

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

FOSTERING ALLOWANCES with effect from July 2014

West Berkshire Council has introduced a simpler model of allowances for foster carers, which is both more equitable between foster carers and more straightforward to administer. These allowances have been constructed from figures produced annually by Fostering Network. It recognises that all foster carers should receive the same level of financial support to care for a child and to this end all foster carers receive a maintenance allowance based on the fostering network recommended rates.

- It is also recognised that there is a need to recruit foster carers from within the general economy and that there is competition from other agencies to attract foster carers. To this end West Berkshire Council provides a fee over and above the recommended maintenance allowance in order to attract foster carers to this authority and to cover some of the tasks associated with caring for “Looked After Children”:
 - Provide placements for children who become Looked After
 - Provide placements on demand
 - Contribute to assessments for court
 - Attend court as witnesses
 - Undertake direct work with children and young people in placement
 - Undertake initial training
- Carers will be paid in four age bands:
0 - 4 years; 5 - 10 years; 11 - 15 years and 16 years and over.

Children who reach the age of 18 are no longer fostered and arrangements for continued payments beyond 18 must be made with the appropriate social work team.

All foster carers will receive the Fostering Network recommended allowances for the respective age group(s). These allowances are set at 50% higher for children 0 – 10 and 16 plus and 75% higher for children 11 – 15 than the estimated average direct costs of caring for children in their own homes. This increase is in recognition of the additional costs that Foster Carers frequently incur when caring for children who are looked after by the Local Authority.

The new rates will be as follows:

Age (years)	Weekly maintenance rate £	Additional fee element £	Total £
0 - 4	144.41	72.20	216.61
5 - 10	164.50	82.25	246.75
11 - 15	204.78	153.59	358.37
16 +	249.06	124.53	373.59

The above rates are for 56 weeks per year and include allowance for holidays, birthday and festival gifts within the main allowances.

What the allowances include:

- Food including school dinner money.
- Clothing and shoes including special occasion clothing. (It is expected that clothing is routinely replaced from within weekly allowances).
- Replacement school clothing.
- Nappies.
- Self care and pocket money.
- Savings.
- Spectacles/contact lenses.
- Toys, games, books and school equipment.
- All sporting activities.
- Hobbies - music, dance and sport, including subscriptions to youth organisations.
- After school clubs.
- Treats and outings including school trips.
- Presents (as appropriate) for relatives and friends.
- Travel to attend meetings, medical appointments etc up to a maximum of 84 miles per child in any one week. Mileage claimed is paid at 40p per

mile. Where foster carers do not drive or have access to a car, the weekly financial equivalent of this amount £33.60 should be used to cover the cost of public transport or taxis for carers and/or young people to attend meetings, medical appointments, etc. Only if weekly transport costs are in excess of this can foster carers claim for these expenses. Receipts will be needed to claim back additional costs.

- Playgroup or nursery fees.
- Household costs including additional fuel, breakage of small items in daily use, wear and tear of furniture, furnishings and electrical durables.
- Baby/child sitters (except 4 hours per month covered by the Child Sitter Allowance).
- Expenses incurred in maintaining contact with child/young person's family and friends.
- Hospitality costs.

Notes

These allowances will be increased annually, usually in April, in line with the changes recommended by Fostering Network.

Payments are made each fortnight on the Saturday of the second week. Occasionally delays in notifying changes relating to moves of children/young people will occur and this could result in an overpayment. All foster carers receive a remittance slip and payslip and should check each slip to ensure that the right monies have been paid. If an overpayment occurs Foster carers are required either to send a cheque back or discuss repayment terms with their supervising social worker. All overpayments will be reclaimed or deducted against future payments.

Young people not in full time education (but who have completed full time compulsory education) are expected to contribute to their upkeep and the foster carers allowances will be reduced by an element to take account of this. The exact amount will be assessed according to the young person's individual circumstances.

Where Disabled Living Allowance or other benefits are payable, carers will be assisted to claim these in consultation and agreement with the social worker for the young person. Such benefits will be retained by the carer or the child/young person in addition to the fostering allowances. Where allowances such as DLA are claimed by the carer for the needs of the young person, the carer must keep records as to how the allowance has been spent. Ideally the allowance should be paid into an account for the child and transferred with the child when/if they move on.

Pocket money/ clothing money and savings allowance within carer's weekly maintenance allowance

Foster carers have an important role in educating children and young people in the responsible use of money. This is particularly important for older children and young people preparing for independence. In addition disagreements can easily arise concerning the amounts of money to be given to children and young people and the way that this money is to be spent. It is therefore important to discuss this fully in the placement agreement meeting and to regularly review what has been agreed. Ideally young people should be provided with a weekly allowance (dependent upon age) to spend at their discretion or if appropriate to spend with the support of their foster carer. The following table provides a guide as to levels of pocket money, savings and clothing and can be discussed more fully at the placement planning meeting.

Age	Maintenance rate	Pocket money	Savings	Clothing money	Total of allowances to directly spend on the child
	£	£	£	£	£
0 - 4	141.58	2.50	5.00	15.00	22.50
5 - 10	161.28	3.50	5.00	15.00	23.50
11 - 15	200.77	7.50	10.00	20.00	37.50
16 +	244.18	10.00	10.00	20.00	40.00

NB If a child is moved as a result of an allegation being against a foster carer, the maintenance part of the allowance will continue to be paid (less direct costs for looked after child) until the conclusion of the Section 47 enquiry is concluded.

If a foster carer is asked to put a placement on hold, i.e. is not able to take another placement until the resolution of the Section 47 enquiry then the again the maintenance part of the allowance will continue to paid (less direct costs for the looked after child).

Additional payments

Training – To support foster carers' professional development mileage and car parking expenses will be reimbursed when carers attend training.

Baby Sitting - Each fostering household will also receive an additional £15.00 per fortnight towards baby sitting.

Breaks in Placement - When a break in care is required or necessary the child's current/regular foster carers will continue to be paid for the first three days following the child moving to another carer. Payment will then cease until the child returns to their care.

Retainers - Payable in special circumstances only. To be considered on an individual basis.

Travel to and from school – foster carers can claim for mileage when taking looked after children to and from school. Mileage will be paid at 40p per mile.

Special/additional payments

Agreement to payment of additional costs must always be sought prior to monies being spent.

The following are all discretionary and can be agreed only by the Family Placement Team Manager following discussion with the child/young person's social worker and/or the family placement supervising social worker. Account will be taken of the above figures.

Special payments will be considered once an additional expenses claim form has been completed; a copy of "West Berkshire Council's Foster Carers Additional Expenses Claim Form can be found in the Foster Carer Handbook.

Initial clothing and footwear - Where a child or young person arrives with insufficient clothing and footwear to adequately meet basic needs. Receipts of purchases will be required.

School uniform allowance – This can be considered at the time of transfer to secondary school or where a change of school necessitates the purchase of a new uniform. Receipts of purchases will be required.

Exceptional costs at the start of a placement - It is recognised that in certain circumstances foster carers may incur high unanticipated costs at the start of a placement eg taking a child away on holiday very soon after the start of a placement. In such circumstances a monetary advance can be made to assist the carer, which would then be repayable over subsequent weeks as agreed between the foster carer and the department.

Holiday grants - It is anticipated that the costs of most holidays (both foster family and school) will be budgeted for by foster carers within the fostering allowances. However in exceptional circumstances additional payments may be made at the discretion of the Family Placement Team Manager.

Expenses associated with intensive introductions or rehabilitation programmes - A grant to cover expenses can be made at the discretion of the Family Placement Team Manager.

Foster carers - tax and benefits

Foster carers are seen as self employed for the purpose of tax. All foster carers are advised to seek independent financial advice as circumstances are individual to each family.

For information gross fostering receipts are any type of payment made by a local authority for foster care. This includes:- maintenance allowance, clothing allowance, fees or rewards, skills payments, additional needs payments, reimbursed expenses, travel and any other monies paid for the purpose of fostering.