



## **Wales Foster Care Allowances Survey 2019-20**

### **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 Welsh Government publishes national minimum allowances (NMAs) for foster carers in Wales, with the expectation that all fostering services meet these amounts. For the many years we have conducted a survey of the fostering allowances given by local authorities, we know that not all local authorities meet the minimums however, this year we are delighted that all local authorities in Wales are providing their foster carers with the national minimum allowance or above.

### **3. About this report**

In the summer of 2019, The Fostering Network conducted a survey of all 22 local authorities<sup>1</sup> in Wales using freedom of information (FOI) requests. This was done to monitor whether local authorities are meeting the NMAs set by the Welsh Government.

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<sup>1</sup> In Wales fostering is delivered by both local authority fostering services and independent fostering services. Due to the rules around freedom of information requests we are only able to survey local authority fostering services.

The wording of the FOI requests was as follows:

- 1) *Please could you tell me your 2019-20 weekly foster care allowances for all age bands, NOT including any fee/reward element for foster carers?*
- 2) *Please could you tell me your 2019-20 weekly allowances to former foster carers looking after young people in When I am Ready 18+ arrangements, broken down by year 1, year 2, and year 3+ if necessary?*

#### 4. Survey results for foster care allowances 2019-20

##### 4.1. Overview

We collected data from all 22 local authorities in Wales. Each year new national minimum allowances are set and these are expected to cover the maintenance costs for looking after children. The NMA for foster carers in Wales increased by 3.62 per cent over the previous financial year, in line with inflation. Table 1 shows this year's figures.

**Table 1: National minimum allowances for Wales set by the Welsh Government for the year commencing 1 April 2019<sup>2</sup>**

Amount provided per week by age band			
0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16-18 years
£181.00	£165.00	£165.00	£206.00

##### 4.2. Results

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

##### Key findings:

- All local authorities in Wales are paying at or above the national minimum allowance level set by the Welsh Government.
- Foster carers looking after children aged:
  - 0 to 4 received a range of £181.00 to £232.34 per week,
  - 5 to 10 received a range of £165.00 to £232.34 per week,
  - 11 to 15 received a range of £165.00 to £232.34 per week and,
  - 16 to 18 received a range of £206.00 to £239.98 per week.

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<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government. National Minimum Allowances for Foster Carers 2017–2020. Available from: <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/welshgovernmentallowances2017-2020.pdf>

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

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

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16-18 years
Wales	£181.00	£165.00	£165.00	£206.00
Blaenau Gwent	£181.00	£165.00	£177.38	£215.74
Bridgend <sup>3</sup>	£181.00	£165.00	£177.38	£224.37
Caerphilly	£181.00	£165.00	£165.00	£206.00
Cardiff	£181.00	£181.00	£181.81	£221.13
Carmarthenshire <sup>4</sup>	£181.00	£175.00	£175.00	£206.00
Ceredigion	£181.00	£165.00	£177.38	£215.74
Conwy	£181.00	£165.00	£182.00	£206.00
Denbighshire	£181.00	£165.00	£165.00	£206.00
Flintshire	£181.00	£165.00	£179.00	£217.00
Gwynedd	£181.00	£165.00	£181.81	£221.13
Isle of Anglesey	£192.50	£174.90	£197.76	£239.98
Merthyr Tydfil	£181.00	£165.00	£182.00	£206.00
Monmouthshire	£216.00	£174.00	£174.00	£223.00
Neath Port Talbot	£181.00	£165.00	£165.00	£206.00
Newport	£181.00	£165.00	£165.00	£206.00
Pembrokeshire	£181.00	£165.00	£177.38	£215.42
Powys	£232.34	£232.34	£232.34	£232.34
Rhondda Cynon Taff	£181.00	£165.00	£165.00	£206.00
Swansea	£181.00	£165.00	£206.00	£206.00

<sup>3</sup> Bridgend County Borough Council are in the process of updating their foster care allowances to the amounts stated in the table for 0-10-year-olds.

<sup>4</sup> Carmarthenshire County Council are in the process of updating their allowance rates for 0-4-year-olds and 16-18 year-olds

Torfaen County	£181.00	£165.00	£168.50	£209.30
Vale of Glamorgan	£181.00	£165.00	£165.00	£206.00
Wrexham	£181.00	£165.06	£177.38	£215.74

### 4.3. Concluding comments and recommendations

The Welsh Government's national minimum allowance is an essential tool to guide fostering services in offering a basic level of support to fostered children, and we are delighted that every local authority in Wales is providing their fostered children with this minimum level of support.

Even though we welcome that all local authorities in Wales are paying at or above the national minimum allowance we continue to hear from foster carers that they feel their current allowance does not meet the full costs of looking after a child<sup>5</sup>. The National Fostering framework in Wales is seeking to bring a consistent approach to fostering allowances across Wales. We would urge the Government and the National Fostering Framework to also consider reviewing the level the national minimum fostering allowance to ensure the level covers the full cost of caring for a child or young person.

#### Recommendation for fostering services:

- 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 constitutes the fee and is a payment given for the foster carer's time and skills.

#### Recommendations for Government:

- Local authorities should be monitored to ensure that they maintain to pay at or above the national minimum allowance level.
- The Welsh Government should 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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<sup>5</sup> 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>

## 5. When I am Ready

Until the beginning of this decade, the majority of fostered young people were required to leave their foster home as soon as they turned 18. This is far earlier than young people outside the care system, who on average leave home at 25<sup>6</sup>, and too early for many fostered young people who often need more support and time as they transition into adulthood.

Since April 2016, fostered young people in Wales have had the right to stay with their foster families up to age 21, if both parties agree to a When I am Ready arrangement. A When I am Ready arrangement is not the same as a foster care placement. The young person, who must be a former fostered child, is no longer a looked after child. They are a young adult and a care leaver. They are entitled to support as a care leaver and will be allocated a personal advisor. The foster carer is no longer acting in the capacity of a foster carer for that young adult; they are their 'former foster carer'. These arrangements require local authorities in Wales to facilitate, monitor and support When I am Ready arrangements for fostered young people.

These types of placements are not governed by fostering services regulations. There are therefore no recommended national minimum allowances for former foster carers in When I am Ready arrangements and local authorities have been known to calculate the amount on a case-by-case basis.

### 5.1. Results of the When I am Ready survey

Below are the full survey responses (see Table 3) as well as the key findings.

#### Key findings:

- When I am Ready allowances provided to cover the costs of caring for the young person ranged from £64 to £238 per week. Over the course of just one year, this amounts to a significant difference of over £9,000.
- 14 local authorities decrease the allowances set from when the young person was in foster care to when they enter a When I am Ready arrangement.
- Seven local authorities stated that the allowance given to former foster carers depended on the contribution the young person could make. Where young people were expected to contribute, this ranged from £10 to £25 per week.
- Only one local authority stated that they provided former foster carers with a retainer during term-time when the young person was at university. This amounted to £66 per week.

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<sup>6</sup> Eurostat. Estimated average age of young people leaving the parent household by sex. April, 2019. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2Tzx4Cy>

**Table 3: Former foster carer allowances paid per week in When I am Ready arrangements compared with allowances given to foster carers looking after young people aged 16 to 18.**

Boxes shaded in blue indicate where former foster care allowances decreased when a placement changed to a When I am Ready arrangement.

Boxes marked with an asterix (\*) show where the young person is expected to contribute and/or claim some kind of benefit and this is included in the amount.

Boxes marked with a † signify where this is the amount paid by the local authority but more is given to the former foster carer through young person's contributions and/or the benefits claimed by the young person.

Local authority	16-18 years	When I am Ready
Blaenau Gwent	£215.74	£215.74*
Bridgend	£224.37	£185.00*
Caerphilly	£206.00	£206.00
Cardiff	£221.13	£189.00*
Carmarthenshire	£200.00	£200.00
Ceredigion	£215.74	£238.00
Conwy	£206.00	£206.00*
Denbighshire	£206.00	£82.00 †
Flintshire	£217.00	£206.00
Gwynedd	£221.13	£206.00
Isle of Anglesey	£239.98	£206.00
Merthyr Tydfil	£206.00	£140.00
Monmouthshire	£223.00	£160.00*
Neath Port Talbot	£206.00	£221.00*
Newport	£349.00	£64.00 - 131.00
Pembrokeshire	£215.42	£147.39
Powys	£232.34	£206.00
Rhondda Cynon Taff	£206.00	£170.00
Swansea	£206.00	£185.00*

Torfaen County	£209.30	£206.00
Vale of Glamorgan	£173.67	£190.00
Wrexham	£215.74	£189.00

## 5.2. Concluding comments and recommendations

Despite widespread acceptance that post-18 care is in young people's best interests, there have been a number of issues with the implementation of the new duties that have caused concern for all involved and have resulted in variability in policy, practice, and participation at a local level. The findings of this survey reflect this variability. Although the costs of caring for a young person do change with age, there is no evidence that they change as considerably as do When I am Ready allowances from foster care allowances, nor is it clear that the levels are being set on the basis of any calculation of new cost.

Additionally, some local authorities do not make clear how much of the allowance given to former foster carers in When I am Ready arrangements is paid by the local authority and how much is expected to be contributed by the young person or covered by the claiming of benefits. While it may be appropriate for a young person who is earning money to contribute towards household costs, this should be determined on a case-by-case basis and be clear to all involved. In all cases the basic principles should be that the money available to former foster carers should not drop when they take a When I am Ready placement, and that the young people are not expected to claim benefits themselves in order to contribute to this overall amount.

### Recommendation for Government:

- When I am Ready minimum allowances for foster carers should be introduced and funded across Wales, with such an allowance being sufficient to cover the cost of looking after a young person and for this amount to increase each year in line with inflation.
- The implementation of the When I am Ready policy should be monitored to ensure practice is in line with national requirements and to share learning from best practice models.
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### Recommendations for fostering services:

- All local authorities in Wales should have a When I am Ready policy in place that explains how placements will be funded and supported.
- There should be a reallocation of funds and the housing element of the When I am Ready allowance paid to the children's service and for it to be given directly to the former foster carer so it does not impact on the carer's tax or benefits.
- There should be greater clarity as to what happens when a young person goes to university. Young people still need a home during the long holidays and we believe carers should be given a retainer during term time. This is an issue of better communication as well as financial support.

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