

## **Wales 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 Welsh Government publishes National Minimum Maintenance Allowances for Foster Carers, 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 Maintenance Allowance, there is no requirement for fee payments to be made.

### 3. About this report

This report provides an update to the 2016-17 National Fostering Framework report, published by The Fostering Network in March 2017.

In the summer of 2017 The Fostering Network conducted a survey of all 22 local authorities in Wales, using a combination of telephone, web research and 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 detail your 2017-18 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.*
  
- 2) *Please could you tell me your 2017-18 weekly allowances to former foster carers looking after young people in Continuing Care / When I am Ready arrangements, broken down by year 1, year 2, and year 3+ if necessary.*
  
- 3) *Please detail your 2017-18 fee/reward structure for former foster carers looking after young people in Continuing Care / When I am Ready 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: Wales Summary

### 4.1 Overview

The Welsh Government's recommended rates for 2017-18 were an increase of 2.4 per cent over the previous year. Results of the survey implied that one out of 22 local authority fostering services in Wales is paying less than the Government's national allowances in at least one age category in 2017-18. Last year, five fostering services fell below. All other local authorities increased their payments in line with the Welsh Government or are already paying at or above the minimum. The results are shown in the following table.

### 4.2 Local Authority fostering services allowances Welsh Government rates (marked in red) in 2017-18

Local authority	Amount paid (0-4)	Amount paid (5-10)	Amount paid (11-15)	Amount paid (16+)
<b>Welsh Government</b>	<b>£170</b>	<b>£155</b>	<b>£155</b>	<b>£194</b>
Blaenau Gwent	£170	£155	£177.38	£215.74
Bridgend	£170	£155	£177.38	£224.37
Caerphilly	£170	£155	£155	£194
Cardiff	£170	£155	£181.81	£221.13
Carmarthenshire	£175	£155	£155	£194
Ceredigion	£170	£155	£177.38	£215.74
Conwy	£170	£155	£155	£194
Denbighshire	£170	£155	£155	£194
Flintshire	£170	£155	£179	£217
Gwynedd	£170	£155	£155	£194
Isle Of Anglesey	£170	£155	£155	£194
Merthyr Tydfil	£170	£159	£182	£194
Monmouthshire	£216	£174	£174	£223
Neath Port Talbot	£166.11*	£150.57*	£149.48*	£186.95*
Newport	£170	£155	£155	£194
Pembrokeshire	£170	£155	£155	£194
Powys	£232.34	£232.34	£232.34	£232.34
Rhondda Cynon Taff	£170	£155	£155	£194
Swansea	<b>£134.12</b>	<b>£146.30</b>	£178.71	<b>£178.71</b>
Torfaen County	£170	£155	£168.50	£209.30
Vale Of Glamorgan	£170	£155	£155	£194
Wrexham	£170	£155	£155	£194

\*When lump sum payments for holiday are included, meets WG national minimum.

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

### Key findings:

- Responses were received from all local authorities.
- The average entry-level fee for foster carers looking after one child aged 0-4 in Wales is £40 per week.
- The average top band mainstream fee for foster carers looking after one child in Wales is £150.22 per week.
- Approximately 27 per cent of foster carers in Wales do not receive a fee.
- Half (11 out of 22) of local authority fostering services in Wales pay no fee at all to foster carers on the lowest band.
- One in four (five out of 22) of fostering services operate a banding system based on the age of the children. The majority of other services use a skills-based banding system, from two to five bands.
- 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 **£13,260**.

### 5.1 More detail on the methodology

This was a complex piece of research to undertake, not least because every fostering service in Wales 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 five 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 these.

We determined the “highest mainstream pay band” by ignoring specialist fee schemes for foster carers looking after children with very high needs. These 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 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 three out of 22 respondents did not give information on how many foster carers were on each fee band. The following table summarises fees and assumes each household has only one child in placement.

Wales	Highest fee	Lowest fee	"No fee" band	Age bands	Total FCs	FCs no fee
Overall	£250	£0	11/22	5/22	2141	578
Mean / per cent	£152.27	£40	-	-	102	27%

## 5.2 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 two children aged 4 and 6 in placement.
- In half (11 out of 22) of local authorities, this foster carer would receive no fee.
- The highest fee they would receive is £255 in Neath Port Talbot.
- The maximum difference in total annual income between two similar foster carers in different parts of Wales is therefore £13,260.
- The average weekly fee across Wales for this foster carer is £75.

	<b>Fee</b>	<b>Total annual income</b>
<b>Highest (Neath Port Talbot)</b>	£255 (£127.50 x 2)	£13,260
<b>Lowest (multiple)</b>	£0	£0

### Scenario 2

This scenario is a foster carer on the highest mainstream band, with one child aged 16 in placement. Some 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.

- Every local authority pays a fee for this foster carer.
- The highest fee they would receive is £250, in Gwynedd.
- The lowest fee they would receive is £60, in Carmarthenshire.
- The average fee across Wales for this foster carer is £154.49.
- The maximum difference in total annual income between two similar foster carers in different parts of Wales is £9,880.

	<b>Fee</b>	<b>Total annual income</b>
<b>Highest (Gwynedd)</b>	£250	£13,000
<b>Lowest (Carmarthenshire)</b>	£60	£3,120

## 6. Survey of When I am Ready payments: Wales summary

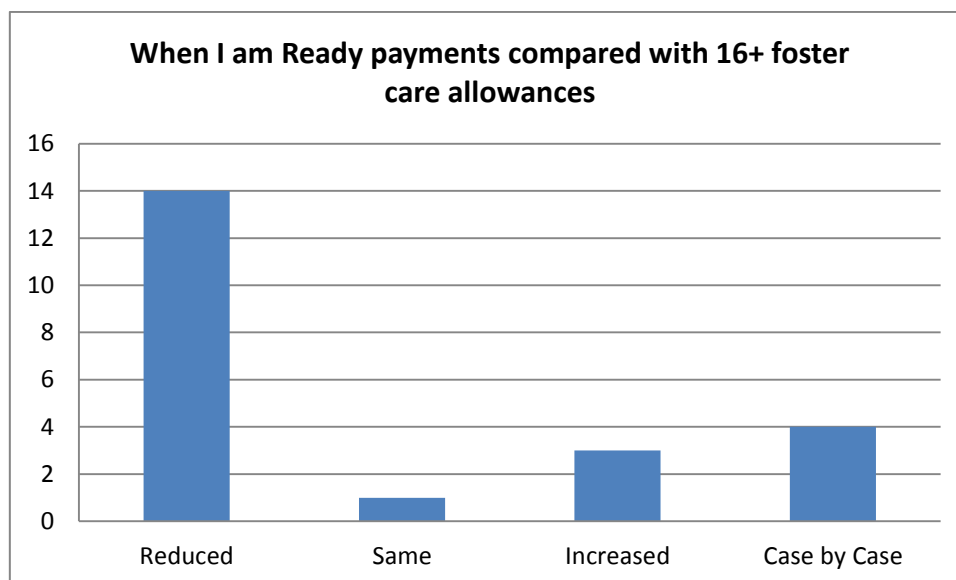
### 6.1 Introduction

Information was gathered from all local authorities. In our analysis we compared the foster care allowances paid in the 16-18 category with those paid for When I am Ready. In this way we can estimate what proportion of foster carers may be required to accept a drop in financial support if offering When I am Ready.

All payments are single lump sums. Therefore foster carers receiving separate fees up until the young person reaches 18 may see a drop in their overall income even if their nominal allowance increases upon When I am Ready commencing.

### 6.2 When I am Ready payments

- Payments range in value across Wales from £140 to £215.74 per week.
- Nearly two-thirds of Welsh local authorities (14 out of 22) reported a reduction compared with pre-18 foster care allowances.
- Three local authorities reported an increase in allowances. Note that no local authorities offer separate fees for When I am Ready.
- One local authority reported that allowances remained the same post 18.
- Four local authorities calculate payments for When I am Ready on a case by case basis so we were unable to compare with the 16+ allowance.
- Nine local authorities stated that payments were partly made up from a contribution from the young person's housing benefit or other benefits.



## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

The results of this survey demonstrate the financial pressures facing foster carers across Wales. The Welsh Government 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 any local authority pays less than this Government minimum.

**All fostering services should be required to pay an allowance at a level that meets or exceeds the Welsh Government's national minimum maintenance allowance for foster carers.**

**The Government should review the level of the national minimum maintenance allowance for foster carers.**

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, two years after the change in law, When I am Ready payments 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 When I am Ready allowances and levels vary greatly by local authority. Foster carers' income can reduce dramatically when they move to support young people under When I am Ready 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 income.

**The Government should introduce a national When I am Ready allowance, which covers the full cost of looking after a young person.**

## About The Fostering Network

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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.

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