



LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND PERMANENCY SERVICE

FOSTERING ALLOWANCES RATES AND GUIDANCE 2020 – 2021

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Introduction

This document is designed to make explicit all the financial arrangements for the care of children who are looked after by the Brent Council. It is very important that you read and understand this comprehensive guide, as it will clarify the use of all placements allowances. If you have any concerns about the management of your allowance, then this should be discussed with your supervising social worker who will be able to help you.

We recognise the importance of ensuring that children and young people in our care are provided with good levels of support. The foster carer allowances and fees have been increased in line with those recommended by the Fostering Network this year, which is an increase of 1%. We have reviewed fees and allowances provided to all our carers, to benchmark these in line with that provided by neighbouring boroughs to ensure that we have competitive rates.

1.1 Foster Carers Charter

Brent Social Care has developed a charter in consultation with foster carers and other stakeholders and expects all foster carers to meet its recommendation and will support and assist carers in order to achieve this. A copy of the charter can be located on Brent's website: <https://brent.gov.uk/fostering>

1.2 Responsibility for funding

Foster carers are advised that discussions regarding allowances or fees should always be made first with their Supervising Social Worker who then may need to liaise with the child's allocated Social Worker. Foster carers should always refer any discussion they may have with the child's allocated Social Worker to their Supervising Social Worker and wherever possible, make a log of this in their diary.

It is expected that foster carers will budget according to their individual child/young person's needs. It is also important to clarify at the Placement Information Meeting if there are any additional financial requirements for which alternative funding may be needed. Request for such additional expenses would need to be agreed via the child/young person's Social Worker, Team manager, and Service Manager/Head of service for Looked after Children and Permanency Service.

1.3 General Principles

Foster carers will receive an allowance for the periods that they are caring for a child/young person and payments are calculated on a daily rate (1/7th of the weekly rate shown in all the tables in this document). If a child/young person returns home on the day of placement, there will be a minimum of one day's payment made.

Foster carers are given some discretion in their use of the allowances but there is an expectation that foster carers will be able to demonstrate that they have used the allowance appropriately in meeting the child/young person's needs. For example, a child/young person has appropriate clothing, is well fed and has pocket money according to their age and needs; savings have been made for the child/young person. Receipts can be requested, as evidence of expenditure used.

To help ensure that foster carers, children, young people and other professionals are clear on what the allowance should cover, we have outlined the areas that foster carers need to consider when budgeting (see *guidance on suggested allowance breakdown). The guidance breaks down suggested spending on food, household costs, clothing/leisure, pocket money/savings, travel, etc. However, please note that this is a guide and the way allowances are spent may differ from child to child.

Types of Allowances

Rates of weekly fostering allowance

Age band	Weekly Fostering Allowance		
	Allowance (level 1)	Allowance + fee (level 2 -£64.19)	Allowance + fee (level 3 -£85.59)
0 – 4	£172.26	£236.45	£257.85
5 – 10	£196.38	£260.57	£281.97
11 – 15	£244.54	£308.73	£330.13
16+	£297.00	£361.19	£382.59

Fostering Allowance Breakdown Table

	Weekly estimated allowance breakdown based on (a) – (f) approx.					
Age band and Allowance	Food and Misc (a)	Household costs and Savings (b)	Clothing (c)	Leisure up to (d)	Pocket money up to (e) (0-10 and (11+))	Travel up to (f)
0 to 4 £172.26	£63.73	£51.68	£18.95	£18.95	£5.17	£13.78
5 to 10 £196.38	£72.67	£58.91	£21.60	£21.60	£5.89	£15.71
11 to 15 £244.54	£83.15	£73.36	£26.90	£26.90	£14.67	£19.56
16+ £297.00	£100.98	£91.26	£32.00	£32.00	£17.00	£23.76

The allowance scheme no longer differentiates the rates paid to foster carers, whether they are short, respite or long term. The rates of payment are determined by the age of the child/young person and a change of rate will occur automatically if a child's birthday means they go into the next band. It is important to note that the full allowance is given tax-free to all foster carers, whether family and friends' foster carers or unrelated foster carers, but both fee elements are subject to income tax. All carers can approach Fostering Network or Inland Revenue for further information on how to set themselves up to pay this income tax.

1.4 Payments for Birthday, Festivals and Holidays

The local authority will make specific one off payments for the child/young person for special occasions throughout the year (see table below). Money for the child/young people's birthday, will be automatically paid to all carers every year at the specified time in the year. Foster carers are advised to talk with their Supervising Social Worker if a payment for the child/young person's birthday is not received. With regards to request for holiday payments, there has been no change in the way in which we administer this and foster carers are advised to speak to their Supervising Social Worker prior to the holiday being planned. Foster Carers have a responsibility to ensure that this entitlement is requested during each financial year as this cannot be backdated, neither can payments be accrued.

Age band	Birthday	Festivity	Holiday
Children 0-5 less than 6 months in care	£25	£25	£100
Children more than 6 months in care	£50	£50	£200
Children 6-18 less than 6 months in care	£50	£50	£150.00
Children 6-18 more than 6 months in care	£100	£100	£300

1.4.1 Birthdays

Where a child/young person has been in placement for less than 6 months, the foster carer will receive £50 for children 6 years and over. This money is to be used towards the cost of celebrating the child/young person's birthday celebrations and purchase of a birthday present. Where the child/young person 6 years and over has been in placement for more than 6 months, the foster carer will receive £100. The last payment of birthday money is given in relation to a child's 18th birthday. Please refer to table above for the payments for children 0-5 years.

1.4.2 Holidays

The foster carer may opt for a break with the child/young person placed in which case they will continue to receive the fostering allowance for the child/young person placed and in addition the foster carer will also receive the holiday allowance for the child. In such cases, once the foster carer is aware of the dates and details of the holiday, they should inform their Supervising Social Worker. In the event that the holiday is a greater cost than the available allowance, consideration could be given for additional financial support. However, these circumstances have to be exceptional and can only be agreed by the Head of Service.

The allowances no longer include money for holidays. The expectation is that the foster carer will have had a discussion with their Supervising Social Worker and provide the department with evidence of booked/paid holiday with itinerary and confirmation of the cost

of the holiday. In some instances, additional information may be needed before agreement is given. Once this has been agreed, your Supervising Social Worker will process the request.

We would expect that the costs of different holidays will vary in price but most child/young people holiday places are within this amount. Please note that although the ceiling for the amount of money that can be given is set (see table), this does not mean that if a request is put in, the foster carer will automatically receive the full amount. For example: if the cost of the holiday is £100 the carer will be given this amount and not the full £300. However, if you are planning a holiday which cost over the amount, you may need to consider putting the surplus monies from the allowances that have not been used. For example: if the child/young person does not engage in leisure activities, then this money could be contributed towards the holiday.

Also, please ensure that all receipts/invoices are kept and maintained, as it is upon presentation of these, that the money for holidays will be processed. Foster carers should note that we can only pay what the actual amount of spend is and not the full entitlement, if not spent.

1.4.3 Festivals

As we are a very diverse borough, we have children/young people who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. The weekly allowance no longer includes a contribution towards the cost of celebrations for festivals, such as Christmas and Eid. The expectation is that the foster carer will request this and upon request, the supervising social worker will process the request. The local Authority will then make this specific one off payment for the child/young person for special occasions throughout the year. The payments are similar to payments for birthdays i.e. with the exception of children 0-5 years old, if the child has been in care for less than 6 months they will receive £50; for more than 6 months it will be £100. Please note that if a request is made for a child under the age of 5 years old, you will have to ensure that you keep all receipts or evidence of how the money has been spent.

In instances, where the child is not practising, no payment will be made and please be reminded that festival payments are paid for each year and not per festival or celebration. Therefore, the foster carer needs to ensure that they budget for each event.

In all cases foster carers are advised that they may be asked to account for how these allowances have been used.

1.5 Enhanced Fostering Allowance

Brent local authority offers an enhanced fostering allowance, which is paid to foster carers who have the skills to care for child/young people who have additional needs, including disabled children. Enhanced fostering allowances are subjected to regular reviews and subject to change, according to the child/young person's needs and have to be agreed via a panel of senior managers.

The Enhanced Fostering Allowance recognise:

- The additional demands on a fostering household in order to support placement stability.
- The opportunities for children/young people with these needs to remain within, or in close proximity, to Brent.
- Foster carers who are particularly skilled in a specific area i.e.: nurse or Police Officer.

Foster carers need to be available for meetings, to care for child/young people who are not at school/college or who have been excluded and to attend on-going medical appointments.

The enhanced allowance request is subject to regular review. Usually, only foster carers operating at level 3 of the fee/reward structure will be eligible for placements of this type. Foster carers who receive the fostering enhanced allowances may be required to provide personal care and/or supervision on a constant basis and in excess of that associated with a child/young person of a similar age.

As the needs of the child/young people are different, the foster carers may be supported by a range of professionals who will be on hand to advise, offer support and guidance when ever needed. There is scope for the foster carer's nominated carer to undertake specific tasks for an additional payment, which is to be agreed in advance with the Team Manager or Commissioning Team Manager, who is part of the Commissioning Services. We are also supported from existing short term foster carers who have a wealth of knowledge and skills, for example: providing respite services for children who are not at school or nursery, where the main foster carer has competing tasks.

Additional needs include but are not limited to:

- Learning disability (low to moderate disability or difficulty)
- Physical disability (severe disability or difficulty)
- Acute or chronic illness (life threatening condition or limited life expectancy)
- Extreme emotional or behavioural difficulties.

The enhanced allowances have been separated into two different tiers (see table below).

	Enhanced Foster Care Weekly Allowance
Age band	Allowance inclusive of £85.59 fee
0 - 10	£414.58
11 - 17	£496.02

1.6 Long Term Fostering and Connected Person Payments

The allowance provided for child/young people in long-term foster care and connected person fostering settings are the same as for short term foster placements.

Connected person foster payments will commence on the date that the child becomes formally accommodated by the Local Authority and when this decision has been documented in writing by the relevant Social Work Manager. Payments forms will be completed by the Assessing Social Worker at the point at which the placement has commenced (usually from the Kinship Care Team). However, in some instances if we are not able to immediately set you up on the BACs system, we will issue you with a cash card and make payments through this method, until the setting up process has been completed.

1.7 Family Links Scheme (remains under redevelopment)

The Family Links scheme is for disabled children who require a short break away from their birth family to allow them some respite. This will usually be over pre-arranged weekends and/or during school holidays. Therefore the payment structure is in hours rather than in days and can be used flexibly as day and/or overnight care arranged between the child's parent/s/carers and the Family Links foster carer/s. This is different to allowances paid for ordinary respite care.

To receive payment, both the foster carer and parent/guardian of the child/young person placed will have to confirm details of the amount of hours the child/young person has been cared for in a month as well as expenses for claimable activities up to the maximum daily

allowance of £5.40. Receipts for activities need to be submitted that the placement had taken place and the duration. This will be processed by the Supervising Social Worker and payments will be made retrospectively and on a monthly basis once.

Additionally in cases where foster carers are regularly picking up and dropping off the child/young person for their short-break, travel costs and car mileage can be re-funded. However, this is subject to prior agreement with the Team Manager.

1.8 Out of Hours Fostering Allowances (EDT)

Where a placement is made via EDT, an increased payment will be given, to recognise the disruption this causes to foster carers when placements take place out of hours. The allowance given is a set amount and the out of hour's rate will be paid for a maximum of four weeks. If the child/ young person continues to require a placement and remain with the carer the allowance will revert back to the standard rate appropriate to the child/ young person's age on the 5th week.

The EDT list runs from Friday through to Thursday every week and foster carers with a fostering vacancy will be contacted every week to check/confirm their availability for emergency placements. The expectation is that if you have placed yourself on the EDT list, you will be available to take an emergency placement. Newly approved foster carers could be considered to be placed on the EDT list, following careful consultation with the relevant Assessing Social Worker and Team Manager.

The local authority will consider how we can offer Brent foster carers additional support if an emergency placement is made e.g., in the form of weekend visits, possible support re difficult transport arrangements (transport to contact/therapy; or to/from schools out of the area etc.). We will consider whether we can elicit the support of other Brent foster carers to assist in these tasks.

Where foster carers state that they are able to accept an emergency placement and they require clothes for the child/young person they may purchase essential items up to the sum of £50 per child. Foster carers will be expected to show evidence of appropriate emergency expenditure in the form of receipts for auditing purposes and reimbursement.

*Outside of office hours is Monday to Friday after 5pm and before 9am and from Friday 5pm to Monday 9am.

1.9 Parent/s and Child Placements

Where a parent and child are placed together and the child is not looked after, a foster carer will be paid the enhanced allowance to reflect the increased cost to the carer. However, there may be the need for further discussions to be undertaken, as the allowance given does not include the needs of the baby.

If both the parent and child are looked after, age appropriate fostering allowance for two placements in line with the rates and guidance will be made to the foster carer.

The expectation is that any equipment that is required for the baby will be provided by the local authority. However, the responsibility for providing equipment is dependent on the status of the placement. For example: if both parent and child are looked after, the placements service is responsible. If the child is not looked after, the expectation is that the parent will provide the equipment that is required. However, in all instances, at the time of the placement planning, there should be discussions and decisions made with the relevant Team Manager, so to avoid any confusion/expectations.

1.10 Retainer Fees

The decision to make a payment of a fee to retain any placement for any period of time will be taken on an individual case by case basis and will be made by the relevant Team manager in consultation with the Service Manager or Head of Service, for Looked after Children and Permanency Service. All retainer fee arrangements are subject to change and dependent on the needs of the child/young person. For example: a carer may be placed on a retainer for a specific period, whilst assessments are ongoing. In the event that the retainer is to cease, you will be notified and given at least one week's notice informing you of the end date. There may be situations where the case would have to be presented to the Children's placement panel for funding approval.

1.11 Shared Care

Situations where care of a child/young person is shared, for example, when a child/young person spends the weekdays at Boarding School or periods of time with their birth family, allowances will be paid at the daily rate according to the times the foster carer is looking after the child/young person.

Additional adjustments may need to be made to provide for appropriate pocket money and clothing; these issues should be discussed at the Placement Information Record Meeting (PIR) or at the next available supervisory visit.

Financial support for foster carers

1.12 Foster carers' allowances and fees

The financial support available to foster carers have been separated into three different levels. The fostering allowances are solely to meet the needs of the child/young person. The fee is paid to foster carers in recognition of their skills and contribution to Brent.

Level one – this is the *allowance* element as set out in government guidance. It is payable to all new carers, whether Special Guardians (pre-SG order), family and friends foster carers (pre-approval), unrelated foster carers (pre-approval) or Fostering for Adoption carers, and is designed to meet the costs of caring for the child with no discrimination on the grounds of a pre-existing relationship with the child. Brent's weekly allowance is greater than the amount advised by *Fostering Network*. The amount paid is based on the age of the child and recognises that these carers will have had no training or assessment. Brent therefore treats all carers, whether kinship or unrelated the same at this stage.

Minimum weekly allowance as advised by government 2020- 2021

The Government recommended minimum payments as listed below:

	Babies	Pre-primary	Primary	11 to 15	16 to 17
London	£152	£155	£174	£197	£231
South East	£146	£150	£166	£189	£222
Rest of England	£132	£135	£149	£170	£198

See the link: <https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

Level two – this is the allowance described above *plus* a discretionary fee element paid by Brent that acknowledges the learning and development undertaken since the child first moved to live with the carer; this fee is awarded upon evidence of the additional learning/development being provided via a Personal Development Plan. There is no legal requirement on any agency to pay this additional fee. The family and friends foster carers and unrelated foster carers will have undertaken kinship induction or 'skills to foster' training, mandatory training (as a minimum, first aid specific to the age of children placed with them, safeguarding training tailored to the age/experience of the children placed with them, health

and safety training and safer care training) to receive this fee element on top of the *allowance*.

Level three – this is the **Level one** allowance *plus* a greater discretionary fee element paid by Brent that acknowledges the continued learning and development undertaken by the carer – this level of fee is awarded upon evidence of completion of the Training Support and Development (TSD) Standards workbook. There is no legal requirement on any agency to pay this greater additional fee, however it is the government's view that all foster carers who are approved under the Fostering Services Regulations should complete the TSD Standards, which are designed to equip all foster carers with the skills and knowledge to provide high quality care to the children they look after. The TSD Standards are also now a requirement of the National Minimum Standards (Fostering). Completion of the TSD Standards is a requirement for all approved foster carers, whether family and friends foster carers or unrelated foster carers, in England and is referenced within the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011. There is acknowledgement that unrelated foster carers who have completed the full development and assessment process prior to any child being placed with them will have gained more learning during this time than 'family and friends' foster carers. Unrelated foster carers are therefore only given 12 months to complete the TSD Standards workbook, whereas 'family and friends' foster carers are given 18 months, to acknowledge that they may not have undertaken as much training pre-the child or young person being placed with them, as is required of an unrelated foster carer. This additional Level three fee element is only awarded once the TSD Standards workbook has been completed successfully and an annual review undertaken to explore how the carers have embedded their learning into their 'fostering' practice, whether they are 'family and friends' or unrelated foster carers.

Expenditure, Covered By Foster Carers Allowance

Brent approved foster carers are expected to make provision for the following costs associated with caring for a child/young person. The local authority have provided the foster carers with an allowance which is sufficient to meet all of the child/young person's weekly needs.

When the placement information record meeting takes place there will be discussion regarding the various amounts of allowance that will be given to the child/young person.

However, there may be instances when the amounts have to be increased or varied. This is because the amounts are based upon the individual needs of the child/young person and may vary from placement to placement.

We have suggested some levels of expenditure as a guide as this is often requested by foster carers and helps to give foster carers and Supervising Social Workers a clear expectation about the allowance.

1.13 Payments for School Run

In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary for another foster carer to carry out this task. Where this is agreed, the foster carer who is doing the school run will be paid a flat rate of no less than £15 to a maximum of £25 per day following approval by a Team Manager. If there is more than one child attending the same school, the rate will remain the same.

1.14 Pocket Money

All child/young people that are looked after should receive pocket money according to their age. As such, it is clearly understood and agreed that foster carers will provide child/young person in their care with weekly pocket money out of the allowance they receive. In some cases such as children aged 0 to 4 years old, this is not relevant, however the expectation is that the money should be put aside from the foster carer's allowance and included on the savings for the child/young person.

The table below represents suggested amounts for pocket money. However, foster carers and Social Workers are strongly advised to discuss the appropriate pocket money level with parents and young people at the placement agreement meeting and to ensure that the amount provides for continuity within the home situation and consistency within the foster carer's own family situation.

	Weekly Suggested Amount Of Pocket Money
Age band	Amount per week
*0 - 4	£5.17
5 - 10	£5. 89
11 - 15	£14.67
16 - 18	£17

*For young children aged 0-4 years where they will not be of an age to understand this, the Foster Carer should use this money to provide the child with toys, or alternatively collect the money in a money box for the child. The Supervising Social Worker / Foster Carer / Child's Social Worker will monitor how this money is spent.

If a foster carer feels that a young person is misusing the pocket money this must be discussed with the Supervising Social Worker and the child's social worker and possible alternative arrangements agreed i.e. increase in savings amount instead. It is imperative that foster carers consult with the child's Social Worker prior to the withdrawal of pocket money, so to avoid any confusion with the reasons why the pocket money has been withdrawn.

Where child/young people have broken items, it might be appropriate that they make some kind of reparation with their pocket money; this must be agreed with the Supervising Social Worker in advance and documented.

1.15 Lunch Money

Foster carers are expected to pay for school lunches from within their allowance. When children/young people are not in school and on holidays/half terms, it is the responsibility of the foster carer to ensure that should the child/young person who attend a play school or activity centre, are provided with lunch or money to purchase lunch.

1.16 Top Up For Mobile Phone

Where confirmed at a placement agreement meeting a top up amount of no more than £5.00 or a £5.00 phone card should be given per week to each child/young person placed. If the foster child/young people choose to use their pocket money to add to this amount then this is acceptable (any excessive expenditure will need to be monitored by the foster carer and any action to address concerns should be done in consultation with the Supervising Social Worker). Where it is the case of a younger child, who does not have access to a mobile phone, the expectation is that the foster carer will allow the child to use their own mobile or a phone within the home.

In some instances, the child's Social Worker may ask for the child/young people to have access via Skype. Appropriate agreements must be given but any additional cost that could be incurred; consideration must be given to using part of the fostering allowances which is not being used. However, if the amount is excessive, this must be agreed prior to the contact

taking place. Foster carers should always take into consideration safer care for children/young people in placement using mobile phones.

1.17 Toiletries, Hair and Personal Care

The foster carers' allowance is sufficient to cover the costs of these items. It may be appropriate for most young people who are learning independent skills, to take responsibility for buying their own toiletries. This should always be discussed and agreed at the placement agreement meeting where a record is made specifying the amount that has been agreed. This arrangement should be reviewed on a regular basis, as the needs of the child/young person may change. .

1.18 Savings for All Looked After Children

Brent Council wants to promote good budgeting skills for children and young people. It is the responsibility of all Brent foster carers to endeavour to teach Looked after Children good financial management as part of their independent living skills. As an integral part of this process it is expected that all foster carers will open a savings account for any child/young person placed in their care (wherever possible).

We are aware that foster carers have faced challenges with trying to open savings account for children/young people in particular when they have no documents. If children and young people do not have an established savings scheme, then the foster carer will be expected to set up a Post Office savings account for every child placed. The account is held in the child/young person's name; therefore the interest is not taxable. This account can become a trust account with the foster carer becoming the trustee if appropriate. This should always be discussed with your Supervising Social Worker who will advise you if there are any problems in doing this.

We advise foster carers to make savings for child/young/people in line with the Fostering Guidance (see table below) unless there are compelling reasons otherwise. Any such issues must be discussed and agreed with your Supervising Social Worker. Foster carers are advised to set up appropriate savings schemes in line with what they may have established for their own children. Child/young people's savings should not be withheld by a foster carer as a sanction.

Arrangements for deposits should be clearly identified and agreed by the foster carer, the child/young person and the Supervising Social Worker. The expectation is that at the end of

the placement, the foster carer should hand over the savings book or account, the total contents, i.e. cheque or bankers draft, ensuring that they get a signed receipt from the Supervising Social Worker or child's Social Worker on provision of the final balance. In instances when savings are not given, the local authority will endeavour to retrieve any outstanding savings owed in line with the Foster Carers' Agreement.

	Weekly Suggested Amount Of Savings
Age band	Amount per week
0 - 4	£5
5 - 10	£10
11 - 15	£12
16 - 18	£15

1.19 Withdrawal of Savings

There may be special circumstances, which may require the withdrawal of a specific sum from the child/young person's savings account, such as provision of a musical instrument or a lap top. Any extraordinary decisions with regards to how foster carers save or withdrawal of savings must be discussed with the Supervising Social Worker and child's Social Worker and agreed at Team Manager level and documented on the child's/foster carer's file.

1.20 Education

The basic allowance is calculated to cover expenses relating to educational costs such as books, trips, school photos, etc. Therefore, the expectation is that the foster carer will ensure that the child/young person they look after have access to all equipment that is required.

1.21 Household Costs

An element of the allowance is designed to cover reasonable wear and tear in the home of the carer for Children Looked After by the Local Authority. However, this must be discretionary and the foster carer should be able to demonstrate how the allowances were used, if requested.

1.22 School summer/ Half Term Holiday Periods

There are no additional allowances provided during the school holiday periods. Foster carers should consider how they will budget for an increased expenditure during these periods.

The following table (based upon a 52 week cycle) gives an idea of what sum would need to be saved to ensure sufficient funding for these periods and will give you sufficient funding to cover these .

*National holidays cover Easter, Public holidays etc.

Age band	Weekly saving for half term/summer/national holidays	Yearly total amount saved
0 to 4	£4.00	£232
5 to 10	£6.00	£312
11 to 16	£7.00	£364
16 to 18	£8.00	£416

1.23 Leisure and Out of School Activities

It is the expectation that the foster carer's allowance will cover funding for different activities such as cinema trips, after school clubs, specific children's interests e.g. sports, music or drama. Foster carers are expected to encourage the development of each child/young person in placement and recognise their differences and interests.

1.24 Provision of Clothing Allowance

Foster Carers are expected to maintain a child/young person's wardrobe, ensuring that they have a reasonable selection of casual and smart clothes, their school uniform, a warm coat and appropriate footwear. There may be occasions when the child/young person requires a major purchase such as a new coat, blazer, and suit or smart outfit for a special occasion, trainers or shoes. The expectation is that the amount set aside for clothing will be discussed within your supervision visits with your Supervising Social Worker.

1.25 Emergency Clothing Allowance

It is expected that an acceptable amount of clothing will be obtained from the child/young person's home or their previous placement before the child joins the foster carers. If adequate clothing is not available then an emergency clothing allowance can be considered and the sum will be agreed on an individual basis based on the child/young person's need. This will rarely be applicable to long term foster carers where children's placements are planned.

Payment can be made in two different ways. If the foster carer has already purchased the items, reimbursement will be given once the receipts are received. Alternatively, we may agree to put the sum on the cash card, which most foster carers have issued to them.

Depending on the circumstance, the clothing allowance paid upfront will be recouped from the fostering allowance over an agreed period as the fostering allowance covers clothing.

There needs to be close liaison between your Supervising Social Worker and the child/young person's Social Worker, as your Supervising Social Worker will complete the paperwork to ensure that the payment is made. Evidence of clothing purchased may be required upon request (see section on keeping receipts and accountability).

The recommended amount given for an emergency clothing allowance is varied and differs from the age of the child/young person to their personal circumstances. The least amount that will be agreed is up to £50 and the maximum will be up to £125, as the expectation is that once the fostering allowances start there will be the clothing element available to top up what has already been brought. Please note that if the child/young person is only being placed for a short period of time, the amount given will be based upon this. However, if the placement is extended, then this will be reassessed and adjustments made.

1.26 Emergency School Clothing

At the point of placement, the child's Social Worker will usually be expected to obtain the Looked After Child/young people's school uniform within 72 hours of the placement commencing. If attempts have been made but the school uniform has not been obtained within 24 hours then the placement service in consultation with the child's Social Worker will consider authorising agreement for the emergency school clothing grant to be made. It is the responsibility of the child's Social Worker to contact the birth parents or the child's school to find out what the essential school clothing needs are for the young person for that week. Also what the likely cost for replacement school clothing will be. Ideally, the child/young person's Social Worker should authorise up to £150.00 emergency clothing money in order to support young people returning to school as soon as possible. The payment of the emergency school clothing grant must be authorised by the relevant Team Manager, subject to the provision of a breakdown of the costs in advance, agreement for this to be paid and to the provision of receipts ideally before or as soon as possible after payment.

1.27 Keeping Receipts and Accountability

It is important that you record all major expenditure and ensure you have receipts for all significant purchases. Foster carers are expected to model good budgeting and we would expect that you retain receipts for your expenditure. These will be required in case of the

need to return faulty items, making claims on insurance and showing Social Workers how monies have been spent.

1.28 Travel Costs

The foster carer's allowance covers all routine travel costs incurred by the child/young person and carer. There is an expectation that the carer will take a child to and from school and, where the foster carer is a car owner, can be used towards some motoring costs. This also extends for travel to and from all relevant appointments with the child e.g. medical and hospital check ups.

There may be instances, where request for additional funding may be made available when there is a need to travel an exceptional distance, for example, birth family contact as set out by a court order. Any such arrangements to request additional funding for travel costs should be discussed and agreed in advance via your Supervising Social Worker/relevant Team Manager and the children's Social Worker.

1.29 Luggage For Looked After Children

Looked After children must be provided with adequate luggage, holdalls or suitcases of their own when travelling i.e. day trips or longer holidays. Foster carers may purchase these from the allowance provided for the young person. Also when children are moving on from their placement, suitable and adequate personal luggage must be provided to accommodate their belongings.

Foster carers are asked to liaise with their Supervising Social Workers if there are difficulties regarding storage of child/young person's belongings. Children/young people should not be stigmatised by having their belongings transported in black dust bin bags/ flimsy carrier style bags with associations of refuse being attached to these. Neither should luggage be 'borrowed' unless there are exceptional circumstances to explain this.

1.30 Request for Additional Funding Not Covered in the Allowance Document

The fostering allowance has been designed to cover the everyday costs of caring for a child/young person. However, there may be rare occasions when additional funding is seen as necessary to meet the best interests of the child/young person. In instances like this, it is the expectation that the foster carer raises this with the child's Social Worker or their Supervising Social Worker to see how best to support the child in placement.

Additional funding should always be discussed in the first instance with your Supervising Social Worker and agreed by the relevant Team Manager, as no funding can be agreed retrospectively.

1.31 Miscellaneous Expenses

The fostering allowances are calculated to cover household costs, food, leisure and personal items for the child. This guidance has not itemised how money should be spent on these items, but we would expect carers to use good judgement to ensure that children/young people's needs are adequately met in regards to these. Any concerns with regards to this should be brought to the attention of your Supervising Social Worker, who will provide the foster carer with clarity and guidance.

How Payments Are Made

1.32 Processing Payments

Payments are processed and are paid fortnightly – payments are now being paid two week in arrears. This is to prevent overpayments. However, there may be instances when the payments dates may have to be changed and foster carers will be notified of any changes prior to the change and by email.

Payments will normally be paid directly into foster carer's bank or building society accounts and are available on the Friday after the bank instruction is issued. Any changes to have been made to bank/building society accounts should be notified directly to the *The Commissioning Resource Team at Civic Centre on 020 937 3136/2527/6284 or CRT.Contracts@brent.gov.uk or your Supervising Social Worker, who will arrange for a new BACS form to be completed. The BACS form is used to update all new information relating to your account. Any changes will require the foster carer to provide a bank statement documentation to confirm their bank account details.

If there are any difficulties regarding payments, contact your supervising social worker or the placements duty social worker as soon as possible so the situation can be resolved.

*Commissioning Resource Team, Brent Civic Centre, 3rd Floor North, Engineers Way, Wembley, HA9 0FJ CRT.Contracts@brent.gov.uk

1.33 Underpayments and Overpayments

Foster carers who feel they may have been underpaid are advised to consult this guidance and discuss the position with their Supervising Social Worker ASAP. If further guidance is required, the relevant Team Manager or your Supervising Social Worker should be consulted. Backdated payments may be paid where appropriate but agreement will need to be sought depending on the amount of underpayments to be made.

The expectation is that the overpayment will be repaid immediately. However where overpayments occur and a child/young person is still in placement, the money will be recovered by deducting the full amount or in exceptional circumstances, an agreed percentage of the fortnightly allowance payment until the debt is repaid. This percentage must be agreed with the relevant Service Manager or Team Manager.

Where overpayments occur and there are no child/young people in placement, the expectation is that the money is repaid immediately by check or internal transfer. In instances like this, all agreed repayments should be documented, so that there is a record of the agreements made. However, there have been some instances, where foster carers do not have the money available and agreement can be given that the money will be recouped once a new placement is made. In instances like this, an agreed percentage will be deducted until the full amount is recouped.

At all times, the expectation is that the money should be available given that it is not yours as failure to repay the debt will be recovered according to our debt recovery procedures. Failure to comply with these procedures could jeopardise any future plans to foster for Brent or another agency.

Setting Up Foster Carers with Equipment

1.34 Purchase of Equipment

Foster carers are provided with start-up equipment to enable them to care for children/young people. This includes beds, bedding, buggies, safety guards and fire safety equipment etc. All equipment supplied is the property of the local authority and an inventory will be kept of all the equipment issued. When foster carers stop fostering, a discussion will be undertaken and a decision made regarding the equipment, as we may be able to recycle them. But if this is not possible, we will ask you to dispose of the items (dependent on their condition).

Equipment provided will be of good quality and will be provided on a one off basis. There may be occasions when the equipment is transferred with the child to another placement, for example, when a child/young person moves to an adoptive placement or if the foster carer/s is no longer using the equipment due to a change in their circumstances. In these circumstances, the equipment will be reissued to the foster carer/s and a new inventory issued.

In the event that some foster carers have their own furniture which is of good and sound quality, agreement may be given for their furniture to be used and in the event that the furniture needs to be replaced, the department will be responsible. However, agreement to be sought from the manager and agreement made on a case by case basis.

If the foster carer lives locally, the Supervising Social Worker will organise this within the department and the equipment will be delivered directly to the foster carer's home. If there is undue delay in this, the foster carer will be kept informed of all developments at all time.

If the foster carer lives some distance from Brent (outside of London) it may be more practical for the foster carer to purchase items and arrange a convenient delivery time. In cases such as this, all the items to be purchased must be agreed, from where and the maximum budget set. All arrangements will be confirmed in writing by the Supervising Social Worker and cost confirmed by the relevant Team Manager in advance of any purchase being made. Foster carers will then be reimbursed by the relevant teams by cheque/or BACS on production of the appropriate receipts.

1.35 Criteria for purchasing equipment

We recognise that every foster carer is different and will require different pieces of equipment according to their approval status and the ages of the children and young people placed with them. Therefore, the equipment list has been placed into 2 categories (essential and non-essential), so that this allows the foster carers to purchase equipment if they feel they require it, as it is not deemed essential and would not impact on their ability to provide good care.

1.35.1 Essential

The purchase of essential equipment means that without this equipment that child/young person could not be placed in a safe environment. For example: if the child/young person did not have a bed or cot, it would be unsafe for them to be placed in a planned placement.

1.35.2 Non-essential

The purchase of non-essential equipment means that this equipment is optional and according to the foster carer's personal choice. For example: it is not necessary at all times to purchase a desk, if the foster carer already has a desk that can be used.

1.36 Equipment in an Emergency

Where it has been agreed between a foster carer and their supervising social worker that they can be available for emergency placements, the carer should have the basic equipment necessary to care for a child (aged within their approval terms) overnight. For example, a baby carer should have an available cot and nappies and a foster carer approved for teenagers should have a bed and spare toothbrush/paste. More suitable equipment for a longer stay will then be sourced for the carer as soon as possible once the longer term plan for the child is clear.

It should be noted, however, that there may be unusual occasions where an emergency placement is required that the carer feels able to manage overnight but does not have the required equipment in place – for example, where a large sibling group needs housing. In these instances, the placing social workers and the carer will consider a creative answer to this for the one night and then source appropriate equipment the next available working day. Each situation would need to be assessed individually

1.37 Preferred Suppliers

The local authority have a list of preferred suppliers who we have agreements with. In all instances, we must use the preferred suppliers for the purchase of all equipment and only where the preferred supplier, is unable to supply the specific piece of equipment, will we then consider purchasing the equipment from another supplier. In these cases, the item must be of similar price.

For all equipment for foster carers who care for children aged 0 to 2 years old, our preferred supplier is *Argos, **Precious Little Ones or ***ATS. These suppliers are internet based and equipment can be ordered with delivery in some cases being the same or next day. Carers should take into consideration that delivery for some items may take up to 7 days.

Equipment for children over the age of 2 years old can be purchased from Argos or ATS. You can view the equipment by using the internet, brochure or the catalogue.

- * Argos - Retail store where you can walk and purchase items or order over the internet.
- ** Precious Little Ones - Internet based company that Brent Placement Service hold a contract with and provide home delivery.
- *** ATS - Store based in Wembley which Brent Placement Service hold a contract with and they will deliver and set up equipment.

1.38 Wear and Tear

Once equipment has been purchased, this is considered as a 'one off' purchase and the foster carer/s, are then considered responsible for replenishing the equipment as and when they feel necessary.

The Fostering Allowance which is paid to foster carers contains an element to enable carers to budget for purchasing new equipment in respect of caring for the child/young person. This can sometimes be used to go towards purchasing ordinary household items which the carer would have in use whether or not there is a child/young person in placement, such as a washing machine.

1.39 Faulty Equipment

If the foster carer/s have purchased equipment and it is faulty, the foster carer will be expected to take steps to renew the equipment if it is in guarantee and they have the receipt. If Brent has purchased the 'Start Up' equipment or any other equipment items, the carer should liaise with the supervising social worker/administrator and this will be looked into, i.e. replaced if the item is faulty. However, in order for the equipment to be replaced, an inspection of the equipment would need to be undertaken by Supervising Social Worker, prior to replacement.

1.40 Start up equipment list for baby foster carers/0 – 2 years

Item	Minimum Cost £	Maximum Cost £	Essential	Non-essential
Blankets (2)	£5 each	£7 each	X	
Fitted or Flat Sheets (2)	£5 each	£7 each	X	

Social Care Policies and Procedures

Title: Fostering Allowances - RATES AND GUIDANCE

1st April 2020 - 31st March 2021

Changing mat (1)	£5	£7		X
Changing bag set (1)	£10	£ 15		X
Car Seat (1)	£35	£50	X	
Steriliser (1)	£20	£25	X	
Bottles (3)	£5	£15	X	
Bouncer or rocker chair (1)		£25		X
Baby Carrier (1)		£ 20		X
Baby Monitor (1)		£ 25		X
Travel Cot (1)		£ 30		X
Baby bath (1)		£15	X	
Stair gates (2 maximum)		£ 25	X	
High Chair (1)		£40	X	
Booster Seat (1)		£ 10	X	
Fireguard (each) if open fire		£ 20	X	
Potty or potty seat (1)		£ 5		X
Buggy and rain cover (all in one system)	£99	£ 125	X	
Cot and mattress (all in one)	£ 120	£ 150	X	
Cot bumper	£20	£ 25		X
Moses basket (1)		£ 35		X

Start up equipment list for foster carers/5 years upwards

Item	Minimum Cost £	Maximum Cost £	Essential	Non-essential
Bed (single divan)	85.00	150.00	X	
Bunk bed (metal and Pine)	100.00	160.00	X	
Headboard	15.00	25.00	X	
Wardrobe (single)	100.00	160.00	X	

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Chest of drawers (4-5 drawer)	50.00	75.00	X	
Computer workstation	20.00	45.00		X
Desks	25.00	45.00		X
Bedding				
Pillow and quilt set	15.00	25.00	X	
Flat or fitted sheet (2)	8.00	12.00	X	
Duvet cover and pillow case (2)	15.00	20.00	X	
Plastic mattress protector (1)	10.00	12.00	X	

Respite and Nominated carers

1.41 Respite Care Arrangements

Any requests for holidays or respite, whilst a foster child/young person is in placement needs to be made via the Supervising Social Worker or the child's Social Worker in the first instance. This request will then have to be agreed by the Head of Service.

It is expected that any such requests by foster carers are discussed in detail with their Supervising Social Worker before anything is agreed. The expectation is that all Looked After Children placed with Brent approved foster carers go on holiday with the foster carers, unless there are compelling reasons why they cannot. However, please note that in the event where the request may 'seem' unreasonable, such a request may be questioned so that a better understanding could be given.

The local authority's expectation is that foster carers put in place arrangements to ensure that if they need to take a break from fostering a child, that this will preferably take place when the placement comes to a natural end, when the child/young person has contact with the birth parent or when the 'nominated carer' is able to step in to provide stability and continuity whilst the foster carer is away.

Foster carers are expected to make arrangements to take children/young people with them if they need to go away in an emergency or on a planned basis. If this proves difficult then emergency respite should be for as short a period as possible. The service also asks that placements staff are given as much notice as possible (verbally and/or in writing e.g. via email) with regards to respite care requests.

If a child/young person is placed with a respite foster carer on an agreed basis, the fostering allowance will be diverted to the respite carer for the duration of the respite placement and payments ceased to the main foster carer for the period they are away. This task is processed by the Commissioning Resource Team who have oversight of all fostering allowance payments.

1.42 Nominated Carers Payments

Nominated Carers are there to support the foster carer with the care of the child/young person. Some Nominated Carers only care for a child for periods under 24 hours and during times when the foster carer may be attending training. In instances like this, the rate that is paid to the nominated carers is £6.75. These payments come out of the usual foster carer's allowance.

The nominated carer's assessment report should indicate the capacity of the nominated carer to provide day care support to the main foster carer for up to 24 hours. Any care to be provided beyond 24 hours must be considered/ assessed via the Regulation 24 arrangements. These assessments must be agreed by the Supervising Social Worker's Team Manager before placements with nominated carers can go ahead. Furthermore the Head of Service (nominated officer) will need to provide temporary approval. If your nominated carer does not have an assessment which allows them to care for a child/young person over 24 hours, this should be made known to the foster carers Supervising Social Worker, so that a more thorough assessment can be completed.

For placements ranging from 2 days to six weeks, it will be the responsibility of the Supervising and/or Assessing Social Workers, to ensure that the payments to the nominated carer are initiated at the earliest opportunity (Regulation 24 rates), and that payments to the main foster carer ceases for the duration of the respite.

Payments to nominated carers must be discussed, agreed and recorded, as part of the respite planning process. The supervising social worker will need to complete the CRT work step on Mosaic or the financial Form F2, which includes the child's details and the

nominated carer's details, as well as the calculations for the amount payable. Examples of situations where such payments can be made include, assisting the main carer with contact arrangements, caring for the foster child whilst the foster carer attends training, caring for a foster child who has been temporarily excluded from school. There may be other examples that could also be considered following agreement with the relevant Supervising Social Worker and Team manager.

1.43 Nominated Carer Arrangements

Brent Looked after Children and Permanency Service will endeavour to undertake a nominated carer assessment of all prospective and newly approved Brent foster carers. We will liaise with you with regards to identifying suitable people to do this task from your support network. We will work together with you to identify replacement nominated carers if they are unable to continue in this role. We will also aim to link you up to other similarly approved Brent foster carers who may also be able and willing to assist you in the fostering tasks.

A nominated Carer is usually someone in the carer's support network who is likely to know or will get to know the foster child in placement. Ideally this is someone who has some child care experience, understanding of child development and understanding of the needs of looked after children. The nominated carer also needs to be someone willing to learn more as required via support and training. This could be a relative, friend or approved foster carer. This person would need to be willing to be DBS checked and assessed as someone suitable to assist the approved foster carer in caring for the Brent foster child. Once completed nominated carer assessments will be required to be signed by the Head of Service for Looked After Children and Permanency.

Nominated carers can offer support if/when the main carer/s needs respite from child care responsibilities e.g. to go out for an evening; to have a planned break; or in an emergency e.g. ill health of a relative or bereavement or in circumstances where it may be inappropriate/impossible for the foster child to accompany the carer. The nominated carer can then step in and provide either planned baby-sitting support in an emergency - either during the day, in the evening, overnight, or for several weeks depending on the circumstances – either in the main carer's home or in the nominated carers home if this is assessed to be suitable. Nominated carer/s prove invaluable because their support to the main carers, can mean continuity/stability for foster child/young people within a placement

and less disruption and placement breakdowns which may arise if the foster carer does not get a planned or emergency break from their caring role.

Most Brent foster carers, have at one time or another needed to make use of their nominated carer for child care support e.g. to attend meetings, attend appointments, attend to emergency matters where the presence of the child would not be appropriate etc. Foster carers for child/young people who have a disability are usually even more in need of appropriate respite; ideally in the form of home/family based care - with carers who are committed and skilled enough to be able to manage any additional challenging aspects of care that the disability might bring.

It is important for the nominated carer to be able to access information about the child/young person they are likely to be caring for on a need to know basis. This will include details of any special or complex needs and it is important that they are carefully briefed by the main foster carer and the relevant staff (Supervising social worker, child's Social Worker, specialist education or health professionals) regarding the practical and financial arrangements for caring for the child/young person.

Payment of allowances must be agreed with the relevant Team Manager prior to any placement taking place. In some instances, the foster carer will be required to use their allowances to pay the nominated carers.

Children Leaving Care Services

1.44 The Transition to Adult Life

Most young people who are 'Looked After' may be eligible for Leaving Care support (see eligibility criteria) Children Act 89 Section 24 (1A), Children Leaving Care Act 2000, Adoption and Children Act 2002).

Therefore, when young people reach the age of 16 years they should have a pathway plan which provides the young person and carer a plan of the areas they need to develop their skills in, in preparation for them to live independently.

1.45 'Staying Put' Scheme

The primary aim of "Staying Put" is to promote a gradual transition from care to adulthood and independent living that recognises that many young people in care often experience delayed maturity, and that their 18th birthday may be an arbitrary and inappropriate point to leave a familial and foster care household.

Staying Put arrangements are used for young people who have reached the age of 18 and who will benefit from remaining within a family unit they are familiar with. Staying Put in a family environment can make all the difference to the participation rates of young people in education, employment or training. Young people, who remain with foster carers post 18 years, are more likely to access practical support around budgeting, housekeeping and health and have lower rates of alcohol and substance dependence and abuse.

Young people are no longer legally Looked After and fostering regulations no longer apply and the young person is no longer a foster child. They become an adult member of the fostering household. The 'placement' becomes an 'arrangement' between the foster carer, the young person and Brent Looked after Children, Care Leavers and Permanency Services.

The arrangement for the young person to continue to have a room as an adult in the foster home should be set out in the form of an agreement usually called a 'Licence Agreement'. This agreement is between the foster carer, the young person and Brent Looked after Children and Permanency Service.

To obtain approval for a placement under a 'Staying Put Arrangement' a request should be made when the child reaches the age of at least 17, setting out the purpose and aims of the "Staying Put" arrangement and any particular milestones, targets and outcomes and the overall purpose and aims and the day to day arrangements for supporting the young person should be set out in the young person's Pathway Plan in conjunction with:

- The Young Person
- The Foster Carer
- The Foster Carer's Supervising Social Worker
- Relevant Team Manager/s

Ideally at the last LAC review and pathway plan (before the 18th birthday) the arrangement should be agreed. This arrangement should be then ratified at the Children's Placement

Panel, where the financial element of the agreement will be decided, as well as at the final LAC review. The responsibility for the ongoing monitoring and review of placements made under the 'Staying Put Placement Scheme' will be through the Brent Care Leavers Team following the decision made at the Children's Placement Panel. However, as there may be different types of placements all happening at the same time, you will still have the support and guidance from your Supervising Social Worker. All young people that are in a 'Staying Put' placement will be reviewed every 6 months. The young person will no longer have an allocated Social Worker and will be reallocated to a Personal Advisor, who will continue to support and guide them through this transition.

All fostering allowances will cease on the birthday of the young person when they turn 18 years and alternative arrangements will be put in place. If the young person remains with the carer on a staying put basis, please note that these allowances will cease on the young person's 19th birthday when they will be eligible to apply for housing benefits.

Financial arrangements for Young People on the Staying put scheme

Initial Staying Put Rate (up to the age of 19)

Under the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 and Planning Transition into Adulthood for Care Leavers Guidance, the Local Authority must provide information about extending placements post-18.

Upon reaching 18, young people will have their own income, either from wages from employment or an apprenticeship, or from income support and housing benefit if they are in further education or training. They will also receive some financial support from Brent Looked after Children, Care Leavers and Permanency Service's with their travel costs to their college or training provider. This income is taken into account when making the Staying Put arrangement. Young people are expected to make a contribution to the costs of the arrangement in the form of rent and a contribution towards food and utilities.

The amount of rent payable by the young person will vary in different parts of the country according to where the foster home is situated.

The contribution of the young person towards food and utilities will be negotiated between Foster Carer, Young Person and Personal Advisor.

Foster carers receive £230 per week, including the rent payable by the young person, which is payable up until the age of 19.

The young persons' own income will come from wages from employment or an apprenticeship, or from Independent Futures or welfare benefits. The foster carer will not be expected to give money to young people and foster carers and will no longer be required to save for young people.

Young people aged up to 19 and studying in Further Education are entitled to receive the 16-19 Bursary from their college.

Support to the carer/s during the staying put arrangement

Supervising Social Workers will continue to be involved in supervising and supporting Brent Foster carers should their fostering approval continue for younger Brent foster children at the same time as agreement has been given for these carers to be placed on a 'Staying Put Arrangement' for former Brent Looked after children.

For those foster carers whose fostering approval ceases at the end of the young person's foster placement i.e. at aged 18 years, Placements Services involvement will usually end at this point unless it is agreed that further specific task centred activity needs to take place in consultation with the young person's social worker.

19+ Staying Rate (up to age 21)

From the date of the young person's 19th birthday the Staying Put rate for all arrangements will be based on the current rate of Housing Benefit or will be negotiated between Foster Carer, Young Person and Personal Advisor through the Young Person wage if employed.

Additionally, the young person will continue to contribute to the cost of food and utilities as agreed with their family.

Housing benefits

If a young person is working then their income from employment is taken into account in their claim for housing benefit. For example, a young person who is working and earning £100 (net income) per week would have to contribute about £21 per week towards their rent. However, every case is not the same, so will be assessed upon the young person's personal circumstances.

1.46 University students

Where university students need vacation accommodation, if the young person has a continuing relationship with their previous foster carer, the foster carer could be asked to provide this service for the rent element of the supportive lodgings rate. This will be negotiated between Foster Carer, Young Person and Personal Advisor.

General Finance

1.47 Allowance and Tax

It is important to note that the full allowance is given tax-free to all foster carers, whether family and friends' foster carers or unrelated foster carers, but both fee elements are subject to income tax and would therefore have to be included on your tax return. All carers can approach Fostering Network or Inland Revenue for further information on how to set themselves up to pay this income tax.

As a Fostering Network member you can access advice from qualified Independent Financial Advisors. They specialize in personal finance matters specifically for Foster Carers including tax and social security benefits.

Fostering Network

Tel: 0207 620 6440

membership@fostering.net

Fostering Network legal helpline – UK - 24-hour legal helpline for expert advice on allegations and help with any legal queries on 0345 013 5004.

HM Revenue and Customs have produced a basic guide to foster care tax relief available on the link below. It is advisable that all foster carers familiarise themselves with the requirements, so that they are equipped with knowledge around tax and what it may mean to them.

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/individuals/foster-care-relief.pdf>

1.48 Foster carers training and development

All foster carers are subjected to an annual review, where their training and development needs will be discussed and will form part of their ongoing personal development plan. This is a joint exercise, which requires both the Foster Carers and Supervising Social Worker to

identify relevant and specific training and the expectation is that all Foster Carers will undertake training on a regular basis, so that they are able to develop their knowledge and skills around the fostering task. The minimum learning events that foster carers need to complete each year are 4. These can include a mixture of training courses, seminars and online learning. As mentioned above, the fee element paid to foster carers in addition to their allowance acknowledges this continued development and learning.

Please note that we take into consideration other relevant training that you may have undertaken through employment or from other educational establishments. Please have a discussion with your Supervising Social Worker or the Training Coordinator, who will be able to clarify this.

The expectation is that once carers have booked themselves to attend training, they will turn up at the confirmed time and venue. If for some reason, carers do not attend and give no explanation, we have introduced a system which will now make a reduction of £50, for every course that the carers do not attend, without reasonable reason. If carers are not happy with any reduction made, you can speak to your Supervising Social Worker who will take the matter forward.

1.49 Tax Credits

When applying for Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit you will need to disclose your self-employment profit. This will be the fostering income in excess of your Qualifying Care Relief (QCR). If your fostering income is less than your QCR then you will have a £0 taxable income, and this is the figure you disclose. Fostering Network will be able to advise regarding this.

1.50 Tax for Staying Put Arrangements

Foster Carers who have a 'Staying Put' arrangement in place and receive money to enable them to pay for the care for the young person will not pay tax on this money as this is a Leaving Care Payment as set out in HM Revenue and Custom help sheet 236 (Qualifying care relief: Foster carer's, adult placement carer's, kinship carer's and staying put carer's, HS236 Self-Assessment help sheet). The government has recently decided that all payments for Staying Put are included in the foster care tax relief threshold. This enables allowances and fees to be tax free, up to £10,000 per year as a foster carer plus £250 per week for each young person over the age of 11, in addition to their own tax free earnings of approximately £10,000 per year.

If the foster carer is not working then tax would be offset against the personal tax allowance. If a host carer is applying as a couple then personal allowance can be claimed by one person or split between the couple.

1.51 Attendance/Mobility Allowance or Disability Living Allowance

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a tax-free, non-means tested benefit to assist people who have a recognised disability. This means that it does not need to be shown on your tax return. The person claiming will have to have been declared as having a disability by a medical practitioner. The benefit is to support people with disabilities with the additional costs that are associated with their disability.

If a carer is disabled they will be entitled to DLA in their own right. A foster carer could also claim DLA on a placement's behalf.

Attendance or mobility allowances or the replacement Disability living allowance received by the child/young person will not be deducted from the foster care allowance. However, benefits paid to a child at age 16 years and above will be taken into consideration under the subvention requirements.

1.52 Income Support

Foster carers are in the unique position of being able to choose whether to be deemed as being working and claim Working Tax Credits or not working and claim Income Support. Income Support is a non-taxable benefit which for people who work less than 16 hours per week but who do not need to sign on as unemployed, such as lone parents or foster carers.

Unless a foster carer has a second job, they will not be deemed as working more than 16 hours per week and will therefore meet this condition. Please note that fostering income does not count as remunerative work for Income Support purposes.

1.53 Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Housing benefit and Council Tax Benefit are both means-tested, and generally have the same conditions to qualify.

Any fostering allowances should be completely ignored when claiming – including any 'reward' element. Any retainer that you receive as a foster carer should also be ignored to the extent that it is offset by any reasonable expenses including Income Tax and NICs.

It may also be possible that you qualify for Council Tax Benefit. The amount of this will depend on how much your Council Tax bill is who you live with. Once again, people with savings exceeding £16,000 will not qualify.

If you are fostering a disabled child, then you may qualify for a Disability Reduction in your Council Tax bill. For more details contact your local council directly.

1.54 Insurance

It is advisable that all Brent Foster Carers have a fully comprehensive home contents insurance policy. If they are owner occupiers they must have Buildings Insurance as well. Supervising Social workers will ask to see evidence of this when they are carrying out the annual health and safety or where a claim has been made for damage made. Foster Carers have a responsibility to inform their insurance company that they are fostering for the Local Authority. If the policy premium increases because of their fostering status, Brent will consider contributing to the increase in the premium. Foster Carers are advised to contact their membership service provider (Fostering Network Members Helpline 020 7401 9582 from 10am - 3pm, Monday to Friday) for further specialist advice in this area.

Where items are damaged, the Foster Carer would be expected to claim on their house insurance. Any excess to be paid may be paid by the local authority, provided that the damage was caused by the young person in foster care and there is independent evidence to support this. In the case whereby the foster carer's insurance will not accept the claim, Brent local authority will consider whether the claim can be processed via Brent Insurance Scheme subject to evidence being provided to support the claim.

Brent Looked after Children and Permanency Service expects our carers to be responsible for the purchase of fully comprehensive car insurance if they are going to use their cars to assist with the caring tasks i.e. transporting of foster children. Supervising Social workers will ask to see evidence of this when they are carrying out the annual health and safety.

1.55 Non Compliance re: DBS, Medicals, Statutory Checks, Attendance at Training and Other Required Procedures

Foster Carers who fail to adhere to the department's requirements within a timely manner for updating medicals and statutory checks may be liable to a financial charge. Non-attendance at training may also incur a financial charge and this is set out within the training policy.

In the event that a nominated carer, or significant visitor to the household fails to provide the required information for a Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS), then the department will have to provide restrictions upon this person's contact with the looked after child/young people.

1.56 Brent Council Anti-Fraud Framework

Brent Council expects high standards of honesty and transparency in their staff, contractors and employees and takes any form of fraud or corruption very seriously. It is expected that Brent Foster carers will conduct themselves as responsible for administering public funds, ensuring that allowances, savings and any other payments or resources that are provided on behalf of Brent Looked After children (or any other children supported financially by Brent Council) are administered in an appropriate and accountable manner.

Brent staff will refer all suspected fraudulent activity to the Brent Audit and Investigation team for them to investigate this, with a view to prevention, detection and remedy; as necessary to discourage dishonest gain at the expense of the Council. The Council will seek the strongest possible penalties for carers who are found to have committed fraud or financial malpractice against the Council. Please ask your Supervising Social Worker to refer you to full details of this policy, which is held on the Brent Intranet site.

It is the responsibility of the carer to notify the local authority as soon as their circumstances change, so that a review of the financial support can be undertaken or the financial support can cease.

1.57 Special Guardianship and Adoption by Foster Carers.

Foster carers who have been fostering a child and are subsequently matched with those children for adoption, or who obtain a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) for the child, will still be paid the fostering allowance appropriate to the age of the child in their care and their own learning and development. This can be for up to two years following the child and foster carer being matched for adoption by Adopt London West's Adoption Panel or the SGO being granted in court. However, this must be agreed as part of the support plan.

For special guardians, before the agreed period ends, a financial assessment will be completed to calculate the means tested allowance to which the special guardian will be entitled after this period ends (see 1.58 for detail).

For adoption cases, before the agreed period ends, the carer will apply for an adoption allowance in the same way as indicated above.

Other Payments That May Be Made To Adopters/Special Guardians

- Travel and accommodation costs during introductions to a child
- A one off settling in grant
- Costs to facilitate direct contact arrangements

1.58 Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Allowances (formerly known as Residence Orders)

Brent pays its Special Guardians and those carers of children on Child Arrangement Orders

Level one payments on a weekly basis – this is the *allowance* element as set out in government guidance <https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>. It is designed to meet the costs of caring for the child with no discrimination on the grounds of a pre-existing relationship with the child. As previously mentioned, Brent's weekly allowance is greater than the amount advised by *Fostering Network*. The amount paid is based on the age of the child and recognises that these carers will have had no training or assessment.

Brent is guided by the Department for Education and Skills in applying the *standardised means test model for adoption and special guardianship financial support* to assess the allowance available to Special Guardians. This takes into account any other grant, benefit, allowance or resource available to the guardian in respect of their needs as a result of becoming a Special Guardian of a child and is reviewed annually based on their incoming and outgoing finances. Financial support cannot duplicate any other payment available to the Special Guardian. A link to this can be found below:

http://kinshipcarers.co.uk/documents/Means_test_guidance.pdf

For those carers who have previously fostered a looked after child their allowance will remain as the fostering allowance rates for up to 2 years post the Special Guardianship Order being granted.

If the child was not previously looked after, the carers receive the Department for Education standardised means test model of financial support, which is based on their incoming and outgoing finances, from the onset of placement and there is therefore no change for them once the Special Guardianship order is granted.

Fostering Network membership issues – 0207 620 6440 membership@fostering.net

Any comments in relation to this policy should be forwarded to the attention of:

Onder Beter

Head of Service

Looked after Children and Permanency Service

Brent Council

3rd Floor, Civic Centre

Engineers Way

Wembley

HA9 0FJ

Email: onder.beter@brent.gov.uk

<p>If this document is required in large print, contact your Supervising Social Worker or speak to the duty Social Worker.</p>
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