

Islington Childcare Bursary Scheme

Guidance Note

The Islington Childcare Bursary Scheme helps parents to move into and progress in work by providing short-term financial support towards the cost of childcare, which can be a significant barrier to taking up employment or progressing to a better, more sustainable job.

The Childcare Bursary Scheme is targeted at those parents who face the greatest challenges in moving into work and for whom the costs of childcare present a real barrier to employment.

Eligibility Criteria

A person can apply for a Childcare Bursary if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Are an Islington resident or placed out of borough by Islington Council
- Are on a low income i.e., claiming Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, or other means-tested benefits and / or eligible for up to Band 3 in the Council's subsidised childcare policy (Funded Early Years Charging Policy) which is currently up to £39,999 total household earnings
- Have a child aged 0-16 (or up to 18 with disabilities) who needs childcare
- Have no alternative to paid childcare e.g. a partner not working (following DWP guidelines)
- Cannot get childcare funding by any other means
- Are out of work, or in low paid / insecure work
- Have sourced registered childcare, either within or outside of Islington
- Have a National Insurance number

What costs can a Childcare Bursary cover?

Parents who meet the eligibility criteria can apply for a Childcare Bursary to cover registered childcare costs to enable them to:

a) Prepare for and move into employment

- Attend an interview or appointment related to securing employment
- Attend a short training course that is likely to lead to employment, where the provider does not offer free childcare facilities

- Undertake a short online training course that is likely to lead to employment
- Pay a deposit to secure a placement at a registered childcare provider
- Cover childcare fees for the first 8 weeks of starting work (to enable a parent time to save sufficient funds to transition to paying childcare costs themselves). This would only be granted where a parent can continue to meet the costs of childcare beyond this point. Parents can request to spread the eight weeks cover over a longer period of time where this would help them to budget and move towards being able to meet ongoing payments themselves.

b) Remain and progress in work

- Cover 8 weeks childcare costs for parents returning from maternity leave or from long-term sickness absence and claiming Statutory Sick Pay.
- Cover an additional 15 hours' childcare per week for working parents in receipt of 15 hours free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds until a family becomes eligible for 30 hours free childcare – to cover the period before the next application deadline (31 March, 31 August, 31 December).
- Attend a short-term training course which is likely to help a parent to progress in work or change career to move towards sustainable employment
- Cover additional childcare costs for a limited period (up to 8 weeks) to enable a parent to meet additional childcare costs upfront as they move from part-time to full-time work and then claim back the increased childcare costs through Universal Credit

c) Meet other ad hoc needs

- Discretion to award a Childcare Bursary for another reason not listed above, provided it is in keeping with the purpose of the scheme i.e. to enable parents on low incomes and / or who face significant barriers to move into, remain in, and progress in work by providing support with childcare costs.
- Examples could include, but are not limited to, additional support for parents of children with SEND, meeting a temporary shortfall in income, or meeting a shortfall in childcare costs through Universal Credit for a limited period only.
- In all instances, funding will only be agreed to provide temporary, short-term support to allow a parent time to stay in work through a difficult period and move towards a sustainable position where they can meet childcare costs themselves.
- Applications under this heading are discretionary and not open to challenge.

Making an application

A parent can apply for a bursary if they are already receiving support from an iWork employment coach or an Islington Working partner. Alternatively, a parent can make an independent application via the website.

Parents can also get support with applying for the Childcare Bursary by contacting:

iWork service:

Tel: 020 7527 2706

Email: islingtonworking@islington.gov.uk

Family Information Service:

Tel: 020 7527 5959

Email: fis@islington.gov.uk

To apply for a Childcare Bursary, a parent should complete the Childcare Bursary form on the website. Where a parent is already receiving employment support from iWork or from another organisation in the Islington Working partnership, their work coach will help them to complete and submit the application.

The completed application form is sent to the iWork service, who will ensure that the necessary information has been provided, and that the claim falls within the remit of the Scheme, before making a decision.

Where a parent needs help to find suitable childcare, is not accessing their entitlement to free early education and childcare (for 2, 3 and 4 year olds) or is using a private provider and likely to struggle to afford costs in the longer-term, they will be referred to the Family Information Service. Where an independent application is received, the iWork service will advise the parent to contact FIS to ensure they are accessing the most suitable childcare for their needs.

Where a parent has an offer of a job, iWork will refer them to the IMAX team for an In Work calculation to understand what they will be earning and whether they will be able to cover childcare and other key costs on an ongoing basis.

Information required for the application process

As part of the application and assessment process, parents will need to provide:

- Evidence (written or email) of either:
- An invitation to an interview
- Confirmation of a training course running for up to 3 months that will help the parent move into or progress in work
- Offer of a work placement which says how this will help the applicant get a job
- Offer of employment (including an apprenticeship)
- Evidence of income / benefits e.g. Universal Credit
- Details of registered childcare provider and invoice / evidence of costs
- National Insurance number

Assessing the application and making a decision

Responsibility for making a decision on whether or not to approve an application for a Childcare Bursary sits with the iWork service. The decision will take into account whether:

- The applicant has met the eligibility criteria
- The Bursary will help to enable a parent to move into work or remain / progress in work
- The parent will be able to meet ongoing childcare costs themselves beyond the support provided through the Bursary Scheme

The aim of the Childcare Bursary Scheme is to provide short-term support with childcare costs to enable a parent to move to a sustainable position or to support 'pinch points' (e.g. summer holidays) where a parent would otherwise struggle to stay in work. The iWork service is unlikely to approve a Bursary where a parent will be unable to meet childcare costs on an ongoing basis, once the Bursary has ended.

Applicants will be contacted within two working days of submitting their application to provide an indication of the outcome of their application. Applications will be dealt with as quickly as possible, but the time required to reach a decision will vary depending upon the complexity of the case. When a parent is advised of the outcome, this should include the reason for the decision, the amount of the Bursary (where the application is successful) and next steps in terms of making the payment.

If approved, a member of the iWork service will contact the childcare provider and the parent to confirm that the application has been successful and that the Council will cover the childcare costs for the agreed period.

Where an application is not approved, iWork will inform the iWork employment coach (for case-loaded clients) or contact the parent directly (for independent applications) to give the rationale for the decision and to discuss an alternative offer. Other referral partners, e.g. the Family Information Service, will also be informed of the decision.

Where the decision is not to award a Bursary, a parent can appeal and the iWork service will consider an alternative offer. There is no right of appeal beyond this.

Making the payment

A contract will be sent to the parent and to the childcare provider (by email) setting out the amount and period for which the Bursary will be paid. Both parties need to sign and return the contract to confirm they agree to the terms and conditions.

Parents must register with iWork to receive a Childcare Bursary. Those parents who are not already case-loaded will be registered and asked to provide their employment details and other monitoring information. All parents receiving a Bursary must also agree to be contacted by the iWork service at 13 weeks, 26 weeks and 52 weeks to confirm if they are still in work (to help the Council monitor the effectiveness and impact of the Scheme).

The Bursary is paid directly to the childcare provider on receipt of an invoice. Payment will normally be made within 30 days of receipt of the invoice, or as soon as possible after all information has been received. Funding is by way of a grant and there is no requirement for the parent or provider to pay it back.

Further information

Further information about the Islington Childcare Bursary Scheme, and how to apply, are set out on the Council's website at:

<https://www.islington.gov.uk/children-and-families/help-with-childcare-costs/childcare-bursary>

The website also includes a link to a simple calculator to help parents work out whether they will be better off in work.