

England Foster Care Allowances Survey 2021-22

1. Introduction

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity and membership organisation. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice.

We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

2. Background

All foster carers receive a weekly fostering allowance from their fostering service when they have a child in placement, which is designed to cover the cost of caring for a fostered child. This includes food, clothes, toiletries, travel and all other expenses incurred and varies depending on the age of the child. Some foster carers also get a fee for their time, skills and experience. The National Minimum Standards 28.5 states¹ *"There is a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments and distinguishes between the allowance paid and any fee paid."* This report focuses purely on the allowances given to the foster carer to cover the costs of looking after a fostered child and not on fees.

The Department for Education publishes National Minimum Allowances (NMAs) for foster carers in England, with the expectation that all fostering services meet these amounts. Most local authorities give their foster carers at least this amount. However, we are concerned that a small number of local authorities choose to give a lower allowance, and each year we monitor this with freedom of information requests.

3. About this report

In the summer of 2021, The Fostering Network conducted a survey of all local authorities in England via freedom of information (FOI) requests, Slough was the only local authority we did not get a response from. The purpose of the survey was to identify which local authorities are paying below the NMA set by the Department for Education. This report includes data from the fourteen local authorities paying below and the one local authority that does not separate their fees and allowances.

The local authorities were asked the following question:

- 1) *Please could you tell me your 2021-22 weekly foster care allowances for all age bands, NOT including any fee/reward element for foster carers.*

¹ National Minimum Fostering Standards. Available [online](#).

- 2) Please could you tell me your 2021-22 weekly allowances for former foster carers looking after young people in 18+ Staying Put arrangements, broken down by year 1, year 2, and year 3 if necessary.

4. Survey results for foster care allowances 2021-22

4.1 Overview

We collected data from all local authorities. Each year new minimum allowances are set by the Department for Education and these are expected to cover the maintenance costs for looking after children. England is divided into separate areas to reflect the different costs of living (see Table 1 for the 2021/22 NMA figures).

Table 1: National Minimum Allowances by area set by the Department for Education year commencing 1 April 2021².

Area of England	Amount paid (£) per week by age bands (years)			
	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-18
London	155-158	177	201	235
South East	149-153	169	193	226
Rest of England	134-138	152	173	202

4.2 Results

Below are the full results of the survey (Tables 2-4) along with some key findings. Results are broken down by area.

Key findings:

- Fourteen local authorities reported that their foster care allowances were below the NMA for at least one age group across England. Of these, two were in London, four were in the South East and ten were in the area of the rest of England.
- One local authority reported that they do not separate their fees and allowances.
- Two of these are reviewing their allowances or planning to do so before the end of the 2021-22 financial year.

Boxes shaded in grey specify the national minimum allowance set by the DfE.

Boxes shaded in blue indicate foster care allowances set below the national minimum allowance.

Boxes shaded in green indicate foster care allowances set below the national minimum allowance that are under review by the local authority.

Table 2: Allowances (per week) for foster carers looking after children and young people up to 18 years of age in London.

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-18
London	155-158	177	201	235
Barnet	155-158	158-177	177-201	235
Enfield	162.29	162.29	234.66	234.66

² Department for Education. Foster Carers. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/support-for-foster-parents/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

Table 3: Allowances (per week) for foster carers looking after children and young people up to 18 years of age in the South East of England.

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-18
South East	149-153	169	193	226
East Sussex	130.06	148.14	184.43	184.43
Isle of Wight	127	130	164	191
Wokingham	162.73	162.73	246.44	246.44

Table 4: Allowances (per week) for foster carers looking after children and young people up to 18 years of age in the rest of England.

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-18
Rest of England	134-138	152	173	202
Birmingham	135.03	149.03	180.91	219.65
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	132-135	149	170	198
Cheshire West and Chester	128.84	146.80	182.70	222.21
Gateshead	132.74	151.22	188.24	228.94
North Tyneside	134.39	147.84	184.05	194
Nottingham City	135	149	170	199
Oldham	135	149	177.38	215.74
Shropshire	129.09	147.18	190.05	225.39
St Helens	125.08	142.49	177.38	215.75
Wiltshire	250.00*	250.00*	450.00*	650.00*

* Combined fees and allowances.

4.3. Staying Put arrangements

- Ninety local authorities provided data on their post 18 allowances.
- Forty-two decreased the allowance from the amount given for 18+ in comparison to the Staying put allowance.
- Eleven decreased the allowance from the amount given for 18+ each year.

4.4. Concluding comments and recommendations

The Department for Education's national minimum allowance is an essential tool to guide fostering services in offering a basic level of allowance to cover the cost of caring for fostered children, and it is unacceptable that any fostering service sets their allowance lower than this Government minimum.

Our State of the Nation's Foster Care 2021 report showed that over a third of foster carers in England do not feel their current allowance levels meet the costs of looking after a child. This means foster carers are having to dip into their own pockets to meet the needs of the child or young person in their care. No foster carer should be out of pocket as a result of caring for a child on behalf of the state.

Recommendations for fostering services:

- All fostering services should set their allowances at a level that meets or exceeds the Department for Education's national minimum allowance for foster carers.
- The administration of fostering payments must be transparent so it is clear to foster carers how much money constitutes the allowance, and thus must be spent on the child, and how much is a payment given to the foster carer in recognition of their time, skills and experience.

Recommendations for Government:

- All fostering services should be monitored to ensure that they are paying at or above the national minimum allowance level.
- The Government should undertake a comprehensive review of the minimum levels of fostering allowances, using up to date evidence, to ensure that foster carers are given sufficient payment that values their unique and critical expertise and skillset and to ensure allowances truly covers the full costs of looking after a child.
- A national minimum allowance should be introduced for Staying Put arrangements with such an allowance being set using up to date evidence to ensure it is sufficient to cover the cost of looking after a young person.

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