

England 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 Department for Education publishes National Minimum Allowances (NMAs) for foster carers in England, with the expectation that all fostering services meet these amounts. However, for the many years we have conducted a survey of the fostering allowances given by local authorities, we know that this is not always the case.

3. About this report

In the summer of 2019, The Fostering Network conducted a survey of local authorities¹ in England via freedom of information (FOI) requests. The purpose of the survey was monitor whether local authorities who have previously set their allowances below or at the NMA level are meeting the NMAs set by the Department for Education. This report includes the data from fostering services who have set their allowances below or at the NMA level over the past five years, including this year. 58 local authorities met this criterion.

¹ In England fostering is delivered by both local authority fostering services and independent fostering services, with local authorities accounting for almost two-thirds of carers. Due to the rules around freedom of information requests we are only able to survey local authority fostering services.

The local authorities were asked the following question:

- 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?*

In addition, we asked all local authorities in England the details of the allowances given to former foster carers in Staying Put arrangements and the foster care allowance level for 16-18 to make comparisons of any changes post-18. The results from these questions will be published in a separate forthcoming Staying Put report.

Even though FOI requests should be a reliable way of gathering information, we became aware that some of the information that was given to us was not correct. Where we have become aware of inaccuracies we have sought for clarification and used the updated, accurate figures in the tables below rather than the figures obtained via the FOI request. In each of these cases we have sought clarification direct from the local authority. Given the difficulty in sometimes gathering accurate information about foster care, it highlights the need to make clear and publicly available all foster care allowances set by fostering services.

4. Survey results for foster care allowances 2019-20

4.1 Overview

We collected data from 57 local authorities². Each year new national minimum allowances are set by the Department for Education and these are expected to cover the maintenance costs for looking after children. England is divided into separate areas to reflect the different costs of living (see Table 1 for the 2019/20 NMA figures). Across the whole of England, the NMAs for foster carers rose by a below-inflation 1.76 per cent over the previous financial year.

Table 1: National Minimum Allowances by area set by the Department for Education for the year commencing 1 April 2019³.

Area of England	Amount paid per week by age band (years)			
	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-18
London	£149.00 - 152.00	£171.00	£193.00	£226.00
South East	£143.00 - 147.00	£163.00	£185.00	£218.00
Rest of England	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00

² One local authority did not respond to our request and we could not find any information online.

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

4.2 Results

Below are the full results of the survey (see Tables 2-4) along with some key findings. Results are broken down by area.

Key finding:

- 11 local authorities provided foster carers with allowances below the NMA for at least one age group across England. Of these, four were in London, one was in the South East and six were in the area of the Rest of England.

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

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

Boxes shaded in blue indicate foster care allowances set below the national minimum allowance.

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16-18 years
London	£149.00 - 152.00	£171.00	£193.00	£226.00
Barnet	£149.00 - 152.00	£171.00	£193.00	£226.00
Bromley	£152.04	£171.08	£193.06	£226.10
Enfield	£163.00	£163.00	£216.00	£216.00
Greenwich	£149.00 - 152.00	£171.00	£193.00	£226.00
Hackney	£149.00 - 152.00	£171.00	£193.00	£226.00
Haringey	£185.00	£185.00	£232.00	£252.00
Islington	£152.00	£171.00	£203.40	£226.00
Kensington and Chelsea	£142.00 - 145.00	£163.00	£184.00	£216.00
Lewisham	£149.00 - 152.00	£171.00	£193.00	£226.00
Newham	£170.00	£170.00	£220.00	£220.00
Tower Hamlets	£149.00	£168.00	£190.00	£222.00
Westminster	£149.00 - 152.00	£171.00	£193.00	£226.00

Table 3: Allowances (per week) for foster carers looking after children and young people up to 18 years of age in the South East of England.

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

Boxes shaded in blue indicate foster care allowances set below the national minimum allowance.

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16-18 years
South East	£143.00 - 147.00	£163.00	£185.00	£218.00
East Sussex	£126.58	£144.18	£179.49	£179.49
Milton Keynes	£147.00	£163.00	£185.00	£218.00
Portsmouth	£147.00	£163.00	£185.00	£218.00

Table 4: Allowances (per week) for foster carers looking after children and young people up to 18 years of age in the Rest of England.

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

Boxes shaded in blue indicate foster care allowances set below the national minimum allowance.

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16-18 years
Rest of England	£129.00 - £132.00 ⁴	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Barnsley	£129.00 - £132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Birmingham	£127.58	£145.31	£180.91	£219.65
Blackpool	£129.00 - £132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Bolton	£129.00 - £132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Bournemouth,	£125.00	£146.86	£183.87	£189.36 - £174.38
Christchurch and	£146.00	£168.00	£208.00	£252.00
Poole ⁵	£127.00 - £130.00	£143.00	£146.00	£191.00
Bradford	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Bury	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Calderdale	£129.00 - £132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Doncaster	£157.86	£177.73	£222.58	£271.44

⁴ The Department for Education states that foster carers looking after babies should receive a minimum allowance of £129.00 per week and pre-primary aged children should receive at least £132.00 per week to cover the costs of looking after that child. As these are not clearly defined age categories, for the sake of this report we have merged these categories into a 0-4 years age band (as do some local authorities). Local authorities, therefore, that are highlighted as setting their allowance below the NMA for the 0-4 years age band but appear to fall allowance range are highlighted as falling below because we assume that they are under-providing for the four-year-olds in that category (i.e. the children at the top end of the age band).

⁵ These three separate local authorities have recently merged into one unitary authority. Due to this being very recent they still have separate allowances rates.

Rest of England	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Dorset	£146.00	£168.00	£208.00	£252.00
Durham	£132.02	£146.02	£167.02	£194.04
Essex	£155.05	£176.68	£219.80	£233.87
Gloucestershire	£171.92	£185.92	£206.92	£233.94
Herefordshire	£131.21	£146.00	£206.22	£246.76
Hertfordshire	£147.00	£163.00	£185.00	£218.00
Lancashire	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Leicestershire	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Manchester	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Norfolk	£137.00	£152.00	£173.00	£201.00
North East Lincolnshire	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
North Lincolnshire	£129.00	£143.00	£164.00	£191.00
North Somerset	£134.00	£147.00	£169.00 - 197.00	£197.00
North Tyneside	£134.49	£147.84	£184.05	£194.00
Northumberland	£132.02	£146.02	£180.04	£219.03
Nottingham City	£133.00	£147.00	£169.00	£196.00
Nottinghamshire	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Oldham	£125.09	£142.52	£177.38	£215.74
Rochdale	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Sefton	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Sheffield	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
South Gloucestershire	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
St Helens	£125.08	£142.49	£177.38	£215.75

Rest of England	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Suffolk	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Tameside	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Torbay	£224.00	£224.00	£224.00	£224.00
Trafford	£130.05 - 133.17	£146.70	£167.50	£195.60
Wakefield	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Warrington	£125.09	£142.52	£177.38	£215.74
Wigan	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Wirral	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Wolverhampton	£132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Worcestershire	£129.00 - 132.00	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00

4.3. Concluding comments and recommendations

The Department for Education's national minimum allowance is an essential tool to guide fostering services in offering a basic level of allowance to cover the cost of caring for fostered children, and it is unacceptable that any fostering service sets their allowance less than this Government minimum. Not only this, but our State of the Nation 2019⁶ survey showed that **55 per cent** of foster carers in England do not feel their current allowance level meets the costs of looking after a child.

Recommendation for fostering services:

- All fostering services should set their allowances at a level that meets or exceeds the Department for Education's national minimum allowance for foster carers.
- 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, skills and experience.

Recommendations for Government:

- All fostering services should be monitored to ensure that they are paying at or above the national minimum allowance level.
- The Westminster Government should urgently 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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⁶ 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>