



## **Northern Ireland Foster Care Allowances 2019-20**

### **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.

### **2. Foster care allowances in Northern Ireland**

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 of Health in Northern Ireland publishes minimum allowances (NMAs) for foster carers, with the expectation that all Health and Social Care Trusts meet these amounts. See Table 1 for the figures for this financial year compared with last year as well as the English rate. Even though the minimum fostering allowance levels have increased from last year, this was below inflation.

**Table 1: Minimum weekly foster care allowances set by the Department of Health<sup>1</sup> in Northern Ireland compared with those set by the Department for Education<sup>2</sup> in England<sup>3</sup> 2018-2020.**

Age band	Rate for 2019/20		Rate for 2018/19	
	Northern Ireland	England	Northern Ireland	England
0 to 4 years	£129.38	£129.00 - £132.00	£126.84	£127.00 - £130.00
5 to 10 years	£142.95	£146.00	£140.15	£143.00
11 to 15 years	£164.56	£167.00	£161.33	£164.00
16 to 18 years	£190.61	£194.00	£186.87	£191.00

### 3. Concluding comments and recommendations

The Fostering Network are concerned about the continued trend of foster care allowances lagging behind levels elsewhere in the UK. In addition, our State of the Nation report 2019<sup>4</sup> found that **58 per cent** of foster carers in Northern Ireland felt the allowances they received do not cover the full cost of looking after the child.

#### Recommendations for the Northern Ireland Executive

- With the Northern Ireland Executive re-established, steps should be taken, in the first instance, to ensure minimum allowances for foster carers in Northern Ireland are commensurate with rates elsewhere in the UK and cover the full cost of looking after a child or young person.

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<sup>1</sup> Health and Social Care Trust. Foster care allowances 2019. Available from: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/foster-care-allowances-2019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education. Foster carers. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

<sup>3</sup> Excluding London and the South East

<sup>4</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>