

# FOSTERING ALLOWANCES AND FEES POLICY

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## FOSTERING ALLOWANCES

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Foster carers receive a maintenance allowance to cover the cost of caring for a child. The Department for Education sets national minimum rates for these allowances each financial year. The level of allowance is reviewed by the Council every year to ensure that the level of allowance for each age band is at or above the rate recommended by the Department for Education.

The current rates of allowances paid can be found on the Herefordshire [Foster carer resources](#) webpage.

Children's savings are deducted before payment of allowances to foster carers. The details of this are explained in the [Pocket money and savings policy](#).

## FOSTERING FEES

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Foster carer with a child in placement are paid a fostering fee in addition to the maintenance allowance. Fees are paid in recognition of the valued role of foster carers. Fostering fees are paid to approved foster carers dependent upon their level of skill and experience and are paid for each child placed.

There are five levels of payment for foster carers in Herefordshire:

- Foundation Level for kinship carers who have been temporarily approved as foster carers but have not yet attended preparation group training.
- Level 1 for newly approved foster carers who have attended preparation group training but have not yet completed their mandatory training or training, support and development (TSD) standards portfolio.
- Level 2 for carers who have completed mandatory training, TSD standards and are maintaining minimum requirements.
- Level 3 for carers who are providing specialisms and good practice required by the fostering service.
- Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support Service (HIPSS) and Alternative to Residential Care (ARC) for carers providing placements to children and young people moving from residential care or would otherwise require residential care.

The full criteria for each level of carer is available on the [Foster Carer resources webpage](#).

The scheme aims to provide a clear career pathway for foster carers, rewarding and supporting ongoing post-approval development and child-focussed foster care.

Progression on the scheme is dependent upon ongoing evidence of competence. Although experience and attendance at post-approval workshops are important factors they do not guarantee progression. There is, for example, no automatic progression based upon experience alone.

Regular attendance at posts-approval workshops is seen as an essential component of the scheme for two reasons: it promotes post-approval learning and development; and it provides opportunities for experienced foster carers to share experiences and knowledge with other carers. Consequently, although relevant training run by other organisations may be accepted by the Team Manager in specifically agreed cases, the general expectation is that the workshops will be a significant source of post-approval training for Herefordshire's foster carers.

While it is hoped that the majority of foster carers will progress to at least Level 2 of the scheme, those who fail to meet the requirements of a specific level may be downgraded to a lower level. For example, if a Level 2 carer fails to attend post-approval workshops or fails to offer high quality foster care they may be regraded through the foster care review process to Level 1. Significant practice concerns may result in a recommendation to terminate approval as foster carers.

Foster carers who, for personal reasons such as bereavement or a significant change in family circumstances, need to take a break from fostering, will generally resume their fostering at the same level as the one they were on when they stopped fostering.

Progression through the scheme is achieved through the foster care review process, the means established through regulation for assessing the quality of foster care provision.

In order to ensure consistency and independent scrutiny, all decisions related to progression within the scheme are based upon a foster care review.

Payments related to progression will commence following approval by the Agency Decision Maker. Foster carers can request that their review is brought forward if they wish to apply for a higher level.

All foster carers will have a development plan setting out their learning and development plans for each year. An action plan setting out what is required to enable a foster carer who wishes to progress to the next level will be included within this plan.

### **Foster placement plus**

There are placements that do not meet the criteria of other schemes, but nevertheless require additional skills to 'mainstream' placements. Placements such as babies and young children with complex health needs e.g. oxygen dependent, substance withdrawing babies, severe autism, young people at risk of exploitation require carers to undertake such things as complex medical responsibilities, restriction of liberty, and/or consistent sleep deprivation for carers.

A discretionary fostering fees can be made by agreement with Head of Service.

### **Exceptional skills payment**

Foster carers can be rewarded for significant achievements for children and young people in line with their care plans. An exceptional skills payment can be made for a child covering a three month period of outcomes achieved. If a second three months period of outcomes is achieved a new application and decision will be reached.

Criteria for exceptional skills are:

- that a child/young person has achieved exceptional outcomes against their care plan which have been sustained for any one 3 month period; and
- the skill and commitment of the carers have gone "above and beyond" good quality standard care and have they been a primary contributor to enabling the child to reach these outcomes.

Exceptional skills payments will be agreed by the Head of Service upon recommendation of the Fostering Team manager.

### **Tax**

The Fostering fee is taxable and foster carers can obtain advice from [The Fostering Network](#). The local authority provides free membership to The Fostering Network for all of their approved foster carers.

## **BIRTHDAY, HOLIDAY AND FESTIVAL ALLOWANCES**

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Foster carers are paid one week's fostering allowance for each child's birthday and at Christmas. These payments are made automatically in the payment run prior to the child's birthday and in the first payment run of December. If any foster carer would prefer the festival allowance to be paid at a different time of year then this should be requested through their Fostering Social Worker.

Foster carers are paid up to two week's fostering allowance towards the cost of a holiday each year. The total amount can be claimed in separate instalments if the fostering family are planning more than one break during the year.

If a fostering family choose not to go away on holiday they can apply for the holiday allowance to contribute to the cost of day excursions.

Foster carers apply for the holiday allowance by requesting the payment via their Fostering Social Worker.

An additional discretionary holiday allowance of up to £200 can be made in exceptional circumstances and would relate to the specific needs of the child. Any additional payments must be agreed in advance by the Fostering Team manager and cannot be assumed.

## **RESPIRE PAYMENTS**

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### **Respite carers**

Foster carers providing respite breaks for children will receive the same allowances and fees as other foster carers on a pro rata basis. Respite carers who provide respite for children and young people ordinarily placed under HIPSS scheme or any other enhanced fee payment, will receive pro-rata payments of main carers fees rather than the standard fee level.

An activities payment is paid for each weekend respite stay to ensure children have an enjoyable experience of respite care and that carers are not funding activities themselves.

Respite carers are paid the hourly day care rate for time spent attending meetings and supervision and pro-rata equivalent of their fee for attending training

If respite arrangements are agreed and cancelled with less than 2 weeks' notice by the main foster carer or the fostering service, then respite carers receive the equivalent fees payment as if respite had gone ahead.

### **Payments in lieu of respite**

Every foster carer is entitled to 14 days paid respite each year during which time they receive full fees and 60% of allowances. Some foster carers choose not to use this entitlement, either due to their own personal circumstances or recognising the impact for some children and young people of going to a respite placement. To ensure that foster carers who choose not to make use of this entitlement are not disadvantaged these foster carers will receive an additional payment in lieu of respite not used at the end of the financial year.

## RETAINER PAYMENTS

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### **General foster carers**

After a placement ends, if there are no children or young people in placement then 50% of fostering fees will be paid for 4 weeks but can be extended up to 12 weeks in exceptional circumstances with agreement of head of service. The retainer payment will end if another placement is made with the carer during this period. No retainer is paid where carers give notice on a placement.

### **Retainer payments for carers under investigation**

If children are removed from the care of their foster carer as a consequence of a safeguarding investigation under S.47 of the Children Act 1989 then foster carers are paid a retention fee of 50% fees and 60% of child related allowances for each child/young person moved for the duration of the investigation or until the child/young person(s) are returned, if earlier.

If the investigation concludes that the allegations against the carer were substantiated then payment of the retainer fees cease immediately.

## ADDITIONAL PAYMENTS

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### **Transport**

Foster carers can claim all transport costs specifically related to their fostering. It is expected that, unless specifically agreed by the Fostering Service, carers will be responsible for the transport of children in placement. The transport costs of those outings which can be considered a part of ordinary family life – e.g. weekly food shopping or family trips – are included in the weekly fostering allowance and cannot be claimed for.

### **Purchase of cars**

Where it can be demonstrated that the size of a foster carer's car has been increased as a direct result of taking on additional fostering tasks, Herefordshire Council will consider financial support for vehicle purchase. Such payments will be discretionary and subject to the agreement of the Head of Service responsible for the Fostering service. The replacement of cars of a similar size will not be eligible for financial support.

### **Clothing grants**

The cost of clothing is included within the fostering allowance.

An emergency clothing grant for each child in any one year can be made at the discretion of the Fostering Team Manager. It will be based upon evidence that a child's level of clothing is inadequate, either upon emergency placement or as a result of excessive loss or damage during their time with the foster carer.

### **Uniform grants**

Uniform grants will be paid when a child starts at a new school on production of receipts. Replacement school uniforms should be paid for from the maintenance allowance.

If a child or young person requires a uniform to take part in work or a social activity then a grant can be made for this on production of receipts.

## SESSIONAL RATES

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Foster carers providing additional support on behalf of the fostering service will be paid the national minimum wage on a sessional basis.

Any arrangements agreed between foster carers will be paid for by the foster carer from their allowances and Fostering Social Workers must be notified in advance.

## STAYING PUT ALLOWANCES

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'Staying Put' accommodation provides for young people aged 18+ to remain living with their previous foster carers and is available to young adults who were placed with foster carers immediately prior to their 18th birthday. This is not an extension to the fostering placement but rather a supportive environment for young people to develop their independence skills further.

Staying put carers are paid the top band Fostering Allowance (16-17 years) plus appropriate fee level for the carers.

Young people are expected to contribute £15 per week or £25 if they are provided with meals.

## OVERPAYMENTS

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If a foster carer is overpaid then the money will be recovered in the next payment due. If the child is no longer living with the foster carer at the time of the overpayment being picked up then foster carers will need to make arrangements to pay back the money in full. The overpayment can be deducted from payments for the next placement as long as this is within 3 months of being notified of the overpayment. It is a foster carers responsibility to inform the team at the earliest opportunity if any payments are made that were not expected.

## COUNCIL TAX EXEMPTION

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Herefordshire approved foster carers are entitled to a 100% discount on their council tax from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. Details of how to apply for the discount are found on the [Herefordshire Council website](#).