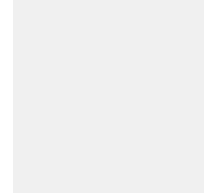


Fostering Allowance Guidance



AMENDMENT

In November 2020 the Foster Carer Allowance Leaflet was removed.

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1. Fostering Allowances

Walsall Council pays the fostering allowance rate recommended by the Fostering Network to all carers, including relative and friend carers.

The Fostering Network gives a guide on how fostering allowances can be broken down into percentages under various components:

Food	30 - 34%
Clothing	22 – 26%
Transport	7 – 11%
Personal	6 – 17%
Household	18 – 30%

Variations in percentages are mainly associated with different ages of children and young people.

Whilst this provides a useful guide, it is not intended to be rigid. However, within the category of clothing, foster carers are expected to be able to evidence expenditure through child's recording logs. In addition, pocket money must be paid according to Walsall's guidance Up to half of the weekly pocket money can – by negotiation with the child's/young person's social worker - be used by the young person to pay for wilfully caused damage, or withheld for a temporary period. Any monies paid or temporarily withheld must be recorded in the child recording logs.

Fostering allowances are initiated and ceased through a form WSS19, completed by the child's social worker. It is therefore essential that this form is completed within 48 hours of placement or of a placement ceasing.

In order for payments to be made to carers on the per placement scheme, a form WSS19 must have been completed and forwarded to finance section, information section and the family placement service by the social worker for the child, and the fee authorisation form (WSS691) must have been sent to finance section by the family placements link worker (counter signed by a manager).

If a child receives a respite service, fostering allowances will transfer to the respite carer on the day the child leaves their regular foster carer and transfer back the day they return.

2. Initial/Emergency Financial Support

Fostering allowances are paid in arrears. As all carers, who have opted for the fee payment scheme will have a regular income through fostering, it is hoped that this will not lead to hardship. However, in extreme cases, the family placement section can make a request for cash or an emergency cheque via a WSS80 form to finance section. Such requests must be authorised by a team manager within the family placement service. Finance section can then arrange payments through the cashier service, subject to the banking halls cash availability, to be made on the same day, the WSS80 has to be delivered to finance section between 9.15am and 11.30am or 2.15pm and 3.30pm. If an initial/emergency payment has been requested by 12noon on Monday, a cheque will be posted to the carer on Friday of that week. If the carer has provided their bank account details, the payment will be in their bank account on Tuesday of the following week. Any payments made are subtracted from the next fostering allowance payment.

Alternatively, it is possible to arrange for official orders through the family placement service, where specific items are required in an emergency. Where this happens, finance section must be notified by E-mail as soon as possible in order to make the corresponding changes to any initial equipment allowances payments. The email should be sent to Children's payments section, which is listed in the internal email directory.

3. Birthday Christmas and Festive Allowances

Each child placed with a foster carer is entitled to the equivalent of one half week's allowance for a birthday, and to one week's allowance per year for Christmas or festival presents. Payments will be automatic, except for festival payments, which have to be applied for via WSS80. Where a festival payment is made, this will substitute the automatic payment of the Christmas allowance.

More than one festival payment per year can only be applied for, if this is necessitated by move of placements. This will be initiated by the family placements section via a form WSS80.

Where a carer has received a festival or Christmas allowance prior to the actual event and the child moves on, any gifts or items purchased for the child to help them to celebrate this event should be sent with the child to their new placement.

In the event of a placement closing prior to the festive date for which the allowance was paid, payment is automatically recovered, to facilitate payment to the new carer. However if the allowance, or part of the allowance, has been spent by the carer and gifts purchased and forwarded to the new placement Family placement must notify finance via a memo to this effect. The memo must clearly state the festive amount spent.

4. Holiday/Recreation and Activity Allowances

Payments equivalent to twice the weekly fostering allowance will be made per child placed with a foster carer per year. Foster Carers have to apply for these payments and the supervising link worker countersigns to confirm that holiday activities are being pursued. Claims can be made from 1st April onwards for that financial year no more than one month in advance of the holiday, except where a payment is required to secure a booking. In this case a copy of the booking form will be required.

Where the allowance is being used to cover the finance recreation and leisure costs, rather than a holiday, the period of this claim is restricted to the 6 weeks school holidays.

Any additional monies, including for children who have experienced placement disruptions or several episodes in foster care within a year have to be applied for via WSS80 through the supervising link worker.

Consideration will be given to requests for payments to enable children to go on holidays abroad with the family. Funding will normally be made available to increase a child's holiday/recreation allowance to cover any flight/travel costs, where these are higher than 2 weeks allowance, even where the holiday is for one week only. Only actual costs can be considered and receipts or confirmation of payment details from travel agents must be submitted. Fostering allowances or the ring fenced per placement fee will continue to be paid and are expected to cover any other expenditure during holidays abroad.

Fostering allowances or the per placement fee are expected to cover school activities up to £30 per any one activity. In addition, one payment for a school educational trip per child can be paid for out from Fostering budget for the primary school and one for the secondary school period. Requests need to be made via WSS80 through the supervising link worker.

5. Discretionary Payments

Clothing Grants

An application may be made for an initial clothing grant, where a child has inadequate clothing on becoming looked after and no clothes can be retrieved for him or her. The sum approved will

depend on the needs of the child, but will not exceed £175. An application should normally be made within the first 6 weeks of a child's placement in foster care. An application for this must be made by the supervising link worker via a WSS80. A record of expenditure for initial clothing must be entered into the carers recording log and signed off by the supervising link worker.

An equivalent system to the above will apply to school uniform grants. Only one grant will be made per child respectively for the infant school period, the primary school period and the secondary school period, unless the child moves placements, which also results in a change of school.

An equivalent system will also apply to maternity clothes where necessary and a payment not exceeding £100 per pregnancy may be approved.

Transport Costs

The fostering allowance or flat fee is assumed to cover all travel costs incurred by the child taking part in everyday family activities and to cover short car journeys associated with the child's needs, for example routine trips for health appointments, hobbies and activities, friends parties etc. To ensure the child's other transport costs are met, the following can be claimed via WSS80 from the fostering budget:

- Carers' mileage costs to and from contact, where the return journey is over four miles or where the weekly mileage in respect to this item exceeds 40 miles. In this case, the total mileage can be claimed.
- Carers' mileage costs to and from school, where the return journey is over four miles or where the weekly mileage in respect to this item exceeds 40 miles. In this case, the total mileage can be claimed.
- Carers' mileage costs incurred in other journeys to meet the specific needs of the child, where this has been agreed at a post placement meeting and where the return journey is over four miles or where the weekly mileage in respect to this item exceeds 40 miles. In this case, the total mileage can be claimed. Mileage costs for routine medical appointments are included in the fostering allowance/flat fee payment.
- Carers' mileage costs incurred in attending reviews and other meetings, including training
- A bus pass for the carer, where public transport is used for accompanying the child for any of the above purposes (Please note that all bus passes should be obtained via an official order, marked family placements).

Claims must be made on carers' mileage forms. Claim forms must detail the reasons for mileage, the meter readings, and the actual miles incurred.

All claims must be submitted on a monthly basis to family placement. The WSS80 must be completed by the supervising link social worker. Claims submitted in excess of 3 months must be accompanied by a covering memo from family placement.

Transport cost incurred should be regularly monitored by the supervising link worker and the child's social worker.

The child's social worker is the lead person in making arrangements for taxis.

Young People Absent From Placement

a. Missing from placement

If a child is absent from placement because he or she has run away, placements can be retained for up to 1 week. During this time the fostering allowance or the per placement fee will continue to be paid. If the child returns during this time and a placement is refused by the carer, the fostering allowance or the flat fee will cease on the day the young person left the placement. In exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of a family placements team manager, payments may be continued for longer than this. If another child is placed into the vacancy left by the absent child, the absent child's placement is assumed to cease on the same day.

b. Admitted to hospital

Where a child's has a hospital stay for up to two weeks, fostering allowances or the per placement fee may continue, in recognition of the high initial costs required to support a child in hospital. After this period an assessment will be undertaken by the child's social worker and the supervising link worker as to whether the foster carers is continuing to incur ongoing costs. If this is the case, a continuing payment up to the amount of the fostering allowance may be agreed by the family placement manager. This should be time limited and must be reviewed at least every 26 weeks, in line with the guidance for enhanced allowances.

Equipment

It is the responsibility of carers to provide appropriate furniture and other equipment for children and young people fostered. An initial lump sum payment of up to £300 per placement may be made at the approval stage processed by the supervising link worker.

Carers receiving a fee, receive a dedicated amount of £120 per year towards the replacement of furniture.

In emergency situations, equipment may be provided to carers.

Enhanced Allowances

Enhanced allowances may be payable to cover identifiable additional costs. Examples of this would be additional washing as a result of heavy soiling, additional skin care products/diet as a result of a medical condition, allergy etc. Any such allowances must be applied for through the supervising link worker via a WSS80. If such allowances are paid on a weekly basis, they will cease after a maximum of 26 weeks, unless they have been reviewed.

Child Care and Sessional Work Costs to Support Placements

A number of carers will be available at any one time to support other foster carers in order to aid placement stability. In exceptional circumstances, nursery, play scheme and sessional work costs can be agreed by a Team Manager, Family Placements, where it can be demonstrated that this measure will significantly enhance the placement stability, or where the need arises as a result of service

requirements. Where such arrangements are made to meet the specific needs of a child, the responsible team manager, Looked After Children team, has to fund this from the LAC budget. Where appropriate childcare arrangements are made in negotiation with the child's social worker to cover the normal work patterns of a carer, this must be funded directly by the foster carer, unless the carer does not receive a fee payment. In this case, financial support may be offered jointly through the family placement and the looked after children service. Foster carers cannot be paid as childminders unless they are appropriately registered with the Early Years' Service to do so and can not be paid childminding fees in respect of foster children.

Ex-Gratia Payments and Claims for Damage

All foster carers are expected to inform their insurers (household, building, car) that they are caring for foster children. Carers are also expected to take reasonable precautions to avoid risk of damage to or loss of their personal property as a result of fostering. However, uninsured losses/damage caused by a foster child may be considered for reimbursement, where they exceed £20 and where the carers' own insurance does not cover the damage.

All claims under this category will normally require 2 estimates and a report must be presented to the Assistant Director for a decision. The supervising link worker should initially advise the carer and draft a report outlining the circumstances of reasons for the claim.

Payments to Support Interests/Talents/Hobbies

Financial assistance to support interests/talents/hobbies, which exceed the cost of £10 per week, can be applied for via a WSS80 by the supervising link worker. Approval can then be given to meet the excess cost of such activities. Payments of up to £10 per week are expected to be covered by fostering allowance or the flat rate per placement fee.

In addition, carers should be encouraged to access resources held by the Early Year's Service, including the toy library and school holiday/council run play schemes.

Receipts of Gifts by Carers

Carers may occasionally be offered gifts, presents or other hospitality by birth family members or friends of the child they are caring for. All such gifts and hospitality should be viewed with caution, as acceptance may be misconstrued at a later stage. Prior to accepting any gifts or hospitality the carer must discuss the appropriateness with the family placement service and the child's social worker. Only if it is considered appropriate should a gifts and hospitality form be submitted to a Family Placements Manager, who will make a recommendation to the Assistant Director. Otherwise the gift must be refused or returned.

Contributions by Young People

When a fostered young person reaches the age of 16, he or she will be expected to contribute 25% of any income to the carer to cover maintenance costs, payable directly to the foster carer. A deduction of an equal amount will be made from the fostering allowance or the flat fee. It is the foster carer's responsibility to inform the supervising link worker, who will inform Finance Section.

Young people should be encouraged to apply for education grants, of which, if awarded, no contribution to their carer is required.

6. Any Other Matters

Any exceptional cases not covered by the above guidance should be referred for a decision to a family placements manager.

Any questions arising should in the first place be dealt with by the relevant supervising link worker or the duty social worker.

Queries regarding payment details, should be made to Children's Services Finance Section on 01922 652716.