

Foster Carers Finance Policy

Appendix 2

This policy aims to provide a clear and comprehensive summary of what payments are made to foster carers and to Looked After Children in Neath Port Talbot. A summary of the payments is available in the *Guide to Foster Carers Finance (Appendix A)*

Payments to foster carers

Foster carers in Neath Port Talbot receive a weekly payment for the children that they care for. The payment consists of two parts; the child's allowances and the foster carers fees.

Foster carers Allowances

Some carers will be eligible for a foster carers fee. The fee is related to the assessed skills, experience, and qualifications of the carers. The service has a banding system for foster carer fees:

Band A	Weekly amount				
	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F
	£127.50	£143	£177.50	£193	£260

Band A

Band A carers are not eligible for the foster carers fee but will receive the child based allowances for each child they care for.

Band B

Band B payments are for children under the age of 10 years. The carer will receive a foster carer fee of **£127.50** per week per child in addition to the child's allowances. Band B carers must have been assessed and approved by the agency as being able to provide a foster placement to any young person who may need to be accommodated by the Local Authority. Band B carers are required to complete a minimum of 3 days core training per year.

Band C

Band C payments are for children under the age of 10 years. The carer will receive a foster carer fee of **£143** per week per child, in addition to the child's allowances. In addition to the requirements of Band B, Band C carers will be required to have completed their Diploma in Child Care and are required to complete a minimum of 3 days core training per year.

Band D

Band D payments are for children aged 11 and over. The carer will receive a foster carer fee of **£177.50** per week per child in addition to the child's allowances. Band D carers must have been assessed and approved by the agency as being able to provide a foster placement to any young person who may need to be accommodated by the Local Authority. Band D carers are required to complete a minimum of 3 days core training per year.

Band E

Band E payments are for children aged 11 and over. The carer will receive a foster carer fee of **£193** per week per child in addition to the child's allowances. Band E carers must have been assessed and approved by the agency as being able to provide a foster placement to any young person who may need to be accommodated by the Local Authority. Band E carers will be required to have completed their Diploma in Child Care and are required to complete a minimum of 3 days core training per year.

Band F

Band F carers receive a foster carer fee of **£260** per week in addition to the child's allowances. In addition to the requirements of Band B and C, carers must meet the Requirements of the Foster Plus Scheme.

Carers are encouraged to progress through the bands and to develop their skills and knowledge. An addendum or reassessment may be required in order to progress to Band B and to Band D

Childrens allowances

In 2011, the Welsh Government introduced the National Minimum Allowances for foster carers. This allowance is the basic allowance that foster carers receive to cover all of the associated costs of looking after child and day to day living including activities, educational expenses transport and day to day equipment.

All foster carers are eligible to receive a weekly age related allowance for each child they care for. The allowance includes payments which should be used towards pocket money and clothing for the child. A holiday allowance is paid for each child who is looked after. This is paid as a one off annual payment rather than within the weekly allowances but it forms part of the overall payments.

Age	Basic	Pocket Money	Clothing	Holiday allowance (paid as a lump sum annually and not included in the weekly allowance)	Total Per week (excluding Holiday element)
0-4	£146.79	0.00	£15.33	£3.89	£162.12

5-10	£124.24	£3.85	£18.48	£4.43	£146.57
11-15	£115.45	£9.73	£20.30	£5.52	£145.48
16-17	£139.93	£15.40	£27.86	£7.05	£183.19

The fostering service does not require foster carers to keep receipts for the money that they spend, but will monitor that allowances are being used appropriately.

Foster Carer Holiday Grant

The Foster Carer Holiday Grant is made in lieu of paid respite payment breaks to Band B, C, D, E, and F carers. We always encourage foster carers to involve the children they care for in their family holidays where appropriate. It is important that children and young people looked after by the department continue to experience holiday opportunities.

In recognition of foster carers' commitment and to enable their family and looked after children to take part in family holidays, a payment of £400 will be paid to eligible carer households. Holiday payments are made retrospectively for the previous year and will be subject to the following criteria:

- Foster Carers approved for one year or more and available for placements on 1st July by Neath Port Talbot CBC and who have successfully completed their first Annual Review.
- Foster Carers who have looked after children or young people on a full time basis for an aggregated 6 month period from 1st July to 30th June in any one year.

Primary carers will only be paid for respite in exceptional circumstances based on the assessed needs of the child and with the prior approval of Senior Management.

Retainers

A retainer to the amount of the foster carers' fees are only payable in the following circumstances:

Following an allegation To all carers for a period of 4 weeks following an allegation being made when the decision is made that placements cease during an investigation.

Band D & E Carers For a period of up to 6 weeks in a 12 month period subject to the foster carer having no children in placement, and subject to them being available to undertake placements at the request of the Local Authority.

To Band F carers

When there are no children in placement (subject to the criteria in the Foster Plus Policy).

Carer Absence

There will be rare occasions where foster carers are unable to look after the children they care for due to unforeseen emergency circumstances, i.e. hospitalisation, illness, family emergency. In these cases and at the discretion of the Fostering Team Manager, provision will be considered to pay the foster carer household, the basic carer allowance, where eligible, for up to seven nights in any one financial year in respect of each child.

Unauthorised Child Absence

For periods of unauthorised child absence, e.g. abscondsions from the primary carer, the basic allowance plus carer allowance, if eligible, will be paid for the first seven nights for the child concerned. Thereafter, payments will be reduced to half of the basic allowance plus half of the carer allowance, if eligible, for a further seven nights for the child concerned. Any further periods of unauthorised absences will be at the discretion and authorisation of the Fostering Team Manager, consideration will be given to paying half the carer allowance in respect of each child per week for any further periods of unauthorised absences. This arrangement will be reviewed fortnightly.

Day Care

Carers identified and agreed support networks should be used for babysitting arrangements when possible in order for Looked After Children to feel fully included in the foster carers family.

Day care will be arranged and paid for when a carer attends training, meetings or appointments when their own support networks are not available.

It is expected that foster carers will pay for childcare in crèches, nurseries, play schemes from their allowances unless there are exceptional circumstances and substantial additional support is required based on the child's assessed needs.

Foster carers may identify support from other foster carers and can pay each other at a pro rata rate. Any arrangements between carers must be agreed in advance with NPT Fostering Service and must be appropriate for the child concerned.

Respite Care/Support Break Arrangements

Foster Carers who provide respite care to primary foster carers and parents.

Requests for respite/support break care can be as a result of the following:

- a) Families experiencing crisis.
- b) Incapacity of parents due to illness, disability, mental illness or inability to control the child's behaviour.
- c) Maintaining children and young people who present challenging behaviour within placement with their primary carers.
- d) Primary carers requiring a support break.

Foster Carers providing respite play a vital role in keeping children within their families and maintaining children within their primary placement. Foster Carers providing support breaks will receive 1/7th of the child basic allowance and carer allowance according to the number of nights. In cases where carers do not receive the pocket money allowance for the child, consideration will be given by the Fostering Team Manager, to provide a discretionary "leisure allowance" of £5.00 per night per child up to a maximum of 3 nights. This allowance is to assist support break carers to provide leisure and social activities to Looked After Children whilst in their care.

For primary foster carers requiring respite - deductions will be calculated at 1/7th of the basic and carer allowance according to the number of nights that respite/break are required. Primary foster carers will continue to receive pocket money and clothing allowances for the child.

Foster carers who require respite/support break provision to help maintain a primary placement *may* continue to receive full allowances. All requests for the main carer to continue to receive payment during respite periods must be made in advance and be authorised by the Principal Officer for the Fostering Service. Such requests will only be considered in exceptional circumstances only.

Shared Care Arrangements

Foster carers provide shared care in cases where children and young people receive ongoing care between their parents and a foster carer. Shared care enables children and young people to maintain family and community life and eases the pressures on families who may be experiencing difficulties.

In shared care arrangements where the child returns home no more than 3 nights a week and the foster carer is expected to be available at all times in the event of a breakdown whilst at home, the carer will receive full child and carer allowances including pocket money and clothing.

Any other shared care arrangements between foster carers and parents where foster carers are looking after children and young people for less than 3 nights a week will be classed as a respite care arrangement. Foster carers will receive 1/7th of the Child Basic Allowance and Carer Allowance according to the number of nights.

In exceptional circumstances and in accordance with the Child Care Plan, consideration will be given to provide a discretionary payment for shared care arrangements between foster carers and residential establishments and foster carers providing a mother and baby placement. These payments are at the discretion of the Fostering Team Manager, following an assessment of the placement requirements.

Equipment

It is the responsibility of the foster carer to ensure that the basic home environment is suitable for a child to live in and has the basic equipment available such as a bed, bedding and basic storage.

We recognise that some children will require additional equipment, and approved foster carers will be able to request to loan equipment.

Items that can be provided on loan include:

- Cots.
- Cot/moses basket mattresses.
- Car seats.
- Buggy's.
- Initial baby equipment.

Items that are not included and should be provided as part of the household furnishing include:

- Beds.
- Bedding.
- Wardrobes/storage.
- Replacement of basic baby items such as bottles, sterilisers.
- Toys.

All requests from foster carers for the loan of equipment should be made through the carer's respective Fostering Social Worker who will undertake an assessment of requirements. All equipment should be kept in good working order.

NPT Fostering Team will be responsible for ordering and buying all equipment. Authorisation of the purchase of equipment will be at the discretion of the Fostering Team Manager. The fostering service will be unable to reimburse payments made by carers for items purchased by the carer unless there are exceptional circumstances and that this is agreed in advance.

Annual Service Recognition Award (see appendix b for criteria)

In recognition of the value the authority places on its foster carers an annual service recognition award event will be held where foster carers will be awarded for their length of service. The event aims to publicise the rewards and challenges of fostering as well as providing an opportunity to congratulate and show our appreciation to our existing foster care families.

E Care

Approved mainstream Foster Carers who are providing full time placements to children and young people will be eligible to receive a PC, printer and basic software for use by themselves, their own children and any children and young people who are looked after. Provision of the equipment is subject to a loan agreement and remains the property of the Local Authority and will need to be returned should a carer be unavailable for placements for a long period of time or upon deregistration. The Local Authority can set up and fund Internet access via a designated ISP and provide technical and training support to foster carer families. Use of the equipment is regularly monitored by the Council and inappropriate use may lead to the removal of the equipment.

Foster carers who have E Care equipment in their home are expected to adhere to the on line safety policy.

Travel Expenses

Foster carers will be able to claim reasonable travel expenses for the children that they are looking after. Expenses must relate to journeys undertaken with the Looked After Child or on business relating to the that child and should not include journeys which would routinely form part of the activities of the household or meetings that are not related to the child.

Carers will be reimbursed reasonable travel costs to attend training, and to attend the foster carers support groups (including the monthly meeting of the foster carers association).

Travel claims should be submitted within three months of the journey being undertaken and will be payable at the current rate set by the Local Authority. Travel claims are subject to approval by management and will be routinely checked for accuracy.

Use of Taxi's

The provision of taxi's for foster children will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and will require advance approval by the Fostering Team Manager and Principal Officer.

Wherever possible NPT fostering will aim to recruit foster carers who are able to drive and have access to a car/or provide a means of transport to the children in their care.

Clothing Allowance

A weekly clothing allowance, in accordance with the child's age, will be paid after the fourth week of placement.

This clothing allowance is intended to cover all expenditure including school uniform and sports kits. The only exception which will be considered is where children are placed and require an immediate change of school. Such payments should be agreed with the Fostering Team Manager in advance.

Emergency Clothing Grant

An initial clothing grant, up to the equivalent of 4 weeks clothing allowance may be claimed if the child's own clothing is inadequate when they are initially placed in foster care. This will need to be agreed by the Fostering Team Manager at the point of placement. Receipts for clothing purchased should be processed for payment by the Fostering Social Worker.

The emergency clothing grant is only payable for new placements and not for changes of placement.

Annual Holiday Payment

The holiday allowance is paid annually in accordance with the child's age. Payments will be made to carer households on 1st July. Carers must ensure that children in foster care are afforded the opportunity to take part in school trips although it is recognised that this does not include carers funding expensive school trips abroad.

Foster carers will be expected to pay for school trips up to the amount of £50. For trips over this amount the Local Authority will consider on an individual basis a contribution towards the cost of educational trips which are required as part of the school/college curriculum for study purposes (such as geography field trips). The Local Authority is unable to fund the cost of other 'leisure' holidays arranged through the school/college.

The Guidance for National Minimum Payments notes that the payments to carers are intended to cover some aspects of holidays, travel and accommodation costs, whether home or abroad. Within Neath Port Talbot the holiday element of the payments have been broken down as follows:

	Weekly holiday payment
0-4	£3.89

5-10	£4.43
11-15	£5.52
16-17	£7.05

Following feedback from foster carers the decision was made in Neath Port Talbot that the weekly payments would be accrued and paid as a one off annual lump payment. In 2016/17 there will be further consultation with carers to review the current payment arrangements to ensure that all carers receive allowances that fall in line with the National Minimum Allowances.

Clubs and Activities

It is important that children are supported to participate in safe social and leisure activities in their communities. This should be encouraged by foster carers. It is expected that the cost of activities should be covered by the child's allowances.

Crèche and Play Schemes

It is expected that foster carers will pay for childcare in crèches, nurseries and play schemes from their allowances unless there are exceptional circumstances and substantial additional support is required based on the child's assessed needs. Approval should be sought prior to any arrangements being set up.

Christmas or other Special Religious Festival Allowances

A Christmas Allowance or other Special Religious Festival Allowances, in accordance with the child's age, will be automatically paid with the allowances approximately four weeks before the festival. For new admissions into care, payment will be made where it is anticipated that the placement will extend over the festival period (see Table 2).

It is expected that the full amount of the allowance be allocated to the purchase of gifts and associated costs of the festival for each child.

Birthday Allowances

A Birthday Allowance, will be automatically paid with the weekly allowances which precede the child's birthday. For new admissions into care, payment will be made where it is anticipated that the placement will continue to the child's birthday. It is expected that the full amount of the birthday allowance be allocated to the purchase of gifts and associated costs of the birthday for each child. Any amount not spent should be placed in the child's bank account.

Pocket Money

A weekly allowance is provided for each child over the age of 4. This allowance should be used at the carers discretion for younger children but it is expected that as

the child reaches sufficient age and understanding that they are at first given an element of the pocket money rising to all of it (in line with age) to assist them to develop financial and budgeting skills. Pocket money should be spent on items of the child/young persons choice and should only be used for toiletries where the young person wishes to spend over and above what has been provided by the foster carer. Children should be encouraged to save part of their pocket money.

Bank Accounts

All children and young people in foster care should have a bank account and they should be encouraged to save at least small amounts from their pocket money.

Foster Carers should assist children to open bank accounts and help them to access them. Where pocket money/Christmas/birthday allowances have not been fully spent Foster Carers should assist children to deposit the money in the child's bank account. For older children the bank account could be used to deposit the clothing allowance until it is required. Access to the bank account should be dependent on the age and understanding of the child and should be agreed with the child's Social Worker.

Discretionary Payments

It is the expectation that the allowances described in this policy will meet the needs of children placed with foster carers. It is recognised however, that there may be exceptional circumstances where Foster Carers will need to incur expenditure on behalf of children that is not accounted for by the allowances described above. In this event, Foster Carers must seek advice from their Fostering Social Worker **before** incurring such expenditure. Only if it has been confirmed that approval has been given for a discretionary payment can Foster Carers be reimbursed for this expenditure.

Examples of discretionary payments may be the replacement of large items if damaged by a child (where the carers insurance will not cover the replacement cost). Discretionary payments should not be used to meet the cost of activities that the child is involved in such as sports clothes/prom clothes. Young people should be encouraged to save for such items from their clothing and pocket money allowances.

Over Payments

Any over payments made to carers will be reclaimed. Carers will be notified when payments will be reclaimed. When a child or young person moves placement, any allowances that need to transfer between carers (such as unspent holiday payments) will transfer to the new carer.

Payments During Allegations

On rare occasions when an allegation is made it may be necessary to suspend foster placements while an investigation takes place. In such circumstances, the carer fee will be paid for a period of 4 weeks.

Foster Carer Finance Summary

Appendix A

Foster carer finance consists of:

Fostering allowances for the child

Allowances for the child are paid for each child. The amount paid depends on the child's age and is based on the National Minimum Allowances for Foster Carers that is recommended by Welsh Government.

Foster carer fees (for carers who are Band A and above)

The foster carers fee is paid to carers for each child that is placed with them. The fee acknowledges the skills required and any training that has been undertaken.

Allowances for the child	
Age	Weekly amount
0-4	£162.12
5-10	£146.57
11-15	£145.48
16-17	£183.19

Carers fees

Band A	Weekly amount				
	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F
	£127.50	£143	£177.50	£193	£260

* see finance policy for the definition of each band

How are payments made

The fostering allowances and fees are paid weekly, one week in arrears. Generally, payments are made on a Friday (but there may be some changes during bank holidays). Payments are made by BACS – a direct payment is made into a bank account.

How are allowances broken down

Allowances for the child should cover the everyday and regular expenses associated with caring for a foster child.

Age	Basic	Pocket Money	Clothing	Total Per week
0-4	£146.79	0.00	£15.33	£162.12
5-10	£124.24	£3.85	£18.48	£146.57
11-15	£115.45	£9.73	£20.30	£145.48
16-17	£139.93	£15.40	£27.86	£183.19

The basic allowance covers:

Food Including eating at home and eating out. It includes the cost of school and food provided for contact. For children aged 0-4 it also covers the cost of nappies, wipes etc.

Clothing The clothing allowance covers the cost of all clothing including school uniform and kit for activities and clothes for special events such as proms.

Transport Foster Carers will be reimbursed for reasonable travel expense which relate to the child or relate to training. All travel claim forms are monitored and need to be completed within 3 months of the journey. Taxi's will only be provided in exceptional circumstances with prior approval.

Activities The allowance covers all personal needs including savings, and activities such as parent and toddler groups, after school activities, swimming lessons, sports clubs and musical lessons etc. The allowance should also cover school trips and activities. It includes general equipment needed for school or clubs.

Savings We encourage all foster carers to open saving accounts for children in their care.

Household Payment towards the cost of utility and energy costs, general wear and tear and repair of furniture, insurances and other costs associated with the home.

Additional Payments

Age	Holiday *	Christmas/religious festival	Birthday
0-4	£202.44	£201.22	£101.22
5-10	£230.58	£215.29	£115.29
11-15	£287.14	£243.57	£143.57
16-17	£366.38	£283.19	£183.19

*the holiday payment is made up of a weekly amount based on the age of the child. it is payable in a lump sum annually. See Finance Policy for weekly amount.

Discretionary payments	Details	Amount	Who can agree
Emergency clothing grant	Payable when carers accept a placement in an emergency situation and the child has little or no belongings	Carers will be able to be reimbursed up to an equivalent amount of 4 weeks clothing allowance based on the age of the child. This amount will be agreed with the fostering manager at the point of placement.	Fostering service manager
School holidays/trips	Foster carers are required to pay for trips up to the value of £50. Consideration will be given to the Local Authority contributing to trips over this amount where the trip is linked to the school curriculum. Ordinarily payment of trips should be saved from out of the child allowances	Discretionary consideration in circumstances when the trip is educational and linked to the school curriculum	Fostering service manager or Childrens community team manager in advance of trips being booked
Travel	Travel expenses will be paid for journeys that are made in relation to looked after children.	45p per mile	Fostering service manager
Equipment	We will order and pay for some equipment that is required for children *see policy for details	Variable	Fostering service manager in advance of equipment being ordered
Passports	Payments for first passport applications and birth certificates (where needed) will be funded	Passports and agreements to travel should be obtained prior to a holiday being booked. Requests should not	Fostering or Childrens community team manager

		be made for late applications	
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Appendix B

Eligibility Criteria for Foster Carers Annual Award

- The award is applicable to eligible Foster Carers who are approved by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.
- The award takes the form of a financial gift presented either by cheque or vouchers for the following number of years approved.

1 year	£100
5 years	£250
10 years	£500
15 years	£750
20 years	£1000
25 years	£1500

- The awards will be presented on an annual basis.
- In order to recognise and encourage the professional development of Foster Carers the award will depend not only on the length of time carers have been approved, but also on the training they have undertaken and on achieving performance targets as agreed in their Personal and Professional Development Plan.
- In order to qualify for an award, carers will have been approved for the above period of time on or at 30th June.
- Foster Carers who have looked after children or young people on a full time basis for an aggregated 6 month period from 1st July to 30th June in any one year.
- Where carers have been approved, de registered then re-approved, the number of years approval will run from the most recent approval.
- The award will be given per carer household and will be based on the number of years the longest serving carer within the household has been approved.
- Carers will continue to receive an individual certificate acknowledging the number of year's service they have achieved. Carers who reach 10, 15, or 20 years approval will in addition be presented with a gift.
- Approved carers who have not been available to offer placements for a considerable period of time (not including short breaks, or periods of absence through illness or special circumstances) shall receive the award backdated to the end of their most recent placement.
- Where there are issues over the approval and de-registration status of carers, the award will not be presented until these issues are resolved.

Any queries over the date of approval or eligibility should in the first instance be addressed with the allocated Fostering Officer. Where issues cannot be resolved the matter will be dealt with by the Principal Officer or Head of Service.