

Consultation information paper

Consultation on Darlington Borough Council's Children's Services Policy and Guidance for Payment of Special Guardianship, Child Arrangements and Adoption Allowance.

The Council is consulting on the implementation of a policy for the payments of special guardianship, child arrangements and adoption allowance to ensure a consistent and equitable consideration of each application.

We would like your views on these proposals as a Special Guardian, Child Arrangement Order Carer. We would also like your views on what impact the policy may have on you.

The consultation is open from 5th September 2022 to 23rd October 2022

You can provide feedback in different ways:

- Complete on-line questionnaire: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/DBC>
- Complete paper questionnaire and return to: Bronwen.Smith@darlington.gov.uk or <mailto:heather.mcquade@darlington.gov.uk>
- Alternatively, consultation events are to be held at the Dolphin Centre on the following dates:
 - 8th September 2022 13:00 to 15:00
 - 5th October 2022 9:00 until 11:00

The events will focus on providing an opportunity to give feedback on the proposed changes and to identify any potential impacts which may arise from the potential change.

The event will be used to allow one to one discussion with any person wishing to consider their own personal situation. Please feel free to attend any event.

Background

The Council is required to provide financial support to individuals who seek to have a relevant order, including Adoption order, Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order with residence element, we are currently carrying out a public consultation on proposed changes to their policy'.

Financial support, where assessed as appropriate, is intended to supplement existing means of support available.

To ensure everyone is treated fairly all carers undergo a financial assessment this is to calculate whether they are eligible for Adoption, SGO or CAO allowance, and if eligible, what their payment will be.

The financial assessment consists of the following tasks.

- Assessing a carer/carers total income.
- Assessing allowable expenditure and disregards.
- Calculating disposable income, this is their total household income minus allowable expenditure and disregards.
- Calculating SGO allowance, by using Core Regular Family and Fostering Allowance.
- Undertaking a comprehensive welfare rights check.

What are we proposing?

Amend the allowances in the Core Regular Family Expenditure

The SGO allowance is calculated by offsetting disposal income against the current core regular family expenditure, The Core Regular Family Expenditure is based on 125% of income support allowances per household.

This is the amount the household would be entitled to if they claimed income support.

Current Process:

Income support allowances for lone parents and couples are only used to determine the amount of the core regular family expenditure.

Proposed Change:

The Core Regular Family Expenditure will include all allowances which the household are entitled to this will include dependent children, disability, pensioners, carers, or any other entitled allowances. This is to ensure the correct funding is awarded to reflect the needs of the household.

Annual Financial Reassessment for Adoption Allowances

Current process:

We do not carry out a financial reassessment for adoption allowances

Proposed change:

The proposal is to complete an annual financial re-assessment for any **new** adoption allowances.

Household Family Income

Current process:

The current financial assessment includes a household monthly income which then has a 20% disregard applied.

The household income is calculated by adding up the household income from earnings, benefits, capital, investments, and any other income, and disregarding 20% of the amount. To determine the total projected family income

Allowable expenditure is deducted from this amount to determine the disposable income amount to be used to calculate the SGO award.

The equivalent income support rate, plus 25% enhancement is then compared to this disposable income amount.

If the disposable income is less than the income support rate the full amount of fostering allowance is paid less the expected child benefit amount.

For carer/carers with greater disposable income than the income support rate, the disposable income is reduced by 50p for every £1 they have over and above the appropriate income support rate.

The disposable income amount is then deducted from the relevant foster allowance, less expected child benefit amount, to calculate the amount awarded.

Proposed change:

To remove the 20% disregard on the household monthly income, and to only apply the 25% enhancement on the equivalent income support rates.

Example 1:

1. Existing process

Family A receive universal credits of a weekly amount of £139.49, the first 20% is disregarded, i.e. £27.90, leaving a balance of £111.59 which is their family income, their core regular family income is £178.28, income support allowance plus 25%, due to this being higher than their weekly income, they will receive the local authority maximum payment of £162.75.

2. New process

Family A receive universal credits of a weekly amount of £139.49 this is their family income, their core regular family expenditure is £178.28, income support allowance plus 25%, due to this being higher than their weekly income, they will receive the local authority maximum payment of £162.75. Therefore, this is the same as the current method.

Example 2:

1. Existing process

Family B are a one parent family have a SGO for a child who is 12 and has two children of their own aged 8 and 10. They receive weekly income from their employment of £334.62 and benefits of £228.78, their family income is £563.40, the first 20% is disregarded i.e., £112.68, therefore the family income included in the calculation is £450.72. The core regular family expenditure is £350.19, which is income support plus 25%, and home allowances of £88.36, mortgage payments, council tax etc, totalling £438.55. This making the weekly disposable income per week is £12.17, the weekly payment would be £191.61 per child.

2. New process

Family B are a one parent family have a SGO for a child who is 12 and has two children of their own aged 8 and 10. They receive weekly income from their employment of £334.62 and benefits of £228.78, their family income is £563.40. The core regular family expenditure is £359.19, which is income support plus 25%, and home allowances of £88.36, mortgage payments, council tax etc, totalling £438.55. This making the weekly disposable income per week is £124.85, this, is making a weekly payment of £135.27

Equality Impact Assessment

The Council is committed to ensuring involvement of all the people and communities that use our services.

We need to do this when we consult too, so we can be sure that the way we consult is fair, transparent and promotes equality of opportunity.

You can help us to do this by answering the questions within the questionnaire. We won't share any of the information you give us, and you don't have to answer the questions if you don't want to.