

30 hours childcare for Children in Foster Care

Introduction

In December 2017, government announced plans to extend eligibility for 30 hours childcare to children in foster care where the foster parents meet certain eligibility criteria, giving foster families the same support as other families where it is right for the child. Children in foster care will be able to receive 30 hours free childcare, if the following criteria are met:

- That accessing the extended hours is consistent with the child's care plan, placing the child at the centre of the process and decision making
- That, in single parent foster families, the foster parent engages in paid work outside their role as a foster parent
- In two parent foster families, both partners engage in paid work outside their role as a foster parent. If one partner is not a foster parent then they must be in qualifying paid work and earn a minimum of the equivalent to 16 hours at national minimum/national living wage.

The application form will be completed by the foster parent and be counter-signed by the Supervising Social Worker to confirm eligibility. Foster parents will be required to reconfirm their eligibility every three months to mirror the existing process and support the work enabling objective of the 30 hours policy. Agreement that the foster parents can take up the extended hours should be recorded and the care plan for the child should be updated as appropriate.

Key Considerations

The funding local authority is the local authority in which the child is taking up their place and who is paying the provider. They do not have to be the same local authority.

When supporting foster parents, local authorities should be aware of the following:

- Accessing 30 hours will **not** be appropriate for every child in foster care. This change is to enable those foster parents who are working outside of fostering to access this support where it is right for the child. The child's social worker will need to provide a brief report to the Supervising Social Worker to support the application from the Foster Carer and confirm that this is consistent with a child's care plan

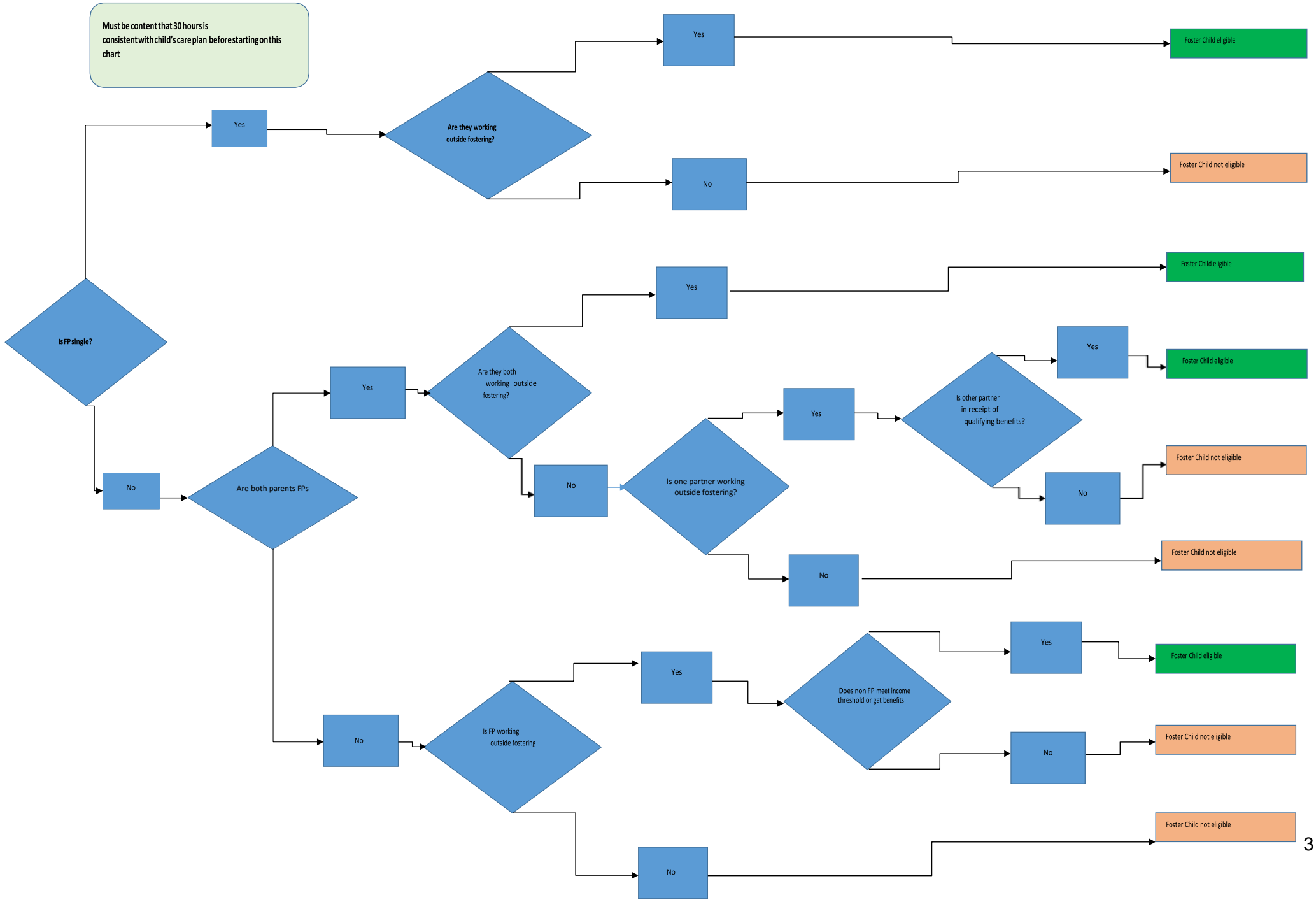
- We are not expecting or requiring foster parents to work outside fostering unless they choose to do so and this decision is supported by the fostering service. There is no requirement on the type of work or number of hours that a foster parent must work in order to access the 30 hours and there is no minimum earnings limit (although they must be engaging in paid work)
- Foster parents will only be eligible if this is consistent with a child's care plan, The child in foster care does **not** have to take up the full 30 hours. Children in foster care **will** continue to qualify for the universal 15 hours regardless of the working status of their foster parents.
- If circumstances change and a child in foster care ceases to be eligible for 30 hours the responsible local authority should assess the child's needs for early years provision as part of the care plan.

Process

Checking Eligibility

The diagram below sets out when foster parents will be eligible for 30 hours for their children in foster care. If the Supervising Social Worker is not satisfied that accessing 30 hours is consistent with the child's care plan, then the child will **not** be able to take up a 30 hours place and no code should be issued.

Must be content that 30 hours is consistent with child's care plan before starting on this chart



Stage 1: The Foster Parent(s) apply

Foster parents and child's social worker start discussions, as the child approaches their 3rd birthday or when a foster parent decides to take up additional work. We would expect these to happen as part of the usual supervision meetings and review process.

The following resources are available on the Childcare Works website to support these discussions:

- [Foster Parents Journey](#)
- [Information Sheet for Social Workers](#)
- [FAQs](#)

The foster parent should complete an application form, once the form has been completed and signed by the foster parents, this will be the declaration as required by regulations. For the purposes of determining when a foster child is entitled to take up their place, the date of application will be the date the parents signed the form.

Stage 2: The LA confirms eligibility

Designated Person

The designated person is the Supervising Social Worker who must be able to confirm that the foster parents are working outside their role as a foster parent and that accessing 30 hours free childcare is consistent with the child's care plan.

Evidence

The evidence needs to allow the Supervising Social Worker to be confident that the foster parent(s) are engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent (there is no requirement to check the number of hours). This can be done by checking:

- pay slips
- job offer letter
- evidence of self-employment (such as tax return)

However, if one partner is not a foster parent, there will need to be a check, via this [link](#), that the partner is meeting the normal income requirements for 30 hours.

Stage 3: Responsible LA issues a code to Parents

The local authority will issue eligibility codes to foster parents.

Once stage 2 is complete and it has been agreed that the foster child should take up a 30 hours place, The Supervising Social Worker or Childs Social worker will scan the application form and send it electronically to The Early Years, Childcare and Business Support Team via email childcare@walthamforest.gov.uk the details will then be entered

on ECS by The Early Years, Childcare and Business Support Team to create a record for the foster child.

Once the 11 digit code has been generated, the Local Authority will send this to the foster parents and the child's social worker, usually via email. The child's social worker will also be informed when the code is issued. Local authorities will want to include further instructions to foster parents about taking the code to their provider to confirm their place and further information on their reconfirmation process. It may be worth clarifying that foster parents can use the code with any provider (subject to vacancy availability), even outside the issuing local authority.

Stage 4: Provider Checking and Payment

Once the foster parent has received the code, the process is the same as for any other 30 hours parent and child. The foster parent contacts a provider to agree a 30 hour place, giving them the code to confirm their place. [The Foster Parent Journey](#) flow chart will help foster parents navigate the process, and may also be useful for providers working with foster families.

Stage 5: Reconfirmation

Foster parents, like all other parents accessing 30 hours are required to reconfirm their eligibility every three months. The exact dates and intervals for children in foster care are set by ECS system when the child's record is created.

As a minimum, the local authority needs to be satisfied that the placement is:

- still on- going
- that accessing the 30 hours is still consistent with the child's care plan
- foster parents are still engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent

The Early Years, Childcare and Business Support Team will use the new ECS report to help identify which of the codes they issued for children in foster care are approaching reconfirmation. At least 4 weeks before the end-date, they will initiate the reconfirmation process with the foster Parent and child's social worker. Once The Early Years, Childcare and Business Support Team have received confirmation that foster parents are still eligible, they will need to update the child's ECS record. Confirmation of eligibility for renewal of the code by The Early Years, Childcare and Business Support Team will be provided by the Childs Social worker or the Supervising Social Worker once they are satisfied the criteria is still met.

Appeals Process

If foster parents are unhappy about the decision made by the local authority, then the foster parents should seek resolution through their social worker or through the local authority complaints process which can be accessed [here](#).

Notes for The Early Years, Childcare and Business Support Team

The LA will be able to see which children in foster care are accessing 30 hours in their area during the regular audits as they will begin with a '400'. They should include these codes in their normal processes.

The LA will ensure that providers are aware that foster parents may not have access to all the documents (such as birth certificates) relating to the children in their care. In this situation, the letter or email from the LA issuing the code can provide evidence of meeting the age criteria

However, local authorities should be aware of handling circumstances sensitively if the funding and responsible local authority are different. The responsible authority should be aware that if they have not initiated the reconfirmation process, and the foster child enters their grace period, the funding authority will have contacted the provider, who will then tell foster parents that they are no longer eligible.

Transition Arrangements for September 2018

We are aware that this is a new process, we are therefore suggesting for the September 2018 only, that local authorities exercise their discretion and secure a place for children in foster care even if the application form was received after 31st August 2018.