



## **Payment Survey - the views of foster carers in England**

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'Absolutely this is a job, one which I do with a passion and that I love. Ultimately I need to earn a living in order to provide all the things for the children that I feel they should have. We work 24/7 with some of the country's most damaged children. We are unable to work because a lot of these children aren't in education or require support throughout it. These young people would not be ok with a childminder in the holidays like my birth children because of their behaviour and emotional vulnerability. There's no sick pay should we become seriously ill, no pension, no retainers, no rights. I wouldn't foster without a skills fee it would be a further insult to the challenges we already face. We offer love, care, guidance, support, encouragement advice to children who face and present with real challenges in order to make some positive changes and help change their future.'

A foster carer – September 2017

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 About The Fostering Network

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.

## 1.2 About the payment survey 2017

Three-quarters of looked after children in the UK are being cared for by foster families. This means that improving the outcomes for children in care must start with improving foster care.

Across the UK, all foster carers receive a weekly fostering allowance which is designed to cover the cost of caring for a fostered child. Fee payments can be made on top of allowances to recognise a foster carer's time, skills and experience. However, there is no requirement for fee payments to be made. In our 2016 State of the Nation's Foster Care report, 57 per cent of foster carers said they received a fee. The amount varies hugely, with only a small minority of foster carers even receiving the equivalent of national living wage for a 40 hour week.

At worst, low or no pay means that some foster carers will be forced to maintain their households on very low income levels, and this can be unsatisfactory for foster carers, their children and fostered children alike. Being part of a low paid workforce can also compound the perceived low status foster carers frequently have in relation to other professionals.

Among the motivations for fostering as reported by foster carers, fee payments are consistently ranked low down the list. Making a difference to the life of a child in care is the primary motivation. We believe that this is how it should be. Nonetheless, this does not mean that foster carers are indifferent to the issue of pay, nor that they wish to work for free. Pay must be seen as a key factor in recruitment and retention because we know it is an issue for current factors, and – looking to the future – the demographic pool of foster carers will remain limited to those who feel they can afford to foster without fee payments or with minimal fee payments.

While The Fostering Network regularly surveys foster carers about the allowances and payments they receive we have not directly asked foster carers their views on whether they should be paid. The Department for Education is conducting a national fostering stocktake in England and seeking the views of foster carers. Given that payment is an issue which is frequently raised with us by our members, we decided to explore this area further in order to inform the stocktake.

In July we publicised the survey on our Facebook page and in our e-news which is sent out to our foster carer members. Within 24 hours, we had 1,283 responses, a response rate which is unprecedented in our previous surveys of foster carers, and which we believe demonstrates the strength of feeling about pay among foster carers. We closed the survey in August with 1,937 total responses, 1,463 of whom lived in England. In total, there are around 44,625 foster families in England.

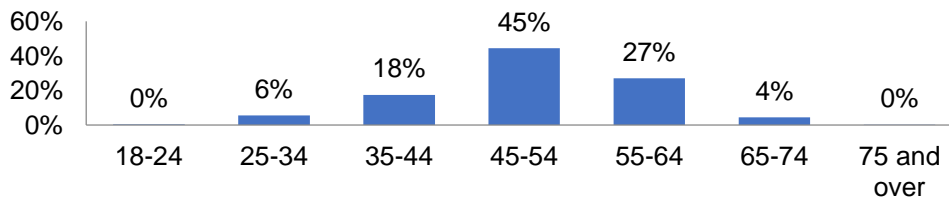
This report is an analysis of the responses we received from foster carers who live in England.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1 Foster carer profile

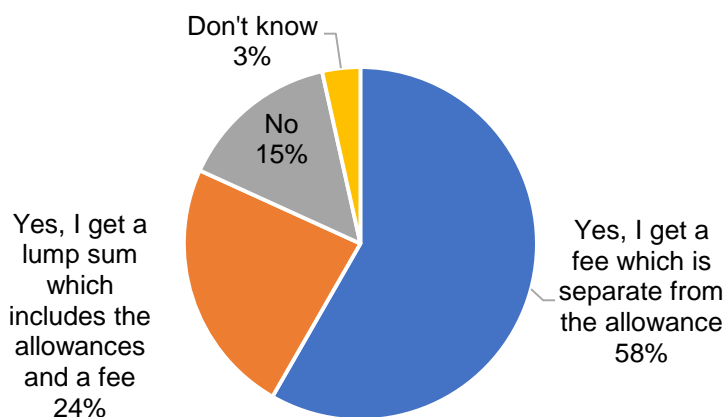
A quarter of respondents fostered for an independent fostering provider and three-quarters fostered for a local authority/children's trust (referred to as local authorities going forward). Seven per cent of respondents said they were a family and friends foster carer.

Age



### 2.2 Fee payments

**Do you consider yourself to get a fee payment for your time, skills and experience?**

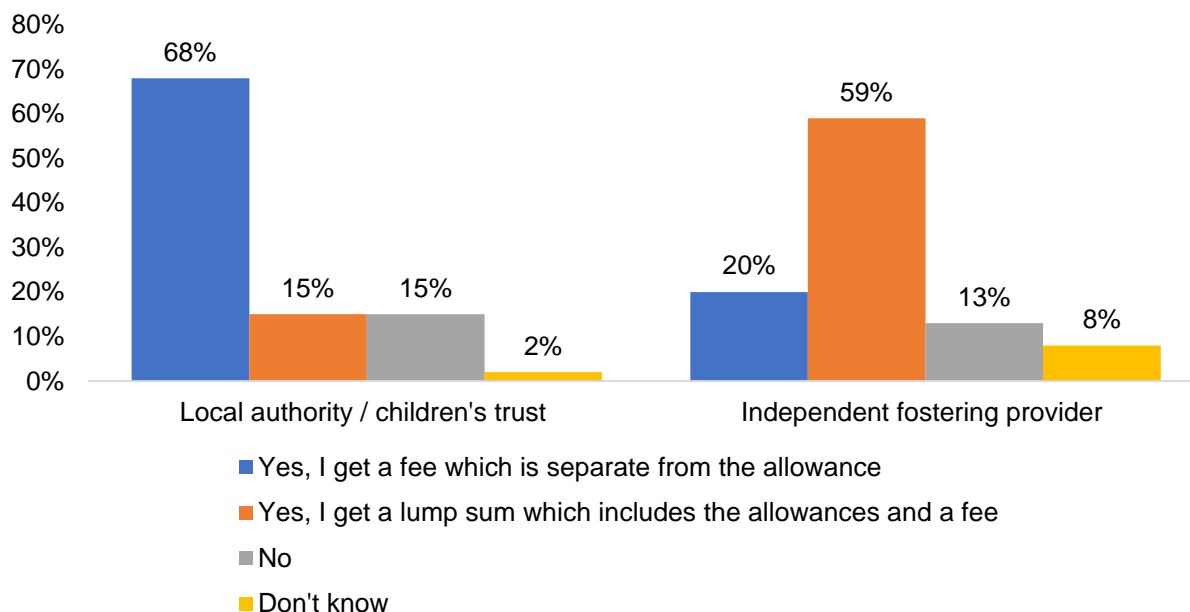


In England, 58 per cent of respondents said they got a fee which is separate from the allowance, 24 per cent got a lump sum and 15 per cent did not get a fee payment. In terms of those who get a fee which is distinct and separate from the allowance, this result is very similar to that from our 2016 State of the Nation report (57 per cent).

Of the 337 who said they got a lump sum payment, 61 per cent of foster carers said they knew which part of the lump sum payment was to cover the allowance and which part was their fee. A third of these foster carers said they did not know the split between the amount that was for spending on the child, and the amount that was for spending on themselves and their own family. This is clearly at odds with the national minimum standard 28.5 which states that, '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.'

## Local authorities compared with independent fostering providers

Do you consider yourself to get a fee payment for your time, skills and experience?



The survey results suggest that it is far more common for foster carers to be paid a lump sum if they foster for an independent fostering provider than a local authority.

Of those who fostered for an independent fostering provider and received a lump sum, 46 per cent said they were not told which part of the payment is to cover the allowance and which part is their fee. For the local authority foster carers receiving a lump sum, 18 per cent said they were not told which part was the allowance and which part the fee - significantly lower than the independent fostering provider foster carers.

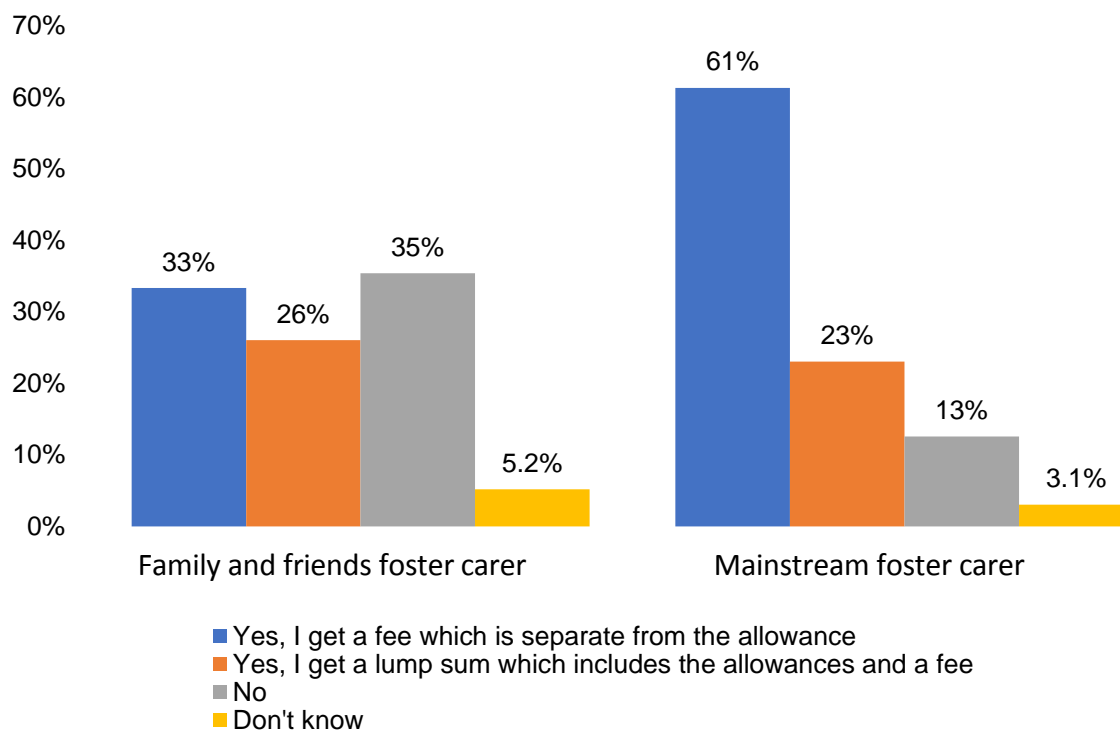
We then invited foster carers to leave comments, which many chose to do. A key theme was this lack of clarity around the split between allowances and fees, as the quotes below demonstrate. This is clearly a very important issue, as allowances are for spending on the care of the fostered child, and fees are for the foster carer to spend as they so wish.

*'Very confusing and can't seem to get a straight answer from anyone.'*

*'The handbook outlines what needs to be spent on the young person but it's not clear as to how much is specifically the fee, and as the young person gets older so the allowance goes up, this is not reflected in the fortnightly amount going up, so effectively my fee goes down.'*

## Family and friends foster carers

Do you consider yourself to get a fee payment for your time, skills and experience?



Family and friends foster carers are less likely to get a fee payment than mainstream foster carers. One third of family and friends foster carers get a separate fee compared with 61 per cent of their peers.

### Key findings

- 58 per cent of foster carers receive a fee which is separate from the allowance.
- A quarter of foster carers receive a lump sum payment incorporating allowances and fees and of those, one-third do not know what part of the payment covers the allowance and what part covers the fee.
- Independent fostering provider foster carers are more likely to receive a lump sum payment – 59 per cent of foster carers compared with 15 per cent of local authority foster carers.
- Family and friends foster carers are less likely to receive a fee payment – one-third of foster carers compared with 61 per cent of mainstream foster carers.

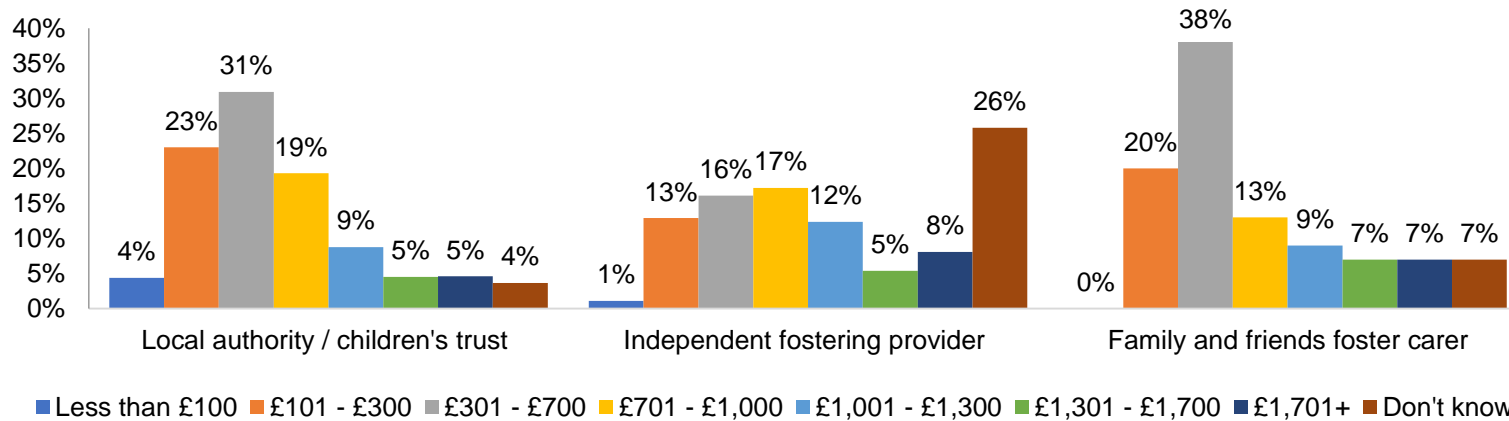
## 2.3 Fee payment levels

What is your typical monthly income from your fostering fee payment?

Less than £100	3%	51
£101 - £300	20%	299
£301 - £700	29%	436
£701 - £1,000	18%	274
£1,001 - £1,300	11%	165
£1,301 - £1,700	7%	98
£1,701+	5%	77
Don't know	7%	105

In order to make some comparisons with the national living wage, we have assumed a 40-hour working week; we know that many foster carers will feel they work many more hours than this and they are permanently on call, and that others do fewer hours and also work in other jobs in addition to fostering, but this approach gives us a baseline from which to make our comparisons. Only 12 per cent of foster carers received an amount similar to or above the national living wage (£7.50) for a 40-hour working week. Just over half of foster carers (52 per cent) received less than £4 an hour and around a quarter of foster carers (23 per cent) received less than £1.70 an hour, again based on a 40-hour working week.

Local authority, independent fostering provider and family and friends foster carers.



Local authority foster carers

Only 10 per cent of foster carers received the equivalent of or more of the national living wage (£7.50) for a 40-hour working week. Just over half of foster carers (58 per cent) received less than £4 an hour and around a quarter of foster carers (27 per cent) received less than £1.70 an hour, again based on a 40-hour working week.

Independent fostering provider foster carers

17 per cent of foster carers received the equivalent of or more than the national living wage (£7.50) for a 40-hour working week. Just under one third of foster carers (30 per cent) received less than £4 an hour and 14 per cent of foster carers received less than £1.70 an hour, again based on a 40-hour working week. One quarter of respondents said they didn't know what their monthly income was.

Family and friends foster carers

14 per cent of family and friends foster carers received the equivalent of or more than the national living wage (£7.50) for a 40-hour working week. Just over half of foster carers (58 per cent) received less than £4 an hour and one-fifth of foster carers (20 per cent) received less than £1.70 an hour, again based on a 40-hour working week.



## Key findings

- Only 12 per cent of foster carers received the equivalent of or more than the national living wage (£7.50) for a 40-hour working week.
- Just over half of foster carers (52 per cent) received less than £4 an hour.
- A quarter of foster carers (23 per cent) received less than £1.70 an hour.
- A quarter of independent fostering provider foster carers did not know what their monthly income was.

## 2.4 Retainers

### Do you get a retainer between placements?

	Yes		No		Don't know	
Local authority	19%	178	75%	693	5%	48
Independent fostering provider	8%	17	91%	201	1%	3

More local authority foster carers (19 per cent) said they receive a retainer in between placements than independent fostering provider foster carers (eight per cent) but in both cases the numbers are still very low.

Furthermore it was clear from the comments that were left by respondents, that even when they did receive a retainer it wasn't for very long and the amount paid wasn't that high.

A number of foster carers said they used to receive a retainer, but don't anymore due to cutbacks. The examples also highlighted areas of inconsistencies with foster carers saying it was decided on a case by case basis, or different rules depending on the age of the child.

Foster carers also reported getting into financial difficulties because they did not get any income when they didn't have any fostered children living with them.

There were only a few examples of foster carers receiving their fee 52 weeks of the year.

*'4 weeks max but you can wait well over 6 months for a placement.'*

*'No placement no income.'*

*'Half fee for 4 weeks'*

*'Stopped years ago due to cut backs.'*

*'As I foster 0-5 year olds our local authority only pay for those who care for 11+.'*

*'We are paid our payment plus skills level payment 52 weeks a year.'*

*'Some people have previously but the decision is made case by case basis by our manager.'*

*'A poor £50 per month.'*

*'Only for 8 weeks and is £20!!!'*

*'For 12 weeks only. If no placement is found the retainer stops after 12 weeks regardless.'*

*'Really think we should I went 3 months between placements and had to use all my savings.'*

*'Lengthy gaps between placements can cause financial stress as I'm a single carer and cannot work outside of fostering.'*

*'I currently have a foster baby. However he is in hospital, so currently getting no fees.'*

*'Only if waiting for a pre planned, £7 p/night.'*

#### Key findings

- More local authority foster carers (19 per cent) received a retainer in between placements than independent fostering provider foster carers (eight per cent) but in both cases the numbers are still very low.
- Where retainers were paid, they were very low and paid for a short period of time.
- Foster carers reported getting into financial difficulties because they did not get any income when they didn't have any fostered children living with them.

## 2.5 Views on Payment

Should foster carers be paid a fee for their time, skills and experience?

Yes, all foster carers should be paid	93%	1272
Yes, some foster carers should be paid	5%	75
No	1%	9
Don't know	1%	19

The vast majority of foster carers were united in their responses. 98 per cent of respondents said that either all or some foster carers should be paid. Only one per cent of foster carers said no, foster carers should not be paid.

We also invited respondents to leave comments and over 600 foster carers did so, showing real strength of feeling. Two issues came across very strongly – the skills and expertise that foster carers need, and the requirement that at least one foster carer in the home is often not allowed to work outside of fostering.

*'The amount of time spent training and updating skills, attending meetings and filling in paperwork is very time consuming and should be acknowledged through payment. Most of these children have developmental delays and emotional problems which requires an enormous amount of energy and time to deal with. This should also be acknowledged in our pay.'*

*'We dedicate our lives to children needing us and it is a full time 7 day a week job and although rewarding can be very challenging.'*

*'We work hard, many wouldn't be able to be foster carers and work outside the home so need the income to live on.'*

*'We work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with no time off, no paid holidays or sick pay. We also are expected to give up our previous job so we can be at home for the foster child, therefore the fee we are paid is our only income.'*

*'We have to go in training courses, fill in paper work, have reviews, go to meetings, support other carers, be available for supervision, the list is endless.'*

*'Being a foster carer is not just about having another child in your family - there are so many commitments involved: contact, meetings, appointments challenging behaviour, schools often a distance away, etc - not usually what you would have to do with your own family, but this has a huge impact on them too and a fee shows recognition of this.'*

*'I am a single carer, if I didn't get paid I would be unable to do it, I consider myself a professional and have worked very hard to achieve my level of skills. I consider fostering a vocational role.'*

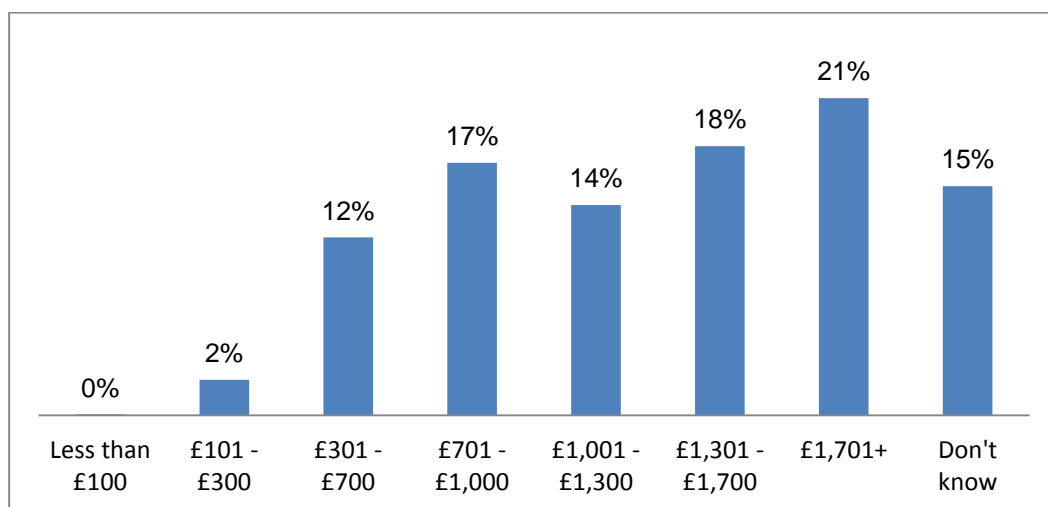
*'My terms of approval state that I don't have any other job.'*

*'As a carer who looks after those children aged under 5 I am not allowed to take any other paid work. I do not get paid when I don't have a placement.'*

*'The role has moved from being a highly voluntary one in the years after I became a carer (mid 90s), so one which is highly regulated and prescribed by the local authority. There is a clear 'job to do', standards to be maintained, and training to undertake. Bearing this in mind a fee element is entirely reasonable.'*

*'Fostering is a 24/7 occupation almost always involving looking after children with additional needs, carers are required to maintain first aid training undergo initial assessments, show evidence of increasing skills to progress and expected to regularly attend other training, maintain records, assist and advise other professionals and often, in reality, provide complex therapy to children. This deserves proper remuneration.'*

## How much should foster carers be paid a month?



The amount that respondents thought foster carers should be paid was varied. However if we compare what respondents thought foster carers should get paid, to what they actually do receive, it is very clear that foster carers believe they should be paid more than what they currently receive.

	What is your typical monthly income from fostering?	How much should foster carers be paid?
Less than £100	3%	0%
£101 - £300	20%	2%
£301 - £700	29%	12%
£701 - £1,000	18%	17%
£1,001 - £1,300	11%	14%
£1,301 - £1,700	7%	18%
£1,701+	5%	21%

Don't know	7%	15%
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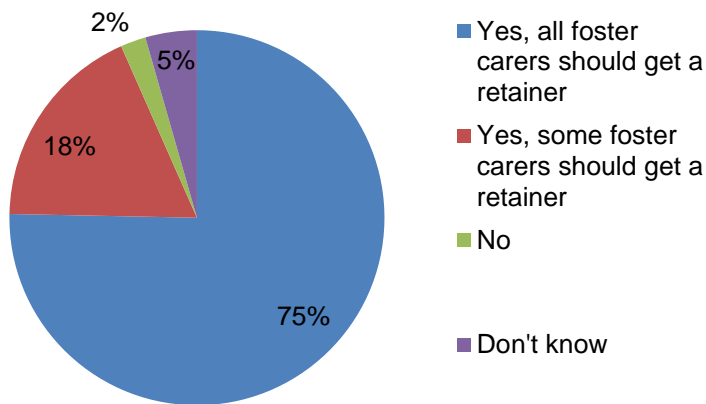
39 per cent of foster carers said they believed that they should receive at least £1,301 a month, which is the equivalent of the national living wage for a 40-hour week. In reality, only 12 per cent of foster carers who responded got paid at this level or more.

Nearly a quarter of foster carers were paid less than £300 a month, and only two per cent of respondents indicated this is the right amount for foster carers to be paid. This is the equivalent of £1.73 an hour based on a 40-hour week.

#### Key findings

- 98 per cent of respondents said that either some of or all foster carers should be paid.
- Two dominant themes emerged as to why foster carers should be paid – the skills and expertise that foster carers need, and the requirement that foster carers are often not allowed to do another job in addition to fostering.
- Views were mixed regarding how much foster carers should be paid. However the message that foster carers need to be paid more than they currently get was very clear, while almost 40 per cent believe it should be at least the equivalent of the national living wage for a 40-hour week.

## 2.6 Should foster carers get a retainer between placements?



Only two per cent of respondents said that foster carers should not get a retainer between placements, while 93 per cent said that some or all of foster carers should get a retainer.

Foster carers were invited to leave comments and 588 did so, again demonstrating strength of feeling. Two strong themes emerged. Firstly that foster carers often work in between placements, continuing with their training and development plans, attending supervision and preparing for the next fostered child. Secondly that foster carers have to be ready to take a placement at very short notice, and therefore taking on a job in between placements is not practical.

However we also got a significant number of respondents saying that if foster carers received a retainer, they should not be able to turn down a fostered child without very good reason.

*'As foster carers cannot take on other employment while waiting for another child this should be paid in all circumstances as foster carers always have to be ready to take on children day or night.'*

*'Without a placement you are on call, ready to pick up a placement at the drop of a hat. You have to undertake training. You are still participating in the fostering network and enhancing your knowledge and skillset. Sacrifices are made to be foster carers even when without a placement - this is a full time job, it should not be the foster carer's responsibility to find placements, that is the social worker's responsibility - ultimately, a foster carer can't have another job to pay their way when they don't have a child as the flexibility demanded of having a foster carer job doesn't allow this.'*

*'While we are waiting for a placement we still need to pay bills, rent/mortgage etc. Obviously if during the retained period you say no to a placement there would have to be justification given as to the reason for refusing.'*

*'From my own experience I have seen dedicated foster carers leave the service of foster care as they have had to find employment elsewhere when they have no placement and sometimes*

*then stay in the employment and don't return to foster care due to the uncertainties of their financial position regarding fostering.'*

*'Yes because it is impossible to find temporary employment in between placements and I know we considered ceasing for this precise reason.'*

*'Foster carers are often expected to perform tasks between placements including supervision, training and TDS work but are expected to do this unpaid. We have rooms sat empty in our house and various other costs related to fostering which have to be paid whether we have a placement or not. We often spend time preparing for placements- including buying clothing, etc - which then do not go ahead. Foster carers are expected to be available to take placements at short notice so cannot have other employment. In the current situation it is the foster carer who is expected to absorb all of the costs when they do not have a placement.'*

#### Key findings

- Nine out of 10 respondents said that foster carers should receive a retainer in between placements.
- Foster carers need to be available at very short notice and so are unable to take up work while waiting for a new fostered child.
- Foster carers continue to complete fostering tasks even when they do not have a fostered child living with them.



### 3. The Fostering Network's view

The Fostering Network believes that it is a matter of social justice that foster carers should be paid; they are the only professional group working with children which is unpaid or underpaid, not even receiving a level equivalent to the national living wage for a 40-hour working week.

No foster carer should be expected to live in poverty as a result of their foster care responsibilities. If fostering services are to be able to recruit the number of foster carers they need with the skills that are required to be able to transform children's lives, levels of pay must be set that are comparable with others in the children's workforce.

We believe that:

1. In the short term fostering fees must be paid at a level equivalent to the living wage based on a 40-hour week for 52 weeks of the year, including holiday and sick pay, regardless of whether the foster carer has a placement or not and providing they are available to take a child.
2. In the longer term fostering fees should be paid on a par with residential workers in children's homes.
3. Governments should invest in local authorities and trusts to ensure the necessary finance is available.
4. Foster carers should continue to receive fee payments while allegations of malpractice are investigated.
5. Tiered payment schemes are preferable. These are likely to take into account factors such as length of service, qualifications, training undertaken, capacity for learning demonstrated by reflection on practice, and needs of children fostered, as well as time invested. When well-managed, tiered schemes can be an important mechanism for the development and recognition of the skills of foster carers, as well as a motivational tool for improving performance.
6. Decisions about foster carers undertaking work in addition to fostering must reflect individual circumstances, and must give priority to the needs of the fostered child. See our policy on combining fostering and other work for more detail.
7. Any changes made to fee payment schemes at local level should not result in individual foster carers being worse off.
8. The administration of fees should be transparent. Fostering services should distinguish clearly between fee payments and allowances. Every foster carer should understand what fees they are entitled to; fostering services should publish clear information about fee schemes and their criteria. Payment slips and payment records should be understandable, and payments should be made promptly.

For further information, please contact:

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