

**WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**Foster Care
Payment and Accreditation Scheme**

April 2017

1. Background

- 1.1 The All Inclusive Allowance (AIA) is designed to meet all of the normal expenses incurred in caring for a foster child.
- 1.2 Also included are additional costs incurred by the foster family by having another child in the family home.
- 1.3 The Skills fee (previously known as the Household Fee) is a reward fee payable in recognition of skills and knowledge demonstrated by the foster carer.

2. Basis of the calculation of AIA

- 2.1 The level of the allowance was reached after detailed analysis of the actual expenditure for a sample of looked after children of all ages in West Sussex over a three month period. This amount was subsequently balanced to allow for variations in individual spending patterns and preferences over the period of the placement. The allowance, therefore, is founded on an evaluation of real expenditure.
- 2.2 As a point of comparison, the Fostering Network and the DfE produces a recommended minimum schedule of fees. It is recognised that caring for a foster child is 'at least' 50% more expensive than looking after parents' own children and this consideration is built into their recommended rates. West Sussex rates are reviewed annually to ensure that they are set at above or in line with the recommended rates.
- 2.3 A table of retainer and absence rulings has been designed to cover such matters as temporary absence and the reservation or retaining of a placement. A table of these rulings is included in section 10.
- 2.4 Foster carers are treated as self-employed for tax and National Insurance purposes. It is the responsibility of each foster carer to submit details of their own income directly to the Inland Revenue. The Authority will provide the foster carer with a statement at the start of each tax year which will set out the total amount paid to the foster carer in the preceding tax year. Under the new regulations both the AIA and Skills fee are included in the Inland Revenue's calculation of tax liability. For further details on Foster Care Tax Relief carers need to refer to the website www.hmrc.gov.uk.
- 2.5 Foster carers are not entitled to claim child benefit or child tax credit in respect of a foster child under the current benefit rules.

3. What is included in the AIA?

3.1 The allowance is designed to include the direct costs of caring for an individual child. The AIA has been calculated to meet all regular weekly expenses.

A non-exhaustive list includes:

- ✓ clothing, food, books, newspapers and other reading materials, nappies, bottles etc
- ✓ playgroup and play scheme fees
- ✓ pocket money
- ✓ entertainment, hobbies, clubs, recreational activities, sports clothing and equipment and musical equipment
- ✓ transport (including public transport) to school, contact and other activities
- ✓ school activities and trips
- ✓ family holidays
- ✓ photographs (including school photographs)
- ✓ passports
- ✓ computers
- ✓ contact lenses and glasses
- ✓ mobile phone contracts/top ups
- ✓ hairdressing
- ✓ other routine 'one off' expenses

Excessive costs associated with the items on the list above are referred to in section 4.

3.2 The allowance also includes a proportion which has been calculated at approximately 30%, of the extra costs associated with having another child in the home, such as:

- normal wear and tear on the home and its fixtures, fittings and furnishings
- heating costs
- insurance
- travel costs including a contribution towards the cost associated with the provision of a larger vehicle and extra costs incurred such as fuel, tax, insurance, servicing and wear and tear to the family vehicle.

3.3 **Pocket Money**

A guide to the amount of pocket money to be given can be found in Appendix 1. Consideration should be given to the amount given to the foster carer's birth children as it would be unfair if foster children receive more or less than the foster carer's own children. The amount should be agreed at the placement planning meeting and increased at each birthday. Pocket money should be used towards a child or young person's personal needs ranging from magazines, excess mobile phone charges for young people (although capped phone contracts are recommended) or perhaps as a contribution towards a birth family's birthday present. The child or young person should also be encouraged to save some of their pocket money. Pocket money should only be withheld as a last resort and the money either placed in a savings account or carried over until the next week.

4. **AIA Exceptions**

- 4.1 It is recognised that not all expenditure is easily quantified and that each household will have different priorities and spending patterns. The weekly payment is greater than the actual weekly cost of caring for a child. There is an expectation that foster carers will budget to meet the overall costs of caring for a child, including occasional large items of expenditure over the duration of the placement. However, there will be circumstances under which exceptional payments may be made when it is considered unreasonable to expect the payment to be met by the weekly AIA. Exceptional payments are authorised by the Exceptional Payments Panel (EPP) on application by the carer's supervising social worker. These requests should be agreed prior to the event if possible. Retrospective claims more than six months old should not be submitted.
- 4.2 The most frequently encountered exceptions to this are outlined below.

i) **Initial clothing allowance**

A one-off payment for clothing and an additional one-off payment towards a school uniform may be paid in emergencies when a child is first placed from home and does not have the necessary clothing (see Appendix 1 for rates). It is the expectation that children moving between foster placements will move with adequate clothing. Applications can be made for exceptional school uniform costs i.e. move to secondary school for new placements (within the last 3 months) to the EPP.

ii) **Transport**

Foster carers are expected to take children to and from school as is appropriate to their age and maturity. Carers are expected to absorb the costs of daily journeys to and from school amounting to 60 miles per week for each child up to a maximum of 120 miles per fostering household. Mileage in excess of this is payable at the mileage rate quoted in Appendix 1. Public transport expenses to school in excess of the approved amount stated in Appendix 1 may be submitted to the Exceptional Payments Panel by the carer's supervising social worker.

As with school transport, foster carers' and children's travel costs associated with contact, medical or therapeutic appointments, social and sporting events, panel attendance and LAC reviews etc. are considered to be included in the AIA. Mileage requests for reimbursement of transport costs will be considered for unusually frequent or long journeys (over 30 miles per week per child). An application may be made to the EPP for such costs although any decision will be taken in the light of the other journeys routinely undertaken by the foster carer.

The payment of taxi fares to school or contact will only be made in exceptional circumstances. There must be no other reasonable option, given the age and circumstances of the child (for example emergency or short term placement, or temporary illness or disability of foster carer) and should be time limited. Although there are financial constraints in relation to taxi use, the overriding principle is that children should not be spending significant periods of time (particularly unaccompanied) in taxis. Taxis must be approved by EPP in advance or as soon as possible in an emergency and no commitment should be entered into with a taxi firm beyond one week without the approval of the EPP. Because transport costs to school and contact are an integral part of the AIA, a contribution will be sought from the foster carer (see Appendix 1).

iii) **Pre-School Day Care**

The AIA is expected to meet up to three half day sessions of playgroup per week. Foster carers should apply for free entitlement funding at their nursery school when applicable. If the care plan for the child requires more than this, a referral should be made to the EPP who will take account of the free entitlement funding. Foster carers would be expected to pay the nursery and claim reimbursement for sessions over and above the three half days.

iv) **After School Care**

It would be unusual for a looked after child to attend after school care and such costs will only be considered when this is specifically included in the child's care plan.

v) **Birth Certificates and Passports**

- a) Social workers are responsible for obtaining birth certificates for children in long term care.
- b) Foster carers are only responsible for providing passports for any child that has been placed with them for over 6 months or is in a long term or permanent arrangement. If a child has been accommodated under Section 20, consideration should be given to requesting a contribution from the birth parents.

vi) **School Trips**

School Trips are to be funded by the foster carer up to the agreed value (see Appendix 1) from the AIA.

5 Summer Activities Allowance

- 5.1 Two extra weeks AIA are payable to foster carers to meet the additional costs of activities for children during the school summer holiday. This allowance will be made in the fostering payment covering the period which includes 18th July.
- 5.2 Short term foster carers who have a child placed over the school summer holiday will receive the summer activities allowance on a pro rata (daily) basis.
- 5.3 If the child leaves the placement during the school summer holiday period then the allowance will be reclaimed on a pro rata basis.
- 5.4 Summer activities allowance will not normally be offered for children placed in respite placements of less than seven nights.

6 Festival and Birthday allowances

- 6.1 The festival allowance is paid to help with the extra expense of Christmas/Festival. This includes not just buying presents for the foster children but presents they may wish to give (eg to friends or birth family) and also celebrations and outings.
- 6.2 The birthday allowance helps towards the cost of presents for the child and also celebrations and outings.
- 6.3 Foster carers should be able to provide a brief record of how the allowances were spent for their supervising social worker.
- 6.4 The festival allowance will be paid on the payment run covering the period which includes the 1st December. Normally it is expected that the child will be in placement on the 25th December to be eligible for the festival allowance. If a child leaves a placement in December unexpectedly, a request for reimbursement can be made to EPP for any presents purchased.
- 6.5 The supervising social worker should email the Payments Team (FS.Childcare.Payments@westsussex.gov.uk) if the festival payment is to be paid to celebrate a festival at another time of the year ie for Eid.
- 6.6 The birthday allowance is paid on the fortnightly payment run before which the birthday falls.
- 6.7 The birthday allowance for an 18th birthday is one week's allowance less £50. The £50 is paid direct to the young person by their allocated Social Worker.

7 Day Care, short breaks and respite care

- 7.1 If pre-agreed day care is provided, the foster carers should complete and email a day care claim form to their supervising social worker for processing.
- 7.2 There are additional costs associated with caring for children with disabilities which foster carers can claim. These costs must be agreed at the initial planning meeting with the child disability team.
- 7.3 If an overnight respite/short break placement is provided, a respite claim form should be completed by the foster carer and emailed to their supervising social worker for processing. Respite carer's with placements of 6 nights or less can claim mileage in full for collecting and dropping back to main placement. Claims cannot be made for activities etc. during respite.

- 7.4 For stays of three nights or less a disturbance fee is payable. (See Appendix 1 for details)
- 7.5 When a respite foster carer stays in the main foster carer's home, payment will be made as per the absence rulings for the main carer and the respite carer will be paid a pro rata rate. No disturbance fee will be paid in these instances.

8. Equipment

- 8.1 There is an expectation that foster carers will supply all usual furniture and equipment to care for the children for their preferential approved age group. However a request can be made to EPP for essential equipment needed if a foster carer accepts a child outside of this age range or to meet the costs of exceptional or unusual equipment. Specialist items, such as those for a child with disabilities should also be referred to EPP.
- 8.2 Replacement costs of equipment will usually be met from the AIA although costs incurred by exceptional wear and tear and damage may be referred to the EPP if the cost cannot be claimed from the foster carer's household insurance. Similarly, theft of household or personal items should normally be claimed from the foster carer's household insurance although when this is unsuccessful the loss should be referred to the EPP or to the Authority's insurer (depending on circumstances) by the supervising social worker.

9. Skills Fee

- 9.1 The Recruited Foster Carer (level 1) fee is a commercial fee that is paid to recruited generic foster carers, (not Friends and Family Carers), to recognise their skills, to make their home available to any child, to recognise the commercial aspect of the local market for generic foster care and the need for the County Council to have a pool of foster carers on which to draw.
- 9.2 The Skilled Foster Carer (level 2) and Advanced Foster Carer (level 3) fees are applicable to all foster carers and promotions to these levels are via the County Accreditation Panel. Foster Carers at the Advanced level are expected to provide 37 hours a year to the authority eg assisting with training, interviewing, mentoring new carers.
- 9.3 Further details of the Skills Fee structure can be found in Appendix 2. The County Accreditation Panel will make a decision to promote a carer based on their training, knowledge and skills. The panel will also take into account financial limits of the Fee budget and the business needs of the County Council to have skilled carers who offer particular type placements e.g. Parent and Child. These business needs will vary according to cohorts of children and young people and County Council priorities. Poor performance, failing to meet Personal Development Plan targets or serious complaints could result in the Panel not approving an application or reducing the fee level.

9.4 Specialist Placements

The Fostering Service has a number of specialist schemes, which will entitle foster carers to a payment supplement being the difference (if any) between their existing level and the Advanced Foster Carer fee level (level 3) or level 4 for Parent and Child placements. The payment supplement is due to the complex nature of the work or time requirements of the work or both. This supplement is only payable whilst the carer has a child from the specialist scheme in placement.

The schemes this section applies to are set out below:

- Parent and Child
- Alternative to Custody (*to be redeveloped*)
- Fostering Early Support Programme – FESP
- Disability (children with an allocated Child Disability Team worker)
- Emergency Fostering Placement (*to be developed*)
- Targeted Teenagers (*to be developed*)

9.5 Foster Carers transferring from the independent sector

A fee may be paid supplementary to the AIA to ensure that a foster carer who is transferring from an Independent Fostering Agency with a West Sussex County Council child in placement is paid at the same level as they would be with the agency. This supplement is payable out of the Fee budget and must be agreed by the Fostering Service Manager. The fee is only applicable while the child is in placement. The carer will be supported and encouraged to apply for a higher fee level in order to ensure that the supplement is time limited. If a foster carer transfers without a West Sussex child in placement then a supplement may still be payable in exceptional circumstances for a time limited period to help the fostering service develop specific placement types.

9.6 Foster Carer applications from qualified teachers, social workers, residential workers and carers with significant professional experience of working with children and vulnerable adults.

Foster carer applicants who fit into this category may be assessed by the County Accreditation Panel for Skilled (level 2) or Advanced (level 3) fee. The service wants to encourage foster carer applicants who can demonstrate substantial childcare experience in a professional setting. If a foster carer applicant fits this category the County Accreditation Panel may APEL courses and set out targets to undertake learning and development in specified areas to fulfil the criteria for the specified fee level. If the targets are not met the Accreditation Panel may reduce the foster carer's fee level.

10. Retainers and Absences

10.1 A schedule of payments below has been agreed to cater for absences from the foster placement. Any exceptions, extended payments or retainers require approval from EPP.

The details summarised below indicate the percentage paid and the maximum periods:

Circumstances	Length of Absence	All Inclusive Allowance	Skills Fee
Hospital (Child)	Up to 2 weeks (14 nights)	100%	100%
School Trips/Other Trips (Scouts/Guides/Clubs etc)	Over 14 nights	Nil	Nil
AWOL/Detention			
Circumstances	Length of Absence	All Inclusive Allowance	Skills Fee
Shared Care (with parents, Grandparents etc.) Primary Carer – Foster Carer	Up to 6 nights	100%	100%
	7 nights – 14 nights	Nil	100%
	Over 14 nights	Nil	Nil
Respite (Primary Carer) Respite taken place in Primary Carer's Home			
School Boarder	Length of School Term/nights absent from placement	50%	50%
Carer illness/operation or family bereavement.	Up to 2 weeks (14 nights) in a twelve month period. (NB Child must return to the placement).	100%	100%
Carer's Holiday	Any length	Nil	Nil

Retainers			
Circumstances	Length of Absence	All-Inclusive Allowance	Skills Fee
Home on Trial	Up to 2 weeks (14 nights)	30%	100%
Reserving a Placement	Up to 2 weeks (14 nights)	30%	100%

10.2 Retainers for Advanced Foster Carers (level 3 & 4)

- i) Retainers are payable to Advanced foster carers (levels 3 & 4) who have signed an exclusivity agreement as part of their partnership with the Authority. This retainer procedure does not supersede the absence and retainer financial procedures (detailed above), which are applicable to foster carers of all levels.
- ii) A retainer of 100% of skills fee is payable for up to 13 weeks from the date when no child is in placement and when the carer is available, within the conditions described in this procedure and the Foster Care Partnership Agreement.
- iii) In addition to the above, one retainer of 30% of the AIA is payable for up to 13 weeks at the AIA rate for the last eldest child in placement.
- iv) The maximum time a retainer can be paid is 13 weeks for the skills fee and the AIA in any 52 weeks. This is the cumulative total in any 52 week period and does not relate to a particular calendar year. Payment for part of a week will be made on a pro-rata basis.
- v) If a foster carer refuses a placement that can be judged to meet the needs of the child and is consistent with their approval and skills and accreditation level, their retainer will not be paid or, if already being paid, will be withdrawn.
- vi) The supervising social worker is responsible for monitoring requests and refusals of placements. Decisions as to the viability of placement, arrangements for support or a decision not to make a placement must be evidenced through the use of the Child and Foster Carer Matching Protocol to support the payment of a retainer when placements have been considered.
- vii) Foster carers must complete retainer claim forms detailing their vacancy position during the period. The forms must be sent to their supervising social worker for processing and authorisation. Payments will be made fortnightly in arrears.
- viii) Foster carers will not be eligible for a retainer in any period when they are not available for placement, without the approval of the Exceptional Payments Panel.

10.3 Suspension Retainers

If a foster carer is suspended from fostering because of an allegation of ill-treatment of a child or concerns about the standard of care they are providing, a retainer of 30% AIA of the eldest child last in placement and their skills fee at the one child rate is payable with immediate effect after suspension. This is paid for a maximum period of 13 weeks. Should the matter take longer than this to bring to a resolution (either by the carer being reinstated or by the foster carer's registration being withdrawn) an application may be made to the EPP for an extension to the payment.

11. Single child placement fee (Young People with Complex Needs)

11.1 An additional allowance will be paid when it is necessary for a child/young person to be the only child in placement or when the number of children a carer can look after must be reduced to or maintained below the number of children for which the carer has approval **and** when one (or more) of the following conditions are met:

- The child/young person is placed in a West Sussex residential unit
- The child/young person is placed with an independent fostering agency or an agency residential unit
- The child/young person is placed in a secure residential establishment
- The child/young person's needs are identified as complex and consequently may have an impact on subsequent placement or the required amount of input from the carers to meet the child's needs is deemed as inappropriate to make further placement.

11.2 The payment will be for one placement at 30% of the AIA level of the child in placement. The EPP will agree and set a time scale for review, in the first instance this will be a maximum of six months. In the event of the placement being a respite care arrangement in support of the above circumstances, the formula will apply on a pro-rata basis at the 30% level.

12. Overpayment

12.1 It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to notify the Placement Finding Team (PFT) when a placement is ending. However, to help avoid creating an overpayment, the foster carer and supervising social worker should contact the Payments Team on 033022 28800/ email FS.Childcare.Payments@westsussex.gov.uk to notify them of known leaving dates.

12.2 Foster carers must immediately contact the Payments Team on 033022 28800/email FS.Childcare.Payments@westsussex.gov.uk if they receive a payment for a child no longer in their care.

12.3 Overpayments will be deducted from a foster carer's future payments, until full recovery has been made.

12.4 Should an underpayment be made, the Authority will rectify this as soon as is possible within the constraints of the payment system.

12.5 If there is no payment due to the carer (because no child is in placement) an invoice will be sent to the foster carer to enable full payment to be made. However, should a subsequent placement be made, the overpayment will be deducted from payments due.

13. Exceptions

- 13.1 Any extension to, or variation of, this payment schedule will only be agreed in exceptional circumstances. An application to support an extension or variation must be made to the EPP

APPENDIX 1

Rates of Payment to Foster Carers 2017/18

Skills Fee – Total weekly rate per household

Level		One child	Two children	Three children	Four children	Five children
Recruited	1	£88.20	£99.89	£113.82	£130.13	£148.75
Skilled	2	£120.89	£132.58	£146.51	£162.82	£181.44
Advanced/Specialist	3	£232.26	£243.95	£257.88	£274.19	£292.81
Advanced/Specialist	4*	£319.20	£330.89	£344.82	£361.13	£379.75

(*level 4 is being phased out)

All-inclusive Allowance – Weekly rate

Age	
0 – 4	£153.37
5 – 10	£182.42
11- 15	£208.11
16 –18	£251.44

Parent & Child – Total weekly rate

£735.70

Day Care

Standard placements	£5.72p/h
Specialist scheme placements	£7.63p/h

Pocket Money

Age	Guide rate £
5	2.00
6	2.50
7	3.00
8	3.50
9	4.00
10	4.50
11	5.00
12	6.00
13	7.50
14	10.00
15	12.50
16	13.00
17	13.50
18	14.00

Other

1. A pro-rata nightly allowance is payable for periods of less than a full week.
2. School mileage in excess of sixty miles per week per child (up to a maximum of 120 miles ie two children) is paid at **46.9 pence p/mile.**
3. Contact/Other mileage in excess of 30 miles per week (Sunday to Saturday) is payable at **46.9 pence p/mile.**
4. In the event of a taxi being commissioned to transport a child to school, **£30 per week** (pro-rata if only some journeys are commissioned) will be deducted from the AIA for the duration of the service.
5. **£15 per week** will be deducted from the AIA if the child attends contact by taxi.
6. Clothing Allowance is up to **£75** per child (under 11 years old) and **£100** per child (11 years and older).
7. Uniform Allowance is up to **£75** per child attending primary school and **£150** for secondary school.
8. Disturbance Fee (payable for each respite episode of three nights or less) is **£13.08.**
9. Public transport expenses in excess of £15 per child per week for contact and in excess of £30 for school may be submitted to the EPP via your supervising social worker.
10. The first £150 of a school trip must be met by AIA and also 50% of the remaining balance. A contribution of the other 50% can be requested from EPP. The EPP contribution is limited to £500 for the first week and £300 for additional weeks.

APPENDIX 2

Skills Fee table 2017/18

Level	Definition	Payment details
Connected foster carer	Connected persons foster carers who have either Agency Decision Maker (ADM) emergency approval (valid for up to 16/24 weeks) or ADM full approval following Panel working towards Fostering Standards. (Note: Training can take longer than 12 months for connected persons but expectation will be that it will be no longer than 24 months)	AIA per child
Recruited foster carer	1. Newly approved Foster carers who have i. Completed Skills to Foster course, and ii. have completed or are working towards completion of Fostering Standards	AIA per child + Market Supplement £88.20 p/w per household + supplement per additional child
Skilled Foster Carer	Approved foster carers who have i. Two years fostering experience and completed the relevant training or ii. a portfolio of experience of working with children and young people and been approved by the Accreditation Panel to be appointed at this level.	AIA per child + Skill fee £120.89 p/w per household + supplement per additional child
Advanced Foster Carer	1. Approved foster carers who have i) completed the relevant training and skills or ii) have portfolio of experience of working with children and young people and iii) are approved by Accreditation Panel to be appointed directly to this level and iv) provide 37hours a year to the authority eg mentoring; assisting with training.	AIA per child + Skill fee £232.26 p/w per household + supplement per additional child
Specialist placements NB. Payment will be in the form of a supplement (ie the difference if any between the carer's actual accreditation level skills fee and this specialist placement fee).	2. Approved foster carers with a placement from a specialist scheme in placement ie: i) Parent and Child* ii) FESP iii) Disability (placement with allocated Child Disability Team SW) iv) Emergency Fostering (to be developed) v) Alternative to Custody (to be redeveloped) vi) Targeted teenagers	As per Advanced Foster carer (*Parent & Child placements will receive a total weekly payment of £735.70)

Multiple Placement Skill Fee Supplement	Weekly amount per child
2 nd child	£11.69
3 rd child	£13.93
4 th child	£16.31
5 th Child	£18.62