



St. Helens
Council

People's Services Department

Foster Care Payments Guide

Introduction

This guide is intended as a reference for social work staff and foster carers. It is a guide indicating the financial support foster carers can expect to receive. This guide concerns both recruited general foster carers and kinship foster carers.

1. The Fostering Allowance

All foster carers will be paid an age related allowance for each child. These payments are intended to cover the daily cost of caring for a child. The allowances are paid a week in arrears and a week in advance. Payments are made for the day of the child's arrival and each day that they remain in placement, but not for the day of departure from the placement. All payments will be made directly into foster carer's bank accounts. Only in exceptional circumstances will cash payments be made; this will be at the discretion of the Head of Service.

2. Age Related Allowance Table

Age of Child	TOTAL (per week)
0 - 4	£135
5 - 10	£150
1 - 15	£180
16+	£220

2.1 Additional Fees for Carers

From 1 January 2019 the fee based scheme for foster carer payments will be based on four levels, which are set out in detail below. Movement up through levels is based on training, skills and experience. The fee is paid in addition to the age related allowance (as indicated in the table above).

2.2 Basic Level

All newly approved foster carers (including kinship) will receive the basic age related allowance as outlined above. This allowance should be used to cover the cost of the child/young person's care needs including the cost of utility bills, food, transportation, pocket money and the replacement of clothing/shoes. The allowance also makes provision for the child's involvement in clubs and activities.

2.3 Level One

In addition to the basic age related allowance, a professional fee of £75 per week will be paid to all foster carers on completion of their Training Standards and Development portfolio. It is also an expectation that foster carers should maintain their placement record, be available to take a placement and engage with supervision.

2.4 Level Two

In addition to the basic age related allowance, a professional fee of £150 per week will be paid to all foster carers. At this level, foster carers should be able to take on more challenging placements and be willing to become involved in the mentoring and training of other foster carers.

2.5 Level Three

In addition to the basic age related allowance, a professional fee of £250 per week will be paid to all foster carers. At this level, foster carers should have completed more specialist training and be able to care for the most challenging young people. For level three foster carers caring for young people aged 16 and over the fee will be £300, this is to acknowledge the additional skills needed to work with the most challenging young people of this age group.

2.6 Minimum Guarantee

For all foster carers, we will offer a minimum guarantee that they receive no less than £250 per week payable upon completion of their Training Standards and Development Portfolio.

3 Foster Care Fee and Allowance Table

	Age 0 - 4	Age 5 -10	Age 11 -15	Age 16+
Basic Level	£135	£150	£180	£220
Level 1	£210	£225	£255	£295
Level 2	£285	£300	£330	£370
Level 3	£385	£400	£430	£520

Actual payments will be adjusted to reflect the minimum guarantee of £250 noted at Paragraph 3.6. For example, the actual payment made to a Basic Level carer with a child age 0 - 4 will be increased from £135 to £250.

4 Foster Care Progression

Generally, all new carers will receive the 'minimum guarantee'. Carers who have specific skills and are willing to care for the most challenging children and young people may commence at a higher level if this is recommended at Fostering Panel and the recommendation is ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. However, progression from the Basic Level to Level 3 is possible for all carers to achieve, providing the relevant criteria are met.

The approval status of all foster carers and their subsequent fee level is reviewed annually.

It is an expectation that Foster carers on levels 1-3 provide evidence of engagement in training, comply with statutory checks and recording requirements. This will be monitored during supervisory visits and as part of the annual review process. Failure to demonstrate appropriate engagement will result in the foster carer's fee level being reviewed and in some instances this could result in them being paid the allowance only (not the minimum guarantee).

5 Disability Living Allowances

Foster carers may be able to claim this allowance from the Department for Work and Pensions if the child they are caring for has a disability (this should not affect the foster care allowance). Foster carers need to inform the child's social worker that they intend to apply for, or are in receipt of, Disability Living Allowance.

Once in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, carers are expected to use the allowance in a sensible manner on behalf of the child, for example by using it to purchase particular special toys or equipment. The supervising social worker will help further with specific ideas for administering the allowance for the particular child if required.

Foster carers are required to evidence how they spend the Disability Living Allowance to both their fostering social worker and to the child's social worker.

6 Additional Allowances

6.1 Holiday Allowance

Carers are expected to include children on their family holidays, especially those children in long-term placements. A holiday allowance is paid to foster carers in addition to the weekly fostering allowance. This allowance amounts to two weeks of the age related allowance. This allowance can also be used towards the cost of day trips and weekend breaks.

6.2 Birthday Allowance and Religious Festival Allowance

Birthday allowances are paid to foster carers in addition to the weekly fostering allowance. The birthday allowance is equivalent to one week's age related allowance.

Religious festival allowance is paid to foster carers in addition to the weekly fostering allowance. The religious/celebration allowance is equivalent to one week's age related allowance.

These allowances will be paid in advance to allow sufficient time for the purchase of presents and other celebratory items.

6.3 Child Specific Payments

For children who are assessed as having more complex needs above those reasonably expected to be met by the standard payment, then consideration can be made to offering a child specific payment of up to an additional £400 per week. Any requests for a child specific payment should be presented to the Head of Service for Permanence in the first instance and this will then be ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

The ongoing need for a child specific payment will then be considered as part of the foster carer's annual review.

6.4 Organised School Trips/Holidays

The cost of school day trips is to be met from the fostering allowance.

The cost of school holidays, which are an integral part of the child's curriculum, should be discussed with your supervising social worker and approval for the cost of the holiday must be obtained from the Fostering Team Manager before any commitment is made with the school. Consideration will be given to meeting the cost of one school holiday up to a maximum of £300 during the primary phase of education and one school holiday up to a maximum of £500 during the secondary phase.

6.5 Leisure Activities for Looked after Children

It is important that alongside a positive education, children have access to a range of leisure activities. All children should be encouraged to develop individual hobbies and interests. We would expect these costs to be met from the fostering allowance e.g. weekly subscriptions, cinema, sports, Brownies and Scouts.

6.6 Initial Clothing

When a child is first placed with the foster carer, they may require an initial set of clothing. If this is the case please contact the supervising social worker to discuss requirements. A contribution of up to a maximum of £75 may be available. Every effort must be made to obtain the child's clothing and belongings from home, as it is important that children have familiar objects around them. There is a requirement that foster carers will provide a child with adequate clothing when they leave their placement and a suitable suitcase or hold all for their clothes and belongings.

6.7 School Uniform

When a child starts a new school which requires a uniform, an allowance of up to a maximum of £100 will be given towards the cost. Any requirements should be discussed with the supervising social worker. It is the foster carer's responsibility to replace any worn or lost uniform items after the initial uniform has been purchased.

6.8 Protective Clothing and Tools

As young people move into employment or training schemes, specific clothing or tools and equipment may be required. Any requirements should be discussed with your supervising social worker in the first instance. A final decision on any award will be made by the Agency Decision Maker

6.9 Transport

Foster carers will be reimbursed for the cost of fuel incurred when transporting children in their care on essential child related journeys such as transport to and from medical appointments, family contact and when attending meetings, concerning children in their care. The mileage rate will be paid at 52 pence per mile which is equivalent to the casual user mileage rate paid to Council Officers.

For foster carers transporting children on public transport a discussion should be held with the supervising social worker as depending on circumstances it may be easier and more cost effective to reimburse the cost of weekly/monthly tickets than single journeys.

Transport costs for day to day travel are funded as part of the allowance as detailed at paragraph 3.2.

6.10 Child Care Costs or Nursery, After School Clubs and Holiday Clubs

Generally carers are expected to pay these costs out of their fostering payments, unless there are extenuating circumstances based on the child's needs. It may be that the child or young person has medical or emotional needs over and above those of other looked after children and would benefit from attending these facilities, in which case consideration will be given to reimbursement of the costs as a child specific payment. A final decision on any award will be made by the Agency Decision Maker.

7 Pocket Money

The fostering allowance includes a pocket money component, which should be given to children on a weekly basis. Suggested amounts for each age group are as follows and children/young people should be made aware of their entitlements.

Age Group	Amount
0 - 4 years	£ 5.00
5 -10 years	£ 7.50
11 - 12 years	£ 10.00
13 -14 years	£ 12.50
15 - 16 years	£ 15.00

Carers of children under the age of five years should use the pocket money element, to purchase appropriate toys or put into savings. All children should be encouraged to save part of their pocket money each week.

8 Recruitment

A recruitment fee of £100 will be paid, when carers introduce prospective foster carers to the service who then go on to foster for St Helens.

9 Payments to Carers Facing an Allegation who have Child/(ren) Removed as a Result

Where carers are subject to an allegation and a child or children placed with them are removed as a result, the carer will continue to receive the fee element of their allowance for a period of up to four weeks. Should an investigation still be ongoing after this period, the situation will be referred to the Agency Decision Maker.

10 Equipment

Foster carers may already have some basic equipment to enable them to undertake the fostering task. If not, basic equipment and/or materials will be provided at the start of the placement. This would include items such as beds and bedding, chests of drawers, prams, highchairs, car seats. If none of the required items are readily available a request for new items must be made via the supervising social worker. All requests for necessary safety equipment for the home will be considered.

11 Accommodation

If accommodation problems are preventing a long term foster carer from taking another child or meeting the needs of an existing foster child, help may be available in exceptional circumstances. Please seek the advice in the first instance from your supervising social worker.

12 Overpayment of Fostering Allowance

If a foster carer receives an overpayment, they are required to notify the fostering Service. Arrangements will then be made to repay this amount. The Council will write to advise foster carers that they have been overpaid and arrangements will be made to repay the amount.

13 Young People

13.1 Young People of Working Age

As young people prepare for independence and are in receipt of their own income, it is reasonable to expect them to contribute to buying their own clothes, toiletries or leisure activities.

13.2 Working Towards Independence

Once a foster child has reached their seventeenth birthday, future financial arrangements will need to be discussed at the child's next review. Normally, the fostering allowance will cease when a child reaches the age of eighteen, as they are no longer 'looked after' and the carer is no longer acting as a foster carer.

However, there is an option to pursue a "Staying Put" arrangement if the young person wishes to continue to live with the foster carer. This will be looked at twelve months before the young person's eighteenth birthday within their pathway plan. If this option is agreed, the young person will be expected to make a contribution to this arrangement either from their wages or benefits.

13.3 Further Education

If the foster child stays on at school or attends college or university after the age of eighteen an ongoing fostering allowance may be paid in order to support their continued education. This should be considered as part of the pathway planning process.

14 Taxation and Benefits

Every individual is liable for their own tax and all carers must ensure they are familiar with the current foster care taxation rules. Some carers will find they may have to pay tax and they must be aware it is the responsibility of the individual carer and not St Helens Council.

Similarly, carers in receipt of income related benefits will need to discuss the implications of increased foster care allowances with their local benefits office.

Further information can be found on the HM Revenue and Customs website (www.hmrc.gov.uk) by typing 'foster care relief' into the search box. Carers can also access information leaflets published by The Fostering Network and Foster Talk.

15 National Insurance Credits

National insurance credits may be claimed by foster carers depending upon individual circumstances. These credits can help to fill gaps in a person's national insurance record, to make sure that certain benefits including the state pension are qualified for.

Further information can be accessed through the www.gov.uk website regarding these credits.

16 Review of the Payments Guide

The Foster Care Payments Guide, including the level of allowances/fees, will be reviewed on an annual basis.