
- Professional Interpreters should always be used for assessments; Case Conferences; and court proceedings.

3.6 Other Types of Payments not Covered by this Guidance

- Day care for pre-school and other children under section 18 of the Children Act 1989. Payments for the care of looked after children residing with Local Authority approved foster cares (including family and friends;
- Payments for those holding a **Child Arrangements Order** - see [Family and Friends Policy and Procedure](#);
- Payments to adopters; those holding a Special Guardianship Order; Child Arrangements Order see Adoption Order, Special Guardianship Order and Child Arrangements Order Allowances;
- Payments to those in receipt of Direct Payments e.g. (Disabled Children and Young People Direct Payments).

4.0 Approval of s17 Financial Assistance

All requests for financial assistance should be made by the worker on a Section 17 request form with the supporting welfare issue that needs addressing and the alternatives that have been explored.

Goods and services should be purchased through purchase to pay or; cash via 'petty cash' should only be used in exceptional circumstances.

The S17 financial request form is an electronic form which can be accessed via the Liquid Logic system.

In all cases the child's worker will make their request to their team manager who will review work undertaken and will agree payment in line with financial approval limits as set out below.

The schedule for authorisation applicable to this budget is as follows:

Financial Approval Limits	Authorised to Sanction
£1 - £200	Team or Duty Manager
£200 and above	Service Manager and Head of Service (where appropriate)

It is expected that all proposed expenditure is submitted for approval and agreement through the delegated power. Where the team manager is unavailable, delegation can be given to the duty managers or other team managers for the approval of single items within the prescribed financial limits. This should be reported to the team manager upon return.

Where the budget holding service manager is absent any financial assistance or a single item above approved limits, will require approval from a service

manager from the same management group, with an automatic notification to the budget holding service manager for their return.

This will also apply to the presentation of an application to the Head of Service which in the absence of the Head of Service can be taken by another Head of Service in the same management group.

The Section 17 form should be stored on the child's case file, whether approved or not, with the nature of the request and outcome being recorded in case notes by the worker.

Repeat request for funding needs to be brought to the attention of the responsible Service Manager. Where ongoing services have been identified as a need and require approval for the provision of services over a period of time. The request for payment should have the weekly amount listed, the time this weekly payment should be made from to the end or review date. The total commitment should also be listed to ensure budget commitments are correctly monitored.

A copy of all Section 17 forms completed and approved will also be given to the business support team for the maintenance of financial management of the budget.

5.0 Recording of s17 Financial Assistance

No payments can be made if the section 17 is only signed by one person. Two signatures are required one from the staff member requesting funding and one from the team manager / service manager / head of service approving the request. Management and Panel decisions and authorisation of payments need to be recorded on Liquid Logic Case Notes.

6.0 Monitoring Spend

S17 payments are time limited and subject to review. A s17 payment to a Child in Need will be reviewed in supervision a month after the payment has been made and not exceeding three months and recorded on the child's case file on Liquid Logic. It is the responsibility of the Service Manager with support from Finance Business Partnering to monitor S17 spend against budget. Summary reports will also be provided to Heads of Service and the Directorate Leadership Team (DLT). The Locality Management Team will review payments at their regularly meetings.