

Scotland 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 and context

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; however, in some cases, it falls well short. In 2019, our State of the Nation survey¹ found that 60 per cent of foster carers in Scotland felt the allowances they received did not cover the full cost of looking after the child. Some local authorities do offer supplements to the weekly allowance, such as money for baby items, school trips, driving lessons and more, but there is a lack of transparency about these extras and there is no guaranteed minimum amount that foster carers will receive to cover the costs of looking after the children in their care.

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 child or young person in foster care.

The Scottish Government does not currently have a national minimum allowance (NMA) for foster carers despite over a decade of campaigning from The Fostering Network. In 2016 the Scottish National Party was elected on a manifesto that pledged to implement a national minimum allowance. Since then a Government-led review of care allowances for kinship and foster care was commissioned; in August 2018 this review concluded only that the Government should consider a recommended allowance. Over a year later no further progress has been made and the fostering community are still waiting for action. In addition to the Government's review of allowances the

¹ The Fostering Network. State of Scotland's Foster Care. June 2019. Available from: https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/stateofthenationsfostercareScotland2019final_0.pdf

Independent Care Review, which has now concluded, has taken evidence around allowances and we look forward to their final report due to published in February 2020.

3. About this report

In the summer of 2019, The Fostering Network conducted a survey of all 32 local authorities² in Scotland using freedom of information requests in order to get a picture of fostering allowances for local authority foster carers across the country. The wording of the freedom of information requests was as follows:

- 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?*
- 2) *Please could you tell me your 2019-20 weekly allowances to former foster carers looking after young people in 16+/18+ Continuing Care arrangements, broken down by year 1, year 2, and year 3+ if necessary?*

4. Survey results for foster care allowances 2019-2020

4.1. Overview

We collected data from all 32 local authorities in Scotland. Although Scotland has no set NMAs, all other countries in the UK do. To get an indication of whether Scottish local authorities are giving foster carers sufficient allowances, we have compared the results with the Welsh³ and English⁴ NMAs and calculated the range of allowances provided by local authorities across Scotland.

4.2. Results

Below are the key findings and the full results of the survey (see Table 2).

² In Scotland fostering is delivered by both local authority fostering services and independent fostering services. Due to the rules around freedom of information requests we are only able to survey local authority fostering services.

³ Welsh Government. National Minimum Allowances for Foster Carers 2017 – 2020. Available from: <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/welshgovernmentallowances2017-2020.pdf>

⁴ Department for Education. Foster Carers. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

Key findings:

Table 1: Number of Scottish local authorities that pay below the Welsh and English national minimum allowances for the year commencing 1 April 2019 by age group

Age group	Below the Welsh NMA	Below the NMA for England (excluding London and the South East)
0 to 4	31	12
5 to 10	27	9
11 to 15	6	6
16 to 17	7	5

- Overall, 31 of the 32 local authorities set their allowances below the Welsh NMA for at least one age group and of these, 12 also provided allowances below the English NMA for at least one age group.
- While nine local authorities increased their foster care allowances from the previous year, 24 (75 per cent) have not. Of those local authorities that have frozen their allowances from the previous year, 21 had also done this the year before meaning that **two-thirds (66 per cent) of local authorities in Scotland have not increased their allowances for foster carers in two years.** We understand a reason for this could be local authorities waiting for the outcome of the Government's allowance review.
- The amount foster care allowances vary within age groups is significant – with some foster carers only receiving half of what others do. These differences amount to thousands of pounds over the course of the year. Foster carers looking after children aged:
 - 0 to 4 received a range of £77.96 to £200.00 per week,
 - 5 to 10 received a range of £96.40 to £200.00 per week,
 - 11 to 15 received a range of £120.00 to £240.40 per week and,
 - 16+ received a range of £155.36 to £253.90 per week.

Table 2: Allowances (per week) for foster carers looking after children and young people up to 16 years of age in Scotland.

Boxes shaded in yellow specify the NMAs set by the Department for Education in England and the Welsh Government.

Boxes shaded in blue indicate foster care allowances which are below the NMA for Wales.

Text written in white indicates foster care allowances below the NMA for England (excluding London and the South East).

Local authority	Age ranges			
	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16+ years
England (excluding London and the South East)	£129-132	£146.00	£167.00	£194.00
Wales	£181.00	£165.00	£165.00	£206.00
Aberdeen City	£135.41	£154.24	£192.02	£233.55
Aberdeenshire	£147.18	£167.65	£208.71	£253.89
Angus Council	£147.18	£167.65	£208.71	£253.90
Argyll & Bute	£196.71	£196.71	£240.40	£240.40
Clackmannanshire	£134.40	£153.09	£190.58	£231.79
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	£140.00	£160.00	£199.00	£242.00
Dumfries & Galloway	£130.34	£148.87	£184.80	£224.77
Dundee City	£140.14	£159.62	£198.70	£241.73
East Ayrshire	£152.70	£152.70	£224.50	£224.50
East Dunbartonshire	£128.22	£146.05	£181.81	£221.13
East Lothian	£114.45	£133.70	£157.98-163.74	£200.11
East Renfrewshire	£128.84	£146.76	£182.70	£222.21
Edinburgh	£106.77	£130.00	£161.84 -166.36	£199.65
Falkirk	£137.18	£156.26	£194.53	£226.84
Fife	£97.95	£110.66	£137.34	£175.52
Glasgow City	£137.18	£156.30	£194.53	£236.60

Highland Council	£77.69	£96.40	£120.00	£155.36
Inverclyde	£127.59	£145.34	£180.93	£220.05
Midlothian	£100.00	£117.20	£138.47-143.52	£175.41
Moray	£142.86	£162.73	£202.58	£246.44
North Ayrshire	£200.00	£200.00	£200.00	£200.00
North Lanarkshire	£142.82	£162.69	£202.51	£246.33
Orkney Islands	£142.86	£162.73	£202.58	£246.44
Perth & Kinross	£134.47	£153.16	£190.68	£231.91
Renfrewshire	£125.86	£125.86	£125.86	£187.00
Scottish Borders	£127.40	£127.40	£191.06	£191.06
Shetland Islands	£145.00	£165.17	£205.62	£250.14
South Ayrshire	£147.00	£147.00	£177.00	£207.00
South Lanarkshire	£139.33	£158.72	£197.56	£240.30
Stirling	£134.40	£153.09	£190.58	£231.79
West Dunbartonshire	£142.86	£162.73	£202.58	£246.44
West Lothian	£113.81	£141.24	£175.73-175.70	£227.60

4.3. Concluding comments and recommendations

The results of this survey show that the fostering allowances set by local authorities across Scotland vary considerably and the majority are not rising with inflation. The large geographical variation in fostering allowances leads to a postcode lottery when it comes to how much money is provided for caring for children in foster care.

After a decade of campaigning from The Fostering Network and a long-term promise by the Scottish Government (including in the latest Scottish National Party manifesto) there is still no minimum fostering allowance in Scotland.

Allowances are designed to cover the costs of looking after a child but they vary across Scotland in a way that these costs do not. The Scottish Government's stated ambition to 'make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up' cannot be achieved without a national minimum allowance being introduced and funded.

Recommendation:

- **The Scottish Government must introduce and fund a minimum recommended allowance.** This amount must reflect the true costs of looking after a child and they must increase yearly in line with inflation.

5. Continuing Care

Until the beginning of this decade, the majority of fostered young people were required to leave their foster home as soon as they turned 18. This is far earlier than young people outside the care system, who on average leave home at 25⁵, and too early for many fostered young people who often need more support and time as they transition into adulthood.

Since 2015, fostered young people in Scotland have had the right to stay with their foster families up to age 21 in a Continuing Care arrangement which can start when they are 16. A Continuing Care arrangement is not the same as a foster care placement. The young person, who must be a former fostered child, is no longer a looked after child. They are a young adult and a care leaver. They are entitled to support as a care leaver and will be allocated a personal advisor. The foster carer is no longer acting in the capacity of a foster carer for that young adult; they are their 'former foster carer'. These arrangements require local authorities in Scotland to facilitate, monitor and support Continuing Care arrangements for fostered young people.

These types of placements are not governed by fostering services regulations. There are therefore no recommended national minimum allowances for former foster carers in Continuing Care arrangements and many local authorities are calculating these amounts on a case-by-case basis.

We welcome that the Independent Care Review has looked at the implementation issues for Continuing Care, including the lack of an allowance, and we look forward to their conclusions being published next month.

5.1. Results of Continuing Care survey

Below are the key findings and full survey responses (see Table 2).

Key findings:

- Continuing Care allowances given to former foster carers ranged from £88.09 to £292.58 per week. Over the course of a year, this amounts to a significant difference of over £10,000.
- 22 local authorities (68 per cent) provide an allowance for a Continuing Care arrangement at the same rate or above as when the child was in foster care.

⁵ Eurostat. Estimated average age of young people leaving the parent household by sex. April, 2019. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2Tzx4Cy>

Table 2: Former foster carer allowances per week in Continuing Care arrangements compared with allowances provided to foster carers looking after young people aged 16 to 18.

Boxes shaded in blue indicate where former foster care allowances decreased when a placement changed to a Continuing Care arrangement.

Local authority	16-18 years	Continuing Care
Aberdeen City	£233.55	£233.55
Aberdeenshire	£253.89	£253.89
Angus Council	£253.90	£223.90
Argyll & Bute	£240.40	£240.40
Clackmannanshire	£231.79	£150.00
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	£242.00	£242.00
Dumfries & Galloway	£224.77	£160.00 - 224.77
Dundee City	£241.73	£115.00
East Ayrshire	£224.50	Assessed on a case-by-case basis
East Dunbartonshire	£221.13	£221.13
East Lothian	£200.11	£146.99
East Renfrewshire	£222.21	£154.50
Edinburgh	£199.65	£199.65
Falkirk	£226.84	£226.84
Fife	£175.52	£245.00
Glasgow City	£236.60	£286.60
Highland Council	£155.36	£155.36
Inverclyde	£220.05	£220.05
Midlothian	£175.41	£175.41
Moray	£246.44	£246.44
North Ayrshire	£250.00	£250.00
North Lanarkshire	£246.33	£292.58
Orkney Islands	£246.44	£246.44

Perth & Kinross	£231.91	£88.09
Renfrewshire	£187.00	£187.00
Scottish Borders	£191.06	£191.06
Shetland Islands	£250.14	£250.14
South Ayrshire	£207.00	£200.00
South Lanarkshire	£240.30	£240.30
Stirling	£231.79	£175.79
West Dunbartonshire	£246.44	£225.30
West Lothian	£227.60	£227.60

5.2. Concluding comments and recommendations

Despite widespread acceptance that post-18 care is in young people's best interests, there have been a number of issues with the implementation of the new duties that have caused concern for all involved and have resulted in variability in policy, practice, and participation at a local level. The findings of this survey reflect this variability. Although the costs of caring for a young person do change with age, there is no evidence that they change as considerably as do Continuing Care allowances from foster care allowances, nor is it clear that the levels are being set on the basis of any calculation of new cost.

While it is good that the majority of local authorities provide former foster carers the same or more as when the child was not in a Continuing Care arrangement, we need more information to understand why the remaining local authorities give less, some over £100 less. Foster carers should not be worse off for continuing to look after a young person who was in foster care and now in a Continuing Care arrangement. This survey provides information which highlights a postcode lottery in children and young people's allowances across Scotland.

Recommendation for Government:

- Continuing Care minimum allowances for foster carers should be introduced and funded across Scotland, with such an allowance being sufficient to cover the cost of looking after a young person and for this amount to increase each year in line with inflation. This should be introduced at the same time as the national minimum foster care allowances to ensure a continuum of support for children and young people.
- The implementation of the Continuing Care policy should be monitored to ensure practice is in line with national requirements and to share learning from best practice models.

Recommendations for fostering services:

- All local authorities in Scotland should have a Continuing Care policy in place that explains how placements will be funded and supported.
- There should be a reallocation of funds and the housing element of the Continuing Care allowance paid to the children's service and for it to be given directly to the former foster carer so it does not impact on the carer's tax or benefits.

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