

England Foster Care Allowances and Fees Survey 2017-18: Summary Report

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 which is designed to cover the cost of caring for a fostered child. This includes food, clothes, toiletries, travel and all other expenses incurred. The Department for Education publishes National Minimum Allowances for England, with the expectation that all fostering services meet these amounts.

Fee payments may be made on top of allowances to recognise a foster carer's time, skills and experience. While all foster carers receive an allowance, unlike the National Minimum Fostering Allowance, there is no requirement for fee payments to be made.

A recent survey about pay that we conducted with nearly 1,500 foster carers in England found that 98 per cent of respondents think foster carers should get paid a fee and, very importantly, a significant majority who are already paid felt that they should get more.

The survey also found that although the number of foster carers who receive a fee payment is increasing, only one in 10 receives the equivalent of the national living wage for a 40-hour week.

3. About this report

As well as hearing the voice of foster carers, we wanted to find out from fostering services what they paid their foster carers. While we survey local authorities about allowances every year, this year we included fee payments as well.

Therefore in July-September 2017 The Fostering Network conducted a survey of all 150 local authorities in England, using freedom of information requests (Fol), in order to get a picture of fostering income across the country. The wording of the Fol was as follows:

- 1) Please could you tell me your 2017-18 weekly foster care allowances for all age bands, NOT including any fee/reward element for foster carers.*
- 2) Please detail your current fee/reward structure for foster carers (NB this is different to allowances for the child). Please include:
 - i) Details of the levels/bands for carers and how much you pay per week at each level/band.*
 - ii) The number of foster carers on each level/band, including those that receive no fee on top of the child's allowance.**
- 3) Please could you tell me your weekly allowances to former foster carers looking after young people in Staying Put 18+ arrangements, broken down by year 1, year 2, and year 3+ if necessary.*
- 4) Please detail your current fee/reward structure for former foster carers looking after young people in Staying Put arrangements. Please include:
 - i) Details of the levels/bands and how much you pay per week at each level/band.*
 - ii) The number of former foster carers on each level/band, including those that receive no fee on top of the child's allowance.**

4. Survey of foster care allowances 2017-18: England Summary

4.1 Overview

The response rate for question 1 of the FoI request was 100 per cent.

The Department for Education's recommended rates for 2017-18 are detailed in this table:

Weekly rates	Babies	Pre-Primary	Primary	Sec (11-15)	Sec (16-17)
London	£144	£147	£165	£187	£219
South East	£138	£142	£158	£179	£211
Rest of Eng	£125	£128	£141	£161	£188

Initial results implied that 17 out of 150 local authority fostering services in England (11 per cent) are paying less than the Government's national allowances in at least one age category in 2017-18. Last year, when we asked only for 0-4 allowances, 11 fostering services fell below. The results are shown in the table on the following page.

The Government increased its recommended allowances this year by approximately 1.4 per cent, but 67 out of 150 local authorities (45 per cent) froze their allowances. The majority (57) of those 67 that did freeze them are already paying at or above Government rates.

Two local authorities appeared to have reduced their rates compared with 2016-17. Neither of these currently pays below the DfE minimum.

4.2 Local Authority fostering services paying below DfE rates (marked in red) in 2017-18

Local authority	Amount paid (0-2)	Amount paid (2-4)	Amount paid (5-10)	Amount paid (11-15)	Amount paid (16+)
DfE London	£144	£147	£165	£187	£219
Greenwich	£142	£145	£163	£184	£216
Bromley	£145.04	£145.04	£162.96	£183.96	£216.02
Enfield	£163	£163	£163	£216	£216
Harrow	£178	£178	£178	£178	£178
Sutton	£142	£145	£163	£184	£216
DfE South East	£138	£142	£158	£179	£211
East Sussex	£122.89	£122.89	£139.98	£174.26	£174.26
DfE England	£125	£128	£141	£161	£188
Northumberland	£126.98	£126.98	£144.69	£180.04	£219.03
Sheffield	£126.50	£126.50	£141	£161	£188
St Helens	£125.08	£125.08	£142.49	£177.38	£215.75
Warrington	£125.09	£125.09	£142.52	£177.38	£215.74
Birmingham	£125.09	£125.09	£142.45	£177.38	£215.32
Herefordshire	£113.02	£113.02	£124.84	£180.8	£215.25
Norfolk	£126	£126	£141	£161	£188-190
Bournemouth	£124.12	£124.12	£146.86	£183.87	£189.36
Dorset	£126	£126	£139	£159	£185
North Somerset	£119.36	£119.36	£133.98	£152.08	£195.10
Poole	£115	£115	£129	£147	£177

5. Survey of foster carer fees 2017-18: England summary

Key findings:

- Responses were received from 148 out of 150 local authorities, a response rate of 99 per cent.
- The average entry-level fee for foster carers in England is £45.98 per week.
- The average top band mainstream fee for foster carers in England is £194.61 per week.
- Approximately 14 per cent of foster carers in England do not receive a fee.
- Nearly all (94 per cent) of foster carers in England are paid at a rate below the national living wage for a notional 40 hour week (£300).
- Over half (53 per cent) of local authority fostering services in England pay no fee at all to foster carers on the lowest band.
- Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of fostering services operate a banding system based on the age of the children. The vast majority of other services use a skills-based banding system, with the most common number of bands being three.
- Depending on where in the country a foster carer lives, they can receive vastly different amounts of money in total household income. For example, one scenario we have considered shows an annual difference of **£23,367.24**.

5.1 More detail on the methodology

This was a complex piece of research to undertake, not least because every fostering service in England has a slightly different approach to foster carer fees. Therefore it is difficult to compare like with like. Some operate a banding system (varying from two to six or more bands), while others may pay a flat fee. Some fostering services offer fees that increase with length of service, while others vary fees according to the age of the child (as with allowances). Some fostering services offer high level specialist schemes for a select few foster carers. Some fostering services operate a combination of all of these.

We determined the “highest mainstream pay band” by ignoring specialist fee schemes for foster carers looking after children with very high needs. These bands could be identified by a combination of the name of the scheme (e.g. “Teen Turnaround”) and the numbers of foster carers on them being very low. The reason we ignored top level specialist schemes is because we wanted to get a picture of the typical foster carer picture across the country, rather than a select few highly trained and remunerated carers.

We determined the “lowest mainstream pay band” by determining if firstly any foster carers (including approved kinship carers) received no fee, and then if all foster carers received a fee, choosing the lowest fee reported. In the case of services operating age-related bands, this was usually the 0-4 band.

Not all fostering services provided all of the information requested. In particular only 107 out of 148 respondents gave information on how many foster carers were on each fee band.

5.2 Comparison with foster carers' survey

It was striking that very similar results emerged from the local authority survey as from the foster carers' survey¹ undertaken earlier in the year. In particular:

- Ninety per cent of foster carers reported being paid less than the equivalent of the national living wage for a 40-hour week, compared with a slightly higher percentage of 94 per cent from this local authority survey.
- Fifteen per cent of foster carers reported not receiving a fee at all. The local authority results for this were 14 per cent.

Due to the similar figures from these two methods of investigating fees, we therefore believe that these results are broadly accurate regarding the foster carer fees picture across England.

The results are summarised in a table in the appendix.

5.3 Fee Scenarios

In this section we compare how the income of an example foster carer can vary across the country.

Scenario 1

- Entry level foster carer, with one child aged 4 in placement.
- In 53 per cent of all local authorities, this foster carer would receive no fee.
- The highest fee they would receive is £248 in Sutton.
- The lowest allowance for 0-4 year olds is in Herefordshire, at £113.02.
- The maximum difference in total annual income between two similar foster carers in different parts of England is therefore £14,558.96
- The average weekly fee across England for this foster carer is £45.98

	Fee	Allowance	Total weekly income	Total annual income
Highest (Sutton)	£248	£145	£393	£20,436
Lowest (Herefordshire)	0	£113.02	£113.02	£5,877.04

Scenario 2

This scenario is a foster carer on the highest mainstream band, with one child aged 14 in placement. Many fostering services have specialist or advanced schemes (for example for children with high needs) that pay significantly more than the figures below. For the purposes of this comparison we are concerned only with mainstream pay bands open to foster carers looking after children of all ages.

- In two out of 148 local authorities (one per cent), this foster carer would receive no fee.
- The highest fee they would receive is £482.50, in York.
- The average fee across England for this foster carer is £191.59. This is slightly lower than the overall average top band fee (£195.55) because some fostering services operate age-related fee bands wherein those caring for 14 year olds would earn less than those caring for older children.

¹ The Fostering Network (2017) [Payment survey: the views of foster carers in England](#).

- The lowest allowance for 11-15 year olds, at a local authority with no fee band for this foster carer, is £192.17 in Lincolnshire.
- The maximum difference in total annual income between two similar foster carers in different parts of England is therefore £ 23,367.24

	Fee	Allowance	Total weekly income	Total annual income
Highest (York)	£482.50	£159.04	£641.54	£33,360.08
Lowest (Lincolnshire)	£0	£192.17	£192.17	£9,992.84

6. Survey of staying put allowances and fees: England summary

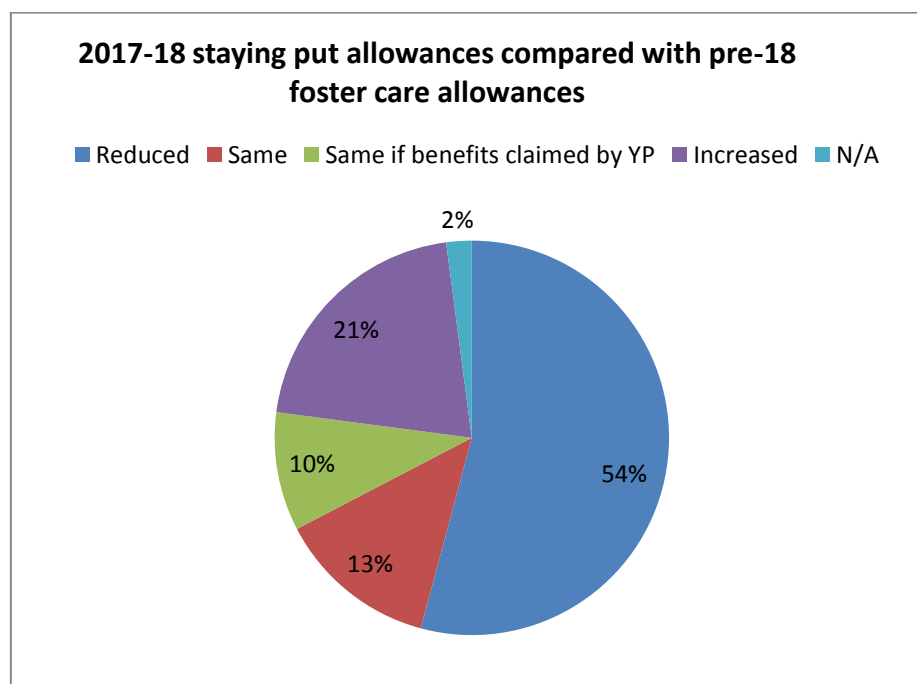
6.1 Introduction

Responses were received from 144 out of 150 local authorities, a response rate of 96 per cent. In our analysis we compared the foster care allowances paid in the 16-18 category with those paid for staying put. In this way we can estimate what proportion of foster carers may be required to accept a drop in financial support if offering staying put.

Most payments are single lump sums and are therefore reported on in the allowances section 6.2. Every local authority who reported an 'increase' in allowances compared with pre-18 only offers a lump sum payment. Therefore foster carers receiving separate fees in those local authorities may see a drop in their overall income even if their nominal allowance increases upon staying put commencing.

6.2 Staying put allowances

- Allowances range in value across England from £60 to £412.91 per week.
- 78 out of 144 (54 per cent) of local authorities reported a reduction in allowances compared with pre-18 foster care allowances. This is an increase on last year when the figure was 40 per cent. Five of these 78 reduce payments in years 2 and 3 of staying put.
- 30 out of 144 (21 per cent) local authorities reported an increase in allowances. Note that none of these 30 offers separate fees for staying put.
- 19 out of 144 (13 per cent) of local authorities reported that allowances remained the same post 18.
- 14 out of 144 (10 per cent) of local authorities reported that allowances to the foster carer were reduced by the amount that young people were now eligible to claim in benefits (for example housing benefit and income support).
- Three out of 144 (two per cent) of local authorities gave answers that were difficult to categorise (e.g. varying levels of allowance depending on the individual case).



6.3 Staying put fees

Very few local authorities – only 19 out of 144 (13 per cent) reported that they paid a separate fee for staying put in recognition of foster carers' skills and experience.

- Nine out of 19 local authorities offer the same fee for staying put as those available in pre-18 foster care.
- Eight out of 19 local authorities reduce fees once staying put commences. Four of these reduce payments in years two and three of staying put.
- Two out of 19 local authorities increase fees once staying put commences.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The results of this survey demonstrate the financial pressures facing foster carers across England. The National Minimum Allowance is an essential tool to enable fostering services to offer a basic level of support for their foster carers' costs, and it is unacceptable that 17 local authorities pay less than this Government minimum.

All fostering services should be required to pay an allowance at a level that meets or exceeds the Department for Education's national minimum allowance.

The Government should review the level of national minimum fostering allowances.

This survey has confirmed the findings from our previous research that nearly all (94 per cent) foster carers are paid below the equivalent of the national living wage for a nominal 40-hour week, and that one in seven receives no fee at all. All foster carers should be paid for their time, skills, and experience. It is a matter of social justice that foster carers should be properly remunerated. But it's also a matter of economics - money spent supporting fostering and foster carers now will save society significantly more money in the future.

All fostering households should receive the equivalent of the national living wage for a notional 40-hour week, paid 52 weeks a year, including holiday and sick pay. In the longer term we believe that foster carers should be paid in line with residential care workers, starting at around £20,000.

This research has shown that, three years after the change in law, staying put allowances and fees still leave foster carers facing a drop in income if they wish to continue to offer a home to a care leaver.

Unlike for foster care there are no minimum staying put allowances and levels vary greatly by local authority. Foster carers' income can reduce dramatically when they move to support young people under staying put arrangements even though their input can stay at the same level or sometimes increase when they are supporting the young person to make the transition to independence. Foster carers often find themselves in the position of having to make a decision to continue supporting a young person who has been part of their family for many years against losing a significant proportion of their allowance.

The Government should introduce a national minimum staying put allowance, which covers the full cost of looking after a young person.

About The Fostering Network

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Appendix: summary	Highest weekly fee	Lowest weekly fee	"No fee" band	Age bands	Total carers (respondents)	Carers no fee	Carers under NLW
London							
Overall	£291.60	£0.00	11	12	1694 (18/32)	134	1644
Mean	£191.45	£103.04					
North East							
Overall	£300.00	£0.00	5	0	1309 (9/11)	254	1239
Mean	£213.61	£36.36					
Yorks & Humber							
Overall	£482.05	£0.00	9	3	3028 (13/15)	445	2845
Mean	£232.22	£29.11					
North West							
Overall	£307.00	£0.00	16	7	3524 (19/23)	574	3389
Mean	£178.87	£15.20					
West Midlands							
Overall	£270.00	£0.00	10	3	2275 (11/14)	301	2237
Mean	£213.26	£18.69					
East Midlands							
Overall	£218.81	£0.00	7	2	1391 (6/9)	107	1271
Mean	£129.02	£9.11					
East							
Overall	£284.77	£0.00	7	3	1911 (8/11)	181	1757
Mean	£187.66	£28.27					
South East							
Overall	£425.46	£0.00	10	2	3001 (14/18)	675	2781
Mean	£215.47	£57.34					
South West							
Overall	£418.54	£0.00	4	2	1758 (11/15)	177	1610
Mean	£184.79	£57.47					
England							
Overall	£482.05	£0	79	34	19891(109/148)	2848	18773
Mean / per cent	£194.61	£45.98	53%	23%		14%	94%

