

Scotland 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 and context

All foster carers receive a weekly fostering allowance from their fostering service when they have a child in placement, which is given 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; however, in some cases, it falls short. Our most recent State of the Nation survey¹ found that 60 per cent of foster carers in Scotland felt the allowances they received did not cover the full cost of looking after a 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.

Scotland is the only country in the UK not to have a national minimum allowance (NMA). In 2016 the Scottish National Party was elected on a manifesto that pledged to implement a national minimum allowance for foster care. Yet, two years later a Government-led review of kinship and foster care allowances concluded only that the Government should consider a recommended allowance.

This year the Independent Care Review has published *The Promise*, in which it states that 'to provide the care that children require, foster carers must be sufficiently financially maintained'.

After years of promises, action must now be taken to safeguard against the postcode lottery that children across Scotland currently face and ensure all foster carers in Scotland receive the financial support they need to meet children's needs.

The introduction of a national minimum allowance would be a step towards reducing geographical inequality for the 4,730 children in foster care in Scotland. There are now only a few months for the Scottish Government to honour their commitment before the next election in May 2021.

¹ The Fostering Network. State of Scotland's Foster Care. June 2019. Available from: https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfostercareScotland2019final_0.pdf

3. About this report

In the summer of 2020, The Fostering Network conducted a survey of all 32 local authorities in Scotland using freedom of information requests in order to get a picture of fostering allowances for local authority foster carers across the country. The wording of the freedom of information requests were as follows:

- 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?*
- 2) *Please detail any allowances that ALL foster carers can claim in addition to their weekly allowance, e.g. holiday allowance or mileage.*

4. Results of the foster care allowances survey 2020-2021

4.1. Overview

We collected data from 31 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland, Renfrewshire did not provide a response. Scotland is the only country within the UK that does not set a national minimum allowance. To gain an indication of whether Scottish local authorities are giving foster carers sufficient allowances, we have compared the results with the Welsh² and English³ NMAs and calculated the range of allowances provided by local authorities across Scotland.

4.2. Results

Below are the key findings and the full results of the survey (see Table 2).

Key findings:

Table 1: Number of Scottish local authorities that pay below the Welsh and English national minimum allowances for the year commencing 1 April 2020 by age group

Age group	Below the Welsh NMA	Below the NMA for England (excluding London and the South East)
0 to 4	29	13
5 to 10	28	10
11 to 15	5	5
16 to 17	6	3

- Overall, 30 local authorities set their allowances below the Welsh NMA for at least one age group and of these, 13 also provided allowances below the English NMA for at least one age group.
- While 13 local authorities increased their foster care allowances from the previous year, 18 have not. Of those local authorities that have frozen their allowances from the previous year, 17 had also done this the year before meaning that **more than half of local authorities in Scotland have not increased their allowances for foster carers in at least two years.**
- Foster care allowances vary significantly within each age band – with some foster carers receiving less than half the amount of their counterparts in another area. These differences

² Welsh Government. National Minimum Allowances for Foster Carers 2020 – 2023. Available from: <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/welshnationalminimumallowancesforfoster-carers2020-2023.pdf>

³ Department for Education. Foster Carers. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/support-for-foster-parents/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

amount to thousands of pounds over the course of the year. The allowance given for looking after children aged:

- 0 to 4 ranged from £77.96 to £200.00 per week,
- 5 to 10 ranged from £96.40 to £200.00 per week,
- 11 to 15 ranged from £120.00 to £240.40 per week and,
- 16+ ranged from £155.36 to £261.52 per week.

Table 2: Allowances (per week) for foster carers looking after children and young people up to 16 years of age in Scotland.

Boxes shaded in yellow are the NMAs set by the Department for Education in England and the Welsh Government.

Boxes shaded in blue indicate foster care allowances which are below the NMA for Wales.

Text written in white indicates foster care allowances below the NMA for England (excluding London and the South East).

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16+ years
England (excluding London and the South East)	£132.00-135.00	£149.00	£170.00	£198.00
Wales	£188.00	£171.00	£171.00	£213.00
Aberdeen City	135.41	154.24	192.02	233.55
Aberdeenshire	150.12	170.65	212.12	258.14
Angus Council	151.60	172.68	214.97	261.52
Argyll & Bute	196.71	196.71	240.40	240.40
Clackmannanshire	134.40	153.09	190.58	231.79
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	140.00	160.00	199.00	242.00
Dumfries & Galloway	130.34	148.47	184.80	224.77
Dundee City	141.89	161.62	201.19	244.76
East Ayrshire	152.70	152.70	224.50	224.50
East Dunbartonshire	128.22	146.05	181.81	221.13
East Lothian	114.45	133.70	157.98-163.74	200.11
East Renfrewshire	132.70	151.16	188.18	228.88
Edinburgh	108.37	131.95	164.27-168.86	202.64
Falkirk	137.18	156.26	194.53	226.87
Fife	100.40	113.43	140.77	179.91
Glasgow City	137.18	156.30	194.53	236.60
Highland Council	77.69	96.40	120.00	155.36
Inverclyde	127.59	145.34	180.93	220.05
Midlothian	126.00	140.00	162.00	217.00
Moray	142.86	162.73	202.58	246.44
North Ayrshire	200.00	200.00	200.00	200.00
North Lanarkshire	142.82	162.69	202.51	246.33
Orkney Islands	142.86	162.73	202.58	246.44
Perth & Kinross	134.47	153.16	190.68	231.91
Renfrewshire				
Scottish Borders	129.94	129.94	194.88	194.88
Shetland Islands	145.00	165.17	205.62	250.14

South Ayrshire	154.35	154.35	185.85	217.35
South Lanarkshire	139.33	158.72	197.56	240.30
Stirling	137.08	156.15	194.39	236.42
West Dunbartonshire	145.00	165.00	205.00	250.00
West Lothian	117.11	145.32	180.82-180.79	234.22

4.3 Additional allowances

We also asked local authorities about the additional allowances that are available to all foster carers. 25 local authorities gave further information about the allowances foster carers can claim for mileage, holidays, birthdays and exceptional costs.

15 local authorities said they give additional payments for holidays, birthdays and Christmas or other festivals which are equivalent to four weeks of the foster care allowance. One gives an equivalent to five weeks.

21 local authorities said they pay additional expenses for mileage, although the terms and rates varied.

Examples of additional expenses that foster carers can claim include school trips, post-adoption visits, costs associated with family contact, a passport and clothing.

5. Concluding comments and recommendations

These results show that the foster care allowances set by local authorities across Scotland vary considerably and the majority are not rising with inflation. The large geographical variation in foster care allowances is not reflected in the cost of living, which means there is a postcode lottery in the funding available to look after a child in foster care.

As our State of Scotland's Foster Care report showed, the majority of foster carers do not believe the allowances they are given cover the costs of foster care, meaning foster carers must dip into their own pockets.

Despite committing repeatedly to resolving this inequality, the Scottish Government have made no progress on introducing a national minimum allowance. 'The Promise' cannot be achieved without introducing and fully funding a national minimum allowance.

Recommendation:

- **The Scottish Government must introduce and fund a national minimum foster care allowance.** This amount must reflect the true costs of looking after a child and must be increased yearly in line with inflation.

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