

England Foster Care Allowances Survey 2022-23

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.

The Fostering Network have recently undertaken research into the true cost of caring for a child in foster care, using up to date evidence, to propose a new level of allowance that fully covers the cost of caring for a child in foster care. Our calculations are based on the [Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom](#) and Nina Oldfield's '[The Adequacy of Foster Care Allowances](#)', which identifies the additional costs of caring for a child in foster care. Our calculations have been supported by Pro Bono Economics. You can find more information about our campaign [here](#).

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

3. About this report

In the summer of 2022, The Fostering Network conducted a survey of all local authorities in England via freedom of information (FOI) requests. 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 eight local authorities paying below and the one local authority that does not separate their fees and allowances.

The local authorities were asked the following questions:

1. *Please could you tell me your 2022-23 weekly foster care allowances for all age bands, NOT including any fee/reward element for foster carers.*
2. *Please detail any allowances that ALL foster carers can claim in addition to their weekly allowance, e.g., holiday allowance or mileage.*
3. *Please could you tell me your 2022-23 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 2022-23

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 2022-23 NMA figures).

Table 1: National Minimum Allowances by area set by the Department for Education year commencing 1 April 2022².

Area of England	Amount paid (£) per week by age bands (years)			
	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-18
London	159-162	181	206	240
South East	152-157	173	198	231
Rest of England	137-141	156	177	207

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:

- Eight 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, three were in the South East and three were in the area of the Rest of England.

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

- 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 2022-23 financial year.
- The amount of local authorities paying under the NMA has decreased from fourteen since the previous year for 2021-22, to eight this year 2022-23.

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	159.00 – 162.00	181.00	206.00	240.00
Lambeth	177.25 (0-12)	177.25 (0-12)	177.25 (0-12) 237.65 (13-17)	237.65 (13-17)
Redbridge	156.00	177.00	201.00	235.00

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	152.00 – 157.00	173.00	198.00	231.00
East Sussex	132.66	151.10	188.12	188.12
Slough	141.73	161.45	200.99	244.50
Wokingham	142.86	162.73	202.57	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	137.00 – 141.00	156.00	177.00	207.00
North Tyneside	134.49	147.84	184.05	194.00
Shropshire	135.54	154.54	199.55	236.66
Wirral	134.00 – 138.00	152.00	173.00	202.00

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 Frozen allowances

We have also seen an increase in the amount of local authorities that have frozen their allowances this year.

- 26 local authorities have frozen their allowances in all age groups this year.
- 11 local authorities have frozen their allowances in at least one age group this year.
- In total a quarter of local authorities have frozen their allowances in at least one age group this year.

4.5. 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.

It is worrying to see the increase to a quarter of local authorities freezing their allowances this year. We know from our State of the Nation's Foster Care 2021 report that over a third of foster carers stated that their allowances do not cover the costs of foster care, meaning foster carers must dip into their own pockets to meet the needs of children they are caring for on behalf of the state. Inflation rates and the cost of living has significantly increases since 2021, and we are continually hearing from foster carers the difficulties they are facing, now more than ever.

We are calling on calling on the Government to urgently fund foster care and increase the national minimum allowance to ensure it reflects the true cost of looking after a child in foster care. You can read more about our campaign [here](#).

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. We recommend utilising our methodology and research to inform these levels.
- All fostering services should be monitored to ensure that they are paying at the agreed national level to ensure consistency and best practice.
- 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.
- All allowance payments in respect of fostering should be subject to annual increase in line with the recognised Minimum Income Standards.

Contact details:

Eve Hatcher, Policy and Campaigns Officer

Campaigns@fostering.net

December 2022