

POLICY ON FOSTERING ALLOWANCES



Introduction

This paper has been produced to outline to foster carers and social workers Foster Care Link's policy on fostering allowances.

Statutory Framework

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 requires fostering services to ensure that each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments must be made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees must be reviewed annually (Standard 28)

Standards requires there to be a written policy on fostering allowances that is:

- Well publicised
- Provided annually to each carer (if updated)

The carer must receive clear information about allowances and expenses payable and how to access them before a child is placed.

Annual Review of Allowances

The Directors of Foster Care Link and the registered manager will review the policy for and level of allowances on an annual basis. Changes to the policy and rates payable will normally be effective from 1st April each year.

A copy of the revised payment rates will be sent to each carer with the first payment in the new financial year i.e. with the 31st April monthly remittance advice.

Standard Allowance

All carers will receive a weekly standard allowance based on the age of the child.

The age bands used are:

- 0 – 11
- 12 – 18

The standard allowance is made up of two elements. The first is the cost element, based on the national rate recommended by the Fostering Network for the majority of the age in the relevant band.

The second is a reward element at a rate determined annually by Foster Care Link.

Religious Festival Payments

Carers will receive a payment of £50 whenever a child is in placement during the major significant religious festival for the child (usually Eid-ul-Fitr but on rare occasions for non-Muslim children on Christmas/Diwali etc). This should cover costs of gifts, clothes

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etc. and should be spent fully on the foster child. This allowance is payable once a year only. Also see below.

For the Islamic festival of Eid-ul-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice) a Qurbani (sacrifice) will be arranged by Foster Care Link for Muslim children in care, with the aim of children in a Third World country benefiting.

Birthday Allowance

For children that celebrate birthdays (as many Muslim families do not), carers will receive a payment of £50, again this should be spent fully on the child. For children that do not celebrate birthdays, Foster Care Link will pay £100 on Eid-ul-Fitr and will not make any payment on the birthday. This is to ensure that all children are treated fairly and receive the same amount annually.

Clothing

Initial clothing grant

It is anticipated that when a child is placed that they will bring their own clothing with them. However, it is acknowledged that in many cases additional finance will be needed to bring clothing to an acceptable standard.

An initial clothing grant of up to £200 will be payable in appropriate cases subject to agreement with the placing authority. This is normally to be agreed at the time of placement by the child's social worker and Foster Care Link at the placement planning meeting. On some occasions we may ask the foster carer to use the on-going clothing allowance to cover this cost.

It should be noted that Local Authorities are now often not paying initial clothing allowances even if the child/ren come to placement with very few clothes. An advance can be paid on request if required to be deducted from the ongoing clothing allowance.

Foster carers are expected to meet clothing needs arising from routine wear and tear, therefore all subsequent purchases should be met from the standard allowance.

School clothing

Additional payments may be made when a child starts school or changes school. These will be at a rate to be agreed by the child's social worker and Foster Care Link. On some occasions we may ask the foster carer to use the on-going clothing allowance to cover this cost.

Holidays

Summer Holiday Leisure Allowance

All children that are in placement on 31st July of any year will be entitled to a £100 Summer Holiday Leisure Allowance. This is to be kept aside for the foster child to

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cover costs such as trips, theme park entrance costs, holiday playscheme fees, other activities etc.

Children's Holidays

Carers can at times take children placed with them on holiday, with the agreement of the child's social worker. Foster Care Link may seek to recover the cost of this holiday in discussion with the placing authority, but at present we are unlikely to obtain such funding. Each case is unique based on the outcomes of negotiations. More commonly, we find respite placements for placed children with alternative carers. If this occurs, the alternative carers will receive the allowance for the placed child or young person.

Costs for holidays for children without the carers, such as school trips or adventure camps, will be agreed by all parties, but will often be deducted from carers allowances as they will not be providing care for the period. On some occasions such costs will be shared or reimbursed.

Carer's Holidays Bonus Payments

Foster Care Link will pay an additional allowance to all carers equivalent to one week of the standard weekly reward allowance for each completed continuous six months of having children in placement. This will be in the form of an additional payment while the child remains in placement which will be clearly stated in the remittance advice.

Where a carer chooses to take a holiday without the child (other than as part of an agreed respite care package) all payments to the carer will cease during the period of the holiday.

Transport

All normal transport costs are covered by the standard allowance. This includes the routine transport costs of children such as transport to school, recreational activities, visits to family and friends, whether transported by car or by public transport.

Exceptional transport costs, where this is essential and agreed in advance, will be arranged by Foster Care Link through our approved and checked transportation company with all costs covered by the agency. On some occasions we will pay an additional weekly sum to foster carers to cover this task.

Contact

Regular contact between children and their birth family and friends is assumed and supervised contact of up to three times a week is covered by the standard allowance.

When additional arrangements need to be made for contact in excess of this amount then this will be arranged by Foster Care Link with all costs covered by the agency.

Additional Placement Costs

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It is expected that most placement costs will be met by the standard allowance, however, it is acknowledged that some placements will incur additional expenditure that it would be unreasonable to expect the carer to meet from the standard allowance.

Such payments may include specialist equipment for the child or additional educational support such as private tutoring.

The costs for circumcision (in accordance to Islamic *Sunnah*) when required for young children will be covered by Foster Care Link.

Additional placement costs will only be made with the prior agreement of the child's social worker and Foster Care Link. Wherever possible the need for and agreement to such additional expenditure will be included in the placement agreement.

Temporary Absence Fee

Where a child is temporarily away from a foster home for more than a week (e.g. in hospital or missing) the standard allowance less the cost element will continue to be paid for a week or until such time that the placing agency confirm that they wish to terminate the placement.

Retaining Fee

Where a placement has been booked for a child more than three working days in advance, a retainer fee will sometimes be payable at the rate of the standard allowance less the cost element. You will be made aware of this by Foster Care Link staff if it is applicable, and this is dependent on the Local Authority making the placement.

Complaints Investigations

Where a child has been removed by the Local Authority from the agency and placed with Local Authority or alternate agency carers pending the outcome of a formal child protection investigation, allowances will continue to be paid for a maximum of four weeks payments or until the conclusion of the investigation (whichever is the earlier) if the Local Authority agrees to cover such payments. These will be paid at the rate of the standard allowance less the cost element.

Non Child Related Costs

There may be occasions when carers incur additional expenditure that is not related to a specific child eg attending training events.

Reimbursement of such expenditure may be made at the discretion of the registered manager whose approval must always be obtained in advance and recorded on the carer's file.

Payment of Allowances

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All payments will be made monthly in arrears. A statement detailing the period covered will be supplied. Payment will be made by bank automated credit transfer.

Notification of Payments

Foster Care Link will send each carer an annual statement of payments made during each financial year if requested.

Overpayments

Any overpayments made in error by Foster Care Link are recoupable. Carers should inform the agency of such errors as soon as possible, and should not cash/bank such payments if made by cheque. Arrangements will be made to cancel such payments, and re-issue using correct information. We may also deduct overpayments from future payments.

FAQs on Fostering Allowances - Information Sheet

Foster Care Link produces a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) information sheet for foster carers which deals with common questions and issues raised by foster carers. Foster carers should request a copy from their social workers if they do not have a copy of this.