

England Foster Care Allowances Survey 2020-21

1. Introduction

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. 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. This report focuses purely on the allowances given to the foster carer to cover the costs of looking after a fostered child.

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 2020, The Fostering Network conducted a survey of local authorities¹ in England via freedom of information (FOI) requests. The purpose of the survey was to monitor whether local authorities who have previously set their allowances below or at the NMA level are meeting the 2020-2021 NMAs set by the Department for Education. This report includes the data from fostering services who we know set their allowances below the NMA level for any age band last year. We also asked our foster carer members to inform us if they believed their allowance was below the NMA. 14 local authorities met these criteria.

¹ In England fostering is delivered by both local authority fostering services and independent fostering services, with local authorities accounting for almost two-thirds of carers. Due to the rules around freedom of information requests we are only able to survey local authority fostering services.

The local authorities were asked the following question:

- 1) *Please could you tell me your 2020-21 weekly foster care allowances for all age bands, NOT including any fee/reward element for foster carers?*

Even though FOI requests should be a reliable way of gathering information, we became aware that some of the information that was given to us was not correct. Where we have become aware of inaccuracies we have sought for clarification and used the updated, accurate figures in the tables below rather than the figures obtained via the FOI request. In each of these cases we have sought clarification directly from **the local authority fostering team**. The difficulty in gathering accurate information about foster care allowances highlights the need for transparency.

4. Survey results for foster care allowances 2020-21

4.1 Overview

We collected data from 14 local authorities. Each year new national 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 2020/21 NMA figures). Across the whole of England, the NMAs for foster carers rose by 2.03 per cent over the previous financial year.

Table 1: National Minimum Allowances by area set by the Department for Education for the year commencing 1 April 2020².

Area of England	Amount paid (£) per week by age band (years)			
	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-18
London	152 - 155	174	197	231
South East	146 - 150	166	189	222
Rest of England	132 - 135	149	170	198

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

4.2 Results

Below are the full results of the survey (see 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, three were in London, one was in the South East and four were in the area of the Rest of England.
- Four of these have since reviewed their allowances or are planning to do so before the end of the 2020-21 financial year.

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

Boxes shaded in yellow 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 grey indicate foster care allowances set below the national minimum allowance that are under review.

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16-18 years
London	£152 - 155	£174	£197	£231
Enfield	163	163	216	216
Kensington and Chelsea	152-155	174	197	231
Newham	170	170	220	220
Lewisham	149-152	171	193	226

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.

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

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

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16-18 years
South East	£146 - 150	£166	£189	£222
East Sussex	126.58	144.18	179.49	179.49

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.

Boxes shaded in yellow 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 grey indicate foster care allowances set below the national minimum allowance that are under review.

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16-18 years
Rest of England	£132 - 135	£149	£170	£198
Birmingham	127.58	145.31	180.91	219.65
Blackpool	132-135	149	170	198
Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch	129-132	146	167	194
Bury	135	149	170	198
Herefordshire	135	149	210.19	249.13
North Lincolnshire	135.96	150.38	172.01	199.82
Oldham	125.09	142.52	177.38	215.74
St Helens	250	250	250	250
Stoke on Trent	129.29	147.28	183.33	222.95

4.3. 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. Not only this, but our State of the Nation 2019³ report showed that **55 per cent** of foster carers in England do not feel their current allowance level meets the costs of looking after a child.

Recommendation 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 Westminster Government should urgently review the level of the national minimum fostering allowance to ensure the level is sufficient to provide high quality care for children and to cover foster carers' expenses. Fostered children should enjoy a decent standard of living sufficient to promote their wellbeing and development, be treated as favourably as other members of the fostering household, be able to participate fully in their community, and maintain appropriate contact with their family.

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³ The Fostering Network. State of the Nation's Foster Care: Full Report. February 2019. Available from: <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfostercarefullreport.pdf>