

Foster Carer Fees and Foster Care Allowances in Northern Ireland: A Submission to the Children’s Social Care Services Review



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Introduction

In August 2022 we forwarded a copy of our manifesto for foster care and offered the CSCS review team an opportunity to meet with our members concerning children's social care. One of the issues we would have liked to raise in more detail with you is foster carer fees and foster care allowances. In lieu of a meeting we have prepared this written submission for the review team.

In this submission we primarily address **foster carer fees**, but also make brief comment on foster care allowances. Foster carer fees play a key role in assisting with the retention and recruitment of foster carers, they are particularly important in helping to retain experienced and well-trained foster carers by providing remuneration for their knowledge, skills, time, and experience¹. Our members would like to outline in more detail our specific concerns and recommendations concerning policy and practice in relation to foster carer fees within children's services in Northern Ireland. The following document discusses the systematic devaluing of foster carers, in respect of fostering fees, over the last decade. In addition, we highlight the disparity experienced by foster carers within and across HSC Trusts. We also outline the lack of clarity, transparency and subsequent confusion concerning the criteria used for the payment of foster care fees and the procedurally obscure processes used in deciding foster carer fees within HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland. It is also important to highlight the intolerable inertia concerning the establishment of a regional fee structure which has been a stalled strategic objective for over 5 years. Finally, we address the need to include foster carers and their unions in establishing robust foster care financial policies which are transparent, equitable and accountable.

In summary we are asking the CSCS review to make definitive recommendations to include:

1. an independent review of foster carer fees in Northern Ireland, with this review to be completed within 6 months and actions agreed to reform HSC Trust foster carer fees and finance policies by the start of the 2024-25 fiscal year.
2. the remit of the review should be to ensure that current and future foster care fee payments are transparent, equitable, subject to regular inspection and collective annual review and collective negotiation with foster carers.
3. Department of Health and HSC Trusts to co-produce with foster carers a regional foster care finance policy to introduce a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments and their equitable operation across the five HSC Trusts.
4. **All** HSC Trust foster carer fee schemes to receive an average **57.52% uplift** in line with RPI inflation to restore the value of foster carer fees to 2008 levels or date introduced value.²
5. HSC Trust foster care allowances should be increased to the Fostering Network recommended minimum allowance.

¹ Selwyn, J and London Economics Wales (2010) *Foster Care Payments Schedule and Fees Framework Final Report for the Welsh Assembly*. London Economics Wales, Hadley Centre for Fostering and Adoption Studies, HMSO 2010

² We recognize there will be some variation based on the date each fee scheme was introduced.

Disparity concerning fee payment structures.

The percentage of fee paid foster carers in Northern Ireland is significantly below other parts of the UK³. There is also wide variation in foster carers access to fee payments in Northern Ireland. This disparity in fee payment structures was noted by the RQIA report into foster care in 2013⁴ and has yet to be resolved. Appendix 2 obtained via freedom of information (FOI) gives some insight into initial work conducted by the Children's Services Implementation Board (CSIB) which halted before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The current standards applicable in Northern Ireland are the 1999 UK National Standards⁵, these require access to fee payments to be open and accessible to **all** foster carers via transparent and widely available policies and procedures. However, in Northern Ireland there is a postcode lottery of fee payments. The Directed Statutory Functions (DSF) composite report⁶ 2021/22 states that 8% (220) of foster carers in Northern Ireland are specialist fee paid foster carers. We note that this is a significant decrease from previous reporting and as outlined by the Trusts in appendix 2. By means of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests the FCWU has determined there are twenty-three different schemes that are in operation in Northern Ireland (also see appendix 2). In addition, there are different proportions of fee paid foster carers within each trust area: BHSCT 17% (97), NHSCT 26% (129), SEHSCT 23%, (78), SHSCT 12%, (57), WHSCT 11% (77), NI wide 17.58% (438)⁷. This is in stark contrast to the 60% of foster carers in England who receive a fee⁸. This inequity also applies to the majority of kinship carers who do not receive a fee in Northern Ireland. There is a need to see a similar standard to England as National Minimum Standard 28.7⁹ were related and non-related foster carers receive equal treatment concerning fee payments. There is an urgent need for the CSCS review to make recommendations to improve regional foster care finance and fee policies and individual Trust foster care finance and fee polices.

We are asking the CSCS review team to make definitive recommendations for

1. an independent review¹⁰ of foster carer fees in Northern Ireland to be completed within 6 months and actions agreed to reform HSC Trust foster carer fees by the start of the 2024-25 fiscal year.
2. the remit of the review should be to ensure that current and future foster care fee payments are transparent, equitable, subject to regular inspection and collective annual review and collective negotiation with foster carers.

Devaluing of foster carer fees over the last decade

HSC Trust foster carer fee payments have not increased in over a decade, this is a critical concern for our members. This systematic devaluing of foster care fees has been experienced acutely by HSC Trust foster carers in Northern Ireland unlike other parts of the UK. Via freedom of information (FOI) requests to the HSC Trusts and Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) we have determined that the majority of

³ Lawson, K and Cann, R (2019) State of the Nation's Foster Care full report. The Fostering Network

⁴ RQIA (2013) Review of Statutory Fostering Services Overview Report. The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority. December 2013. <https://www.rqia.org.uk/RQIA/files/35/3554bcdf-8cdb-4e2b-a839-c61c901d798a.pdf>

⁵ NFCA (1999) UK National Standards. National Foster Care Association

⁶ Department of Health (2022) Directed statutory Functions Composite Report

⁷ Note this figure excludes foster carers registered with IFA's who will all receive a fee.

⁸ Lawson, K and Cann, R (2019) State of the Nation's Foster Care full report. The Fostering Network

⁹ 28.7) *Criteria for calculating fees and allowances are applied equally to all foster carers, whether the foster carer is related to the child or unrelated, or the placement is short or long term.* Department for Education. (2011). *Fostering services: national minimum standards*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards>

¹⁰ Similar to Selwyn, J and London Economics Wales (2010) *Foster Care Payments Schedule and Fees Framework Final Report for the Welsh Assembly*. London Economics Wales, Hadley Centre for Fostering and Adoption Studies, HMSO 2010

the current HSC Trust foster carer fee schemes in Northern Ireland were initiated pre-2010, over a decade ago¹¹. All Trusts have confirmed via FOI that they have not increased fees since before 2011-12 or since the introduction of each respective fee scheme. HSC Trusts have also confirmed via FOI they have no mechanism for annual or regular collective review of foster carer fee schemes, therefore there have been no increases. We note that the England National Minimum Standards require an annual review of allowances and fees and that foster carers are consulted about any changes.¹²

With no increases in over a decade the cumulative impact of inflation means there has been a significant erosion of the value of foster care fees in Northern Ireland which is excessive when compared to other salaried workers. We have calculated that the majority of foster carers in Northern Ireland have experienced an average devaluing of their fee of around **28% based on CPI inflation** and **36% based on RPI inflation**. We have calculated examples from the main fee schemes in operation across the Trusts and these are available in appendix 1. Our calculations demonstrate the extent to which each of the fostering fee schemes have experienced a real terms decrease.

As an exemplar the figure below demonstrates that a standard foster carer fee of £12,958 has failed to keep pace (0% rise) with inflation. We calculate that for a foster carer in receipt of a standard fee they now receive **£6,540 less** when compared with an adjustment made for CPI inflation and **£8,858 less** when compared to an adjustment made for RPI inflation. Table 1 below demonstrates the current value in pounds and pence which a standard fee foster carer would be in receipt of had the fee kept pace various measures of inflation. Figure 1 below shows a visual representation of the fee adjusted for both CPI and RPI inflation rates since fee introduction in 2008.

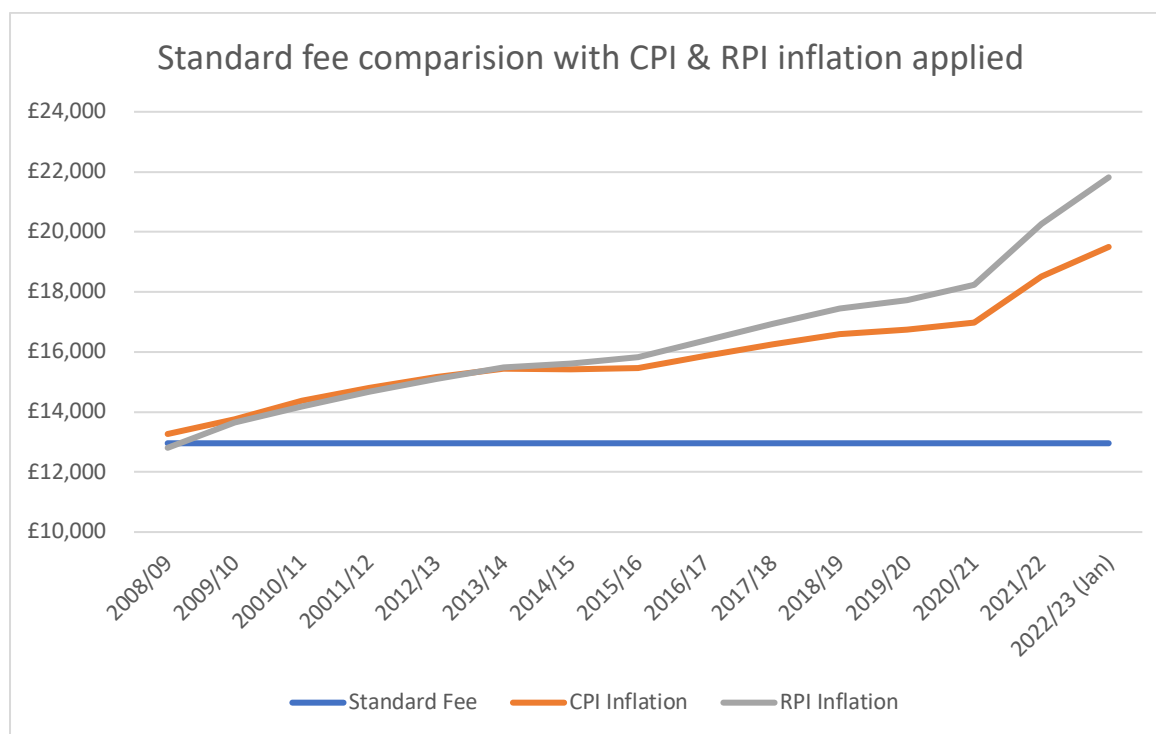
Table 1 Standard fee foster carer adjusted for inflation.

Standard Fee introduced in 2008	Adjusted for CPI inflation to January 2023	Adjusted for RPI inflation to January 2023
£12,958	£19,498.71	£21,816.67

¹¹ A small number of schemes have been introduced post 2010, these also have not been subject annual fee rate reviews or increases.

¹² "28.3) Allowances and any fees paid are reviewed annually and the fostering service consults with foster carers in advance of any change to the allowance and fee Department for Education. (2011). *Fostering services: national minimum standards*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards>

Figure 1: Standard Fee (£12,958) example comparison with CPI and RPI inflation rates applied since fee introduction in 2008.



For a foster carer on standard fee this equates to a 33.54% real terms decrease in value based on CPI inflation and a **40.61% real terms decrease based on RPI inflation**. This trend to devalue foster carers is unsustainable and must be reversed. We estimate that the majority of HSC Trust foster carer fee schemes require an **average 57.52% uplift** to bring them into line with RPI inflation (39.49% into line with CPI) to restore the value of foster carer fees to the equivalent to when they were established over a decade ago.

In appendix 1 we have presented a comparison of current Trust fee scheme rates (obtained via FOI) a comparison with both CPI and RPI inflation is applied, real terms percentage decrease and the percentage uplift required to restore fee value. The continued failure to increase HSC Trust foster care fees has communicated a clear message to foster carers, we value you less that we did a decade ago. This has left foster carers feeling forgotten, undervalued, devalued, and demoralised.

We are asking the CSCS review team to make definitive recommendations to include:

1. **All** HSC Trust foster carer fee schemes to receive an average **57.52% uplift** in line with RPI inflation to restore the value of foster carer fees to 2008 levels or date introduced value.¹³
2. An independent review¹⁴ of foster carer fees in Northern Ireland, to be completed within 6 months and actions agreed to reform HSC Trust foster carer fees by the start of the 2024-25 fiscal year.

Regional foster care fee policy and structure

Unlike other parts of the UK, Northern Ireland does not have a foster carer fee payment structure or explicit fee levels based on the knowledge, time, skills, and experience of foster carers. There is also no definitive foster care fee finance policy either regionally or within each of the Trusts. Each of the 23 fee

¹³ We recognize there will be some variation based on the date each fee scheme was introduced.

¹⁴ Similar to Selwyn, J and London Economics Wales (2010) *Foster Care Payments Schedule and Fees Framework Final Report for the Welsh Assembly*. London Economics Wales, Hadley Centre for Fostering and Adoption Studies, HMSO 2010

schemes operate in isolation, most without explicit or written policy. As a result, foster carer fee payments policy in Northern Ireland is unwritten, opaque, and discretionary (on a case-by-case basis). This leads to significant perceptions of inequity. It is also unclear if these schemes have been equality screened as required by law. There is urgent need to see implementation of a regional foster carer fee structure¹⁵, open to **all** foster and kinship carers. There is a need to co-produce a common policy that would provide for consistency based on shared principles, a common language, structure, and approach. The Fostering standards in England recognise the need for “*clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments*”¹⁶ and our members would like to see a similar standard introduced and followed within Northern Ireland.

It is currently unclear what rationale is used by each Trust (or within each of the 23 individual schemes) for the calculation of payment of fees to foster carers. The Wales independent review¹⁷ of foster care payments considered three approaches to foster care payments (1) Payment for skills, as measured by knowledge, skills, qualifications, and experience; (2) payment for time and effort involved in the placement; and (3) a flat fee across all foster carers. It is unclear which of these approaches applies to which schemes within the Trusts. There is no rationale for the disparity in fee rates across or within the five Trusts, this leads to significant perceptions of inequity. In addition to date, we have been unable to clarify if foster carer payments in Northern Ireland have been subject to various equality and human rights screening processes as required by law. Research¹⁸ in this area is clear that foster carer remuneration can no longer remain a discretionary function of fostering providers, but instead requires government intervention to ensure standards and equity. We would call for a review like Wales of foster care payments in Northern Ireland. Any review needs to be ‘done with us’, not ‘done unto us’. Foster carers must not be excluded from policy development. The review needs to include the views of foster carers to ensure we are represented in the formulation of the policy and to provide clarity within the system. Moving forward the body that sets HSC Trust foster carer fees must have representation from foster carer unions to ensure that the fees provided are collectively and annually updated.

Our members and some Trusts (via FOI) have advised that in some cases foster carer fees are determined annually for individual carers via a resource committee (fee panel). These fee panels are operated internally by senior Trust staff, the operation and decisions of fee panels is not transparent. In some cases, foster carers indicated that fee payment was attached to specific children and challenging behaviour and not them as foster carers. This presents a dilemma as “*there is a disincentive to ‘make a difference’*”¹⁹. *If the carer does a good job and the child’s behaviour improves, the fees are*

¹⁵ a regional fee structure for Foster Care was referred to in page 57 of the Delegated Statutory Functions overview report 2019-20 and again on page 29 in the Delegated Statutory Functions Interim Corporate Parenting Report September 2020 available on <http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/>

¹⁶ “28.5) There is a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments and distinguishes between the allowance paid and any fee paid. The policy includes policy on payment of allowances and any fee during a break in placement or should the fostering household be subject to an allegation.” Department for Education. (2011). Fostering services: national minimum standards. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards>

¹⁷ Selwyn, J and London Economics Wales (2010) *Foster Care Payments Schedule and Fees Framework Final Report for the Welsh Assembly*. London Economics Wales, Hadley Centre for Fostering and Adoption Studies, HMSO 2010

¹⁸ Kirton, D. (2013) “What is work? Insights from the evolution of state foster care”, *Work Employment & Society*. Sage, pp. 658-673. doi: 10.1177/0950017012460323.

Kirton, D., Beecham, J. and Ogilvie, K. (2007) “Gaining satisfaction? An exploration of foster-carers’ attitudes to payment”, *British Journal of Social Work*. Oxford Journals, pp. 1205-1224. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcl061.

Kirton, D., Beecham, J. and Ogilvie, K. (2007) “Still the poor relations? Perspectives on valuing and listening to foster carers”, *Adoption and Fostering*. British Association for Adoption and Fostering, pp. 6-17. doi: 10.1177/030857590703100303.

Kirton, D. (2007) “Step Forward? Step Back? – The professionalisation of fostering”, *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*. Whiting and Birch, pp. 6-24. doi: 10.1921/19626.

Kirton, D. (2001) “Love and Money: payment, motivation and the fostering task”, *Child and Family Social Work*. Blackwell Science, pp. 199-208. doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2206.2001.00208.x

¹⁹ Selwyn, J and London Economics Wales (2010) *Foster Care Payments Schedule and Fees Framework Final Report for the Welsh Assembly*. London Economics Wales, Hadley Centre for Fostering and Adoption Studies, HMSO 2010

reduced.” In cases where the fee is attached to the child foster carers are confused as to why the fee then becomes a feature of their annual foster carer review or annual fee panel and requires further justification by social work staff if the child has not moved placement. In addition, fee payment arrangements are not included in foster care agreements and therefore HSC Trusts can arbitrarily reduce fee payment with no input from foster carers, changes are made with no reference to previous understandings and foster carers have no right to appeal a decision made by a fee panel. As a result, our members have experienced decreases in fees following decisions by fee panels into which they have had no input or representation, they have merely been informed. This has led to a loss in confidence concerning existing foster care fee payment arrangements. Foster carers are fearful that arbitrary fee decreases can be applied at any time by senior Trust staff. Foster carers increasingly feel anxiety alongside perceptions of unfairness and injustice.

We are asking the CSCS review team to make definitive recommendations to include:

1. an independent review²⁰ of foster carer fees in Northern Ireland, with this review to be completed within 6 months and actions agreed to reform HSC Trust foster carer fees by the start of the 2024-25 fiscal year.
2. Department of Health and HSC Trusts along with foster carers to co-produce a regional foster care finance policy to introduce a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments and their equitable operation across the five HSC Trusts.

Foster Care Allowances

Given recent developments in England and Wales concerning National Minimum Allowances (NMA) we think it is important to add additional comment on foster care allowances.

In our manifesto submission we highlighted the need for the Department of Health to ensure that children looked after have access to parity in foster care allowances compared to other jurisdictions on these islands. We called for foster care allowances to be transparent and cover the full cost of caring for the child. We also pointed out the need for care experienced young people and foster carers to be provided with a mechanism to collectively communicate regularly (annually) concerning the adequacy and relevance of foster care allowances. We shared our view that the process and methodology used to calculate foster care allowances must be transparent, verifiable, published, and accountable.

In 2022-23 foster care allowances in the Northern Ireland foster care model scheme were increased across the different age brackets ranging from 2.4% - 3.9%. The Department of Health advised the FCWU in writing that the rise **“was designed to bring the NI rates into line with those for rest of England.”** This was a positive step forward. However, we would point out that it is substantially below (between 52% and 83% depending on age group) the Fostering Network’s recommended minimum allowance for 2022-23 (see table 2 below). This results in foster carers subsidising the costs of care and in effect means that foster carers in Northern Ireland are paying to foster a child.

²⁰ Similar to Selwyn, J and London Economics Wales (2010) *Foster Care Payments Schedule and Fees Framework Final Report for the Welsh Assembly*. London Economics Wales, Hadley Centre for Fostering and Adoption Studies, HMSO 2010

Table 2: Northern Ireland 2022-23 allowances compared to Fostering Networks recommended minimum allowance 2022-23

Age Group	NI Current Allowance 2022-23	The Fostering Network Rec'd Allowance 2022-23 ²¹	Percentage increase required to match	Annual Shortfall per year per child
0-4	£141.00	£215.00	52.48%	£3848
5 to 10	£156.00	£258.00	65.38%	£5304
11 to 15	£177.00	£324.00	83.05%	£7644
16+	£207.00	£324.00	56.52%	£6084

In addition, the Northern Ireland fostering allowance in 2022-23 was also substantially below (11% to 50% depending on age range) the already higher Wales National Minimum Allowance (NMA). The Welsh Government increased their National Minimum allowance by 5.5% in February 2023²². A comparison of the Wales NMA with Northern Ireland is available in table 3 below. Without substantial increases to the Northern Ireland foster care allowance model scheme there is potential that the Northern Ireland fostering allowance will continue to fall further behind Wales.

Table 3: Northern Ireland 2022-23 allowance in comparison to proposed Wales NMA 2023-24

Age Group	NI Current Allowance 2022-23	Wales NMA 2023-24	Percentage increase required to match Wales NMA 2023-24	Annual Shortfall per year per child
0-4	£141.00	£212.00	50.35%	£3692.00
5 to 10	£156.00	£193.00	23.72%	£1924.00
11 to 15	£177.00	£193.00	11.35%	£832.00
16+	£207.00	£241.00	24.11%	£1768.00

The UK government in England in response to the care review²³ announced that it would be raising foster care national minimum allowances in 2023-24 by 12.43%. A comparison of the England NMA with Northern Ireland is available in table 4 below. Without substantial increases to the Northern Ireland foster care allowance model scheme there is potential that the Northern Ireland fostering allowance will again fall behind England.

Table 4: Northern Ireland 2022-23 allowance in comparison to proposed England NMA 2023-24

Age Group	NI Current Allowance 2022-23	England Projected NMA 2023-24	Percentage increase required to match England NMA 2023-24	Annual Shortfall per year per child
0-4	£141.00	£158.53	12.43%	911.37
5 to 10	£156.00	£175.39	12.43%	1,008.32
11 to 15	£177.00	£199.00	12.43%	1,144.06
16+	£207.00	£232.73	12.43%	1,337.97

²¹Wales Foster Care Allowances Survey 2022-23. The Fostering Network <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/Wales%20allowances%20report%202022-23.pdf>

²² <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/media-release/2023/wales-foster-carers-see-uplift-allowances>

²³ Strategy for the reform of children's social care: *Stable Homes, Built on Love*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/childrens-social-care-stable-homes-built-on-love>

It is also essential that allowance increases are prompt and made at the start of the fiscal year, an end to the practice of delayed and backdated allowance increases must end. With the recent cost of living crisis and National Minimum Allowance increases in England and Wales it is essential that parity to other jurisdictions on these islands is not lost. The CSCS review team should go further and make a definitive recommendation that minimum foster care allowances (HSC Trusts always apply the minimum) in Northern Ireland meet the full cost of care and ensure that foster carers do not pay to care. The use of the Fostering Network recommended minimum allowance would provide Northern Ireland foster carers with the increase in allowances required.

Concluding Recommendations

We have made the case for improvements to financial policies concerning foster care payments in Northern Ireland. The time for strategies has passed. The intolerable inertia must end, and action must be taken.

In summary we are asking the CSCS review to make definitive recommendations to include:

1. an independent review of foster carer fees in Northern Ireland, with this review to be completed within 6 months and actions agreed to reform HSC Trust foster carer fees and finance policies by the start of the 2024-25 fiscal year.
2. the remit of the review should be to ensure that current and future foster care fee payments are transparent, equitable, subject to regular inspection and collective annual review and negotiation with foster carers.
3. Department of Health and HSC Trusts to co-produce with foster carers a regional foster care finance policy to introduce a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments and their equitable operation across the five HSC Trusts.
4. **All** HSC Trust foster carer fee schemes to receive an average **57.52% uplift** in line with RPI inflation to restore the value of foster carer fees to 2008 levels or date introduced value.²⁴
5. HSC Trust foster care allowances should be increased to the Fostering Network recommended minimum allowance.

²⁴ We recognize there will be some variation based on the date each fee scheme was introduced.

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Appendix 1: HSC Trust fostering fees real terms decrease and fee uplift required to match inflation.

Trust	Scheme	Fee intro'd	Fee when intro'd	Adjusted for inflation (CPI) Jan 2023	Current Fee	Difference	Real terms decrease against CPI inflation (%)	Fee uplift needed to match CPI inflation (%)	Adjusted for inflation (RPI) Jan 2023	Difference	Real terms decrease against RPI inflation (%)	Fee uplift needed to match RPI inflation (%)
BHSCT	Stand Fee	2008	£12,958	£19,499	£12,958	£6,541	33.54	50.48	£21,817	£8,859	40.61	68.36
BHSCT	1/2 Stand Fee	2008	£6,479	£9,749	£6,479	£3,270	33.54	50.48	£10,908	£4,429	40.61	68.36
BHSCT	1/4 Stand Fee	2008	£3,239	£4,874	£3,239	£1,635	33.54	50.48	£5,453	£2,214	40.61	68.36
BHSCT	Intensive Prg.	2010	£14,669	£20,787	£14,669	£6,118	29.43	41.70	£23,722	£9,053	38.16	61.71
BHSCT	Intensive	2018	£21,000	£25,184	£21,000	£4,184	16.61	19.92	£27,051	£6,051	22.37	28.82
BHSCT	Disability	2015	£17,000	£21,510	£17,000	£4,510	20.97	26.53	£23,741	£6,741	28.39	39.65
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£6,500	£9,211	£6,500	£2,711	29.43	41.70	£10,511	£4,011	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£13,000	£18,422	£13,000	£5,422	29.43	41.70	£21,023	£8,023	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£18,000	£25,507	£18,000	£7,507	29.43	41.70	£29,109	£11,109	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£19,000	£26,924	£19,000	£7,924	29.43	41.70	£30,726	£11,726	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£19,500	£27,632	£19,500	£8,132	29.43	41.70	£31,534	£12,034	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£22,000	£31,175	£22,000	£9,175	29.43	41.70	£35,577	£13,577	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£24,000	£34,009	£24,000	£10,009	29.43	41.70	£38,811	£14,811	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£26,000	£36,843	£26,000	£10,843	29.43	41.70	£42,046	£16,046	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£27,000	£38,260	£27,000	£11,260	29.43	41.70	£43,663	£16,663	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£31,000	£43,928	£31,000	£12,928	29.43	41.70	£50,132	£19,132	38.16	61.71
NHSCT		Pre 2010	£36,000	£51,013	£36,000	£15,013	29.43	41.70	£58,218	£22,218	38.16	61.72
SEHSCT		Pre 2010	£6,987	£9,901	£6,987	£2,914	29.43	41.70	£11,299	£4,312	38.16	61.71
SEHSCT		Pre 2010	£13,974	£19,802	£13,974	£5,828	29.43	41.70	£22,598	£8,624	38.16	61.71
SEHSCT	Intensive/ P&C	Pre 2010	£18,000	£25,507	£18,000	£7,507	29.43	41.70	£29,109	£11,109	38.16	61.71
SEHSCT		Pre 2010	£20,961	£29,703	£20,961	£8,742	29.43	41.70	£33,897	£12,936	38.16	61.71
SEHSCT		Pre 2010	£23,974	£33,972	£23,974	£9,998	29.43	41.70	£38,769	£14,795	38.16	61.71
SEHSCT		Pre 2010	£25,947	£36,768	£25,947	£10,821	29.43	41.70	£41,960	£16,013	38.16	61.71
SEHSCT		Pre 2010	£27,948	£39,603	£27,948	£11,655	29.43	41.70	£45,196	£17,248	38.16	61.71

Trust	Scheme	Fee Intro'd	Fee when Intro'd	Adjusted for inflation (CPI) Jan 2023	Current Fee	Difference	Real terms decrease (%)	Pay uplift needed to match CPI inflation (%)	Adjusted for inflation (RPI) Jan 2023	Difference	Real terms decrease (%)	Pay uplift needed to match RPI inflation (%)
SEHSCT		Pre 2010	£34,972	£49,557	£34,972	£14,585	29.43	41.70	£56,555	£21,583	38.16	61.71
SEHSCT		Pre 2010	£41,923	£59,407	£41,923	£17,484	29.43	41.70	£67,796	£25,873	38.16	61.71
SHSCT	Intensive	2019	£27,000	£31,717	£27,000	£4,717	14.87	17.47	£33,755	£6,755	20.01	25.02
SHSCT	P&C	2019	£18,000	£21,145	£18,000	£3,145	14.87	17.47	£22,503	£4,503	20.01	25.02
SHSCT		2012	£18,000	£23,700	£18,000	£5,700	24.05	31.67	£26,744	£8,744	32.69	48.58
SHSCT		2007	£14,730	£22,817	£14,730	£8,087	35.44	54.90	£25,838	£11,108	42.99	75.41
SHSCT		2007	£12,769	£19,779	£12,769	£7,010	35.44	54.90	£22,399	£9,630	42.99	75.41
WHSCT	Therapeutic	2015	£21,000	£26,571	£21,000	£5,571	20.97	26.53	£29,327	£8,327	28.39	39.65
WHSCT	Standard	2015	£13,000	£16,448	£13,000	£3,448	20.97	26.53	£18,155	£5,155	28.39	39.65
						Average	27.97	39.49		Average	36.04	57.52

Appendix 2 Trusts Working Paper on Development of a Regional Fee Framework 2019

Development of Regional Fee Framework



1. Purpose of paper

- To provide context for consideration of need to reform of financial remuneration to foster carers across NI.
- To outline a proposal for a Tiered payment for skills framework
- To seek discussion with CSIB regarding the appropriateness's and next steps to progress this framework or an alternative mandate.

2. Background

In March 2008 the four Boards in conjunction with the Fostering Network established and produced a proposal for the implementation of a Regional Foster Carer Payment Scheme. This proposal recommended the establishment of Northern Ireland Career Carer Scheme (NICCS). The Task group had, at that time, given consideration to the option of a tier Payment for Skills scheme and identified with research at that time (Kirton D et al, 2003 – Remuneration and Performance in Foster Care 2003), that “it was apparent that payment for skills schemes did not entirely resolve the tension between basing payment on reward for skills as opposed to compensation for demands.”

The proposal to progress a NICCS was aimed at recruiting salaried carers, focusing on working with older children. This was based on the view that these foster carers would be fostering as a professionals, as opposed to being prepared to care for other people’s children for an altruistic standpoint.

All five Trusts have developed schemes aimed at recruiting foster carers for this cohort of young people with variation in fees being offered to these carers across the region i.e., Intensive support fostering (SET and BHSCT joint scheme) paying. £18,000 per year per child to carers, Intensive support (SHSCT £18,000 per year for up to 3 young people and therapeutic support fostering team (WHST commencing at £21,000).

Despite the development of specialist fee paid foster carers there continues to be a lack of capacity across NI for foster carers to meet the demand for foster placements. This is the reported experience of all 5 Trusts with increased reliance of independent sector placements for children and young people coming into care, and

not just for those who were traditionally considered ‘hard to place’. Whilst this trend was also noted in the 2008 proposals, this is significantly impacted by the increase in number of children in care across NI.

3. Current Strategic Context

Health and Social Care Board Placement Services – Strategic Direction (July 2016), set out a number of challenges and expectations for Trusts when providing foster placements. This paper noted that the existing distinction between professional and fee paid foster carers was unhelpful and potentially confusing.

Regional consistency is required not only in relation to terminology but also in respect of criterion for both foster carers and the children/young people placed. Foster carers receiving a fee should do so in recognition of the specific experience, skills etc. they bring to the fostering task.

Plan on a Page for Fostering - ratified by the Children’s Service Improvement Board in July 2018 identified one of the key priorities as ensuring there is a regionally agreed model for the payment of fees to foster carers with specific specialist skills.

Foster Carers views regarding Finances

The Fostering Network *State of the Nation Survey (2016)* recommended that foster carers should be paid for their time, skills and expertise, and carers should receive retainer fees between placements. The administration of fee and allowance payments should be transparent, and clearly distinguish between the two, so that all foster carers are clear about their entitlement to allowances and fees.

4. NI Fee Paid Structure

Table 1 below provides an overview of fees paid which were either regarded as child specific or professional fees paid to carers associated with Trust specific schemes.

Table 1 summary of fee paid across NI as of March 2017

Cost	BHSCT	NHSCT	SEHSCT	SHSCT	WHSCT
Fees - range	£25,916 - £3,239	£36,000 - £18,000	£36,000 - £6,987	£25,538 - £12,769	£50,000 - £6,500
No of f/carers	494	492	302	397	431
No of fee paid carers	95	127	117	53	46
% of carers in receipt of fees	19%	26%	39%	13%	11%
No of Kinship carers in receipt of fee	0	9	1	0	7

Monthly cost of fee	£96,000	£183,602	£98,321	£62,697.95	£42,223.33
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	Av £1,010 for 95	Av £1,445.68 for 127	Av £840.35 for 117	Av £1182.98 for 53	Av £917.89 for 46
No of fee ranges	7	4	8	7	8
Schemes	Salaried Fostering scheme 2011		2 X Edge of care schemes	Intensive support fostering	Therapeutic support
	Adolescent fostering partnership		Emergency Scheme	Emergency Out of hrs.	Specialist Carers
	Parent and Community Support		Intensive Support fostering	Mother and Baby Placement	

The above information also needs to be considered in the context of regional spend on children placed with independent sector providers.

Table 2 Foster Placement with Independent Providers at 31 March 2018

	Action for Children	Barnardo's	Foster Care Associates	Kindercare	Total
BHSCT	7	25	26	46	104
NHSCT					19*
SEHSCT	7	10	34	14	65
SHSCT	1	0	6	2	9
WHSCT	1	7	17	2	27
Total	16	42	83	64	224

* Figures to be confirmed, 2 of the NHSCT placements are in Scotland with Providers - Step Down and Care Visions,

Table 3 Estimated Spend Per Annum (17/18)

	Action for Children	Barnardo's	Foster Care Associates	Kindercare	Total
BHSCT	£415,399	£1,440,088	£1,413,496	£1,587,710	£4,856,693
NHSCT	£264,121*	£ 56,791	£549,217	£7,500	£ 877,629
SEHSCT	£342,803	£ 513,756	£1,284,291	£325,393	£2,466,243

SHSCT	£59,418	£ 0	£385,476	£73,863	£ 518,757
WHSCT	£116,148	£132,867	£1,078,072	£60,648	£1,387,735
Total	£1,197,889	£2,143,502	£4,710,552	£2,055,114	£10,107,057

*Figure to be verified

Note - Total spend figure does not include spend on 2 NHSCT placements in Scotland (est.

£96,000pa)

In summary there are inconsistencies across the region in respect of fees paid to foster carer, resulting in a total of 23 different possible fee bands. These range from £50,000 (WHSCT) to £3,239.60 (BHSCT). Equally there is inconsistency across the region in the likelihood of receiving a fee - 39% (SEHSCT) and 11% (WHSCT).

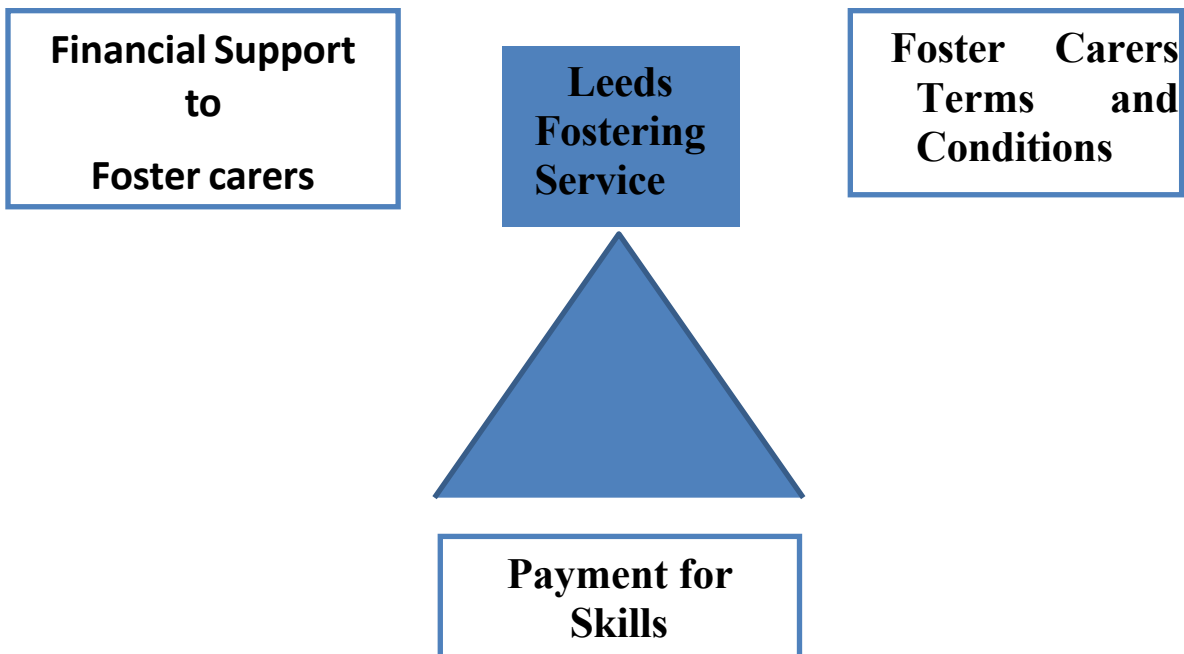
The payment of fees to kinship carers also creates much debate and inconsistency and has been a matter for debate via of judicial process.

5. Proposed way Forward

The Task and Finish Group in trying to consider how the regional inconsistencies in respect of fees might be resolved and how we might utilise the payment of fees to aid recruitment and retention concluded that the model used in Leeds has the potential to reconcile both.

Leeds Payment for skills based Framework

The model is operationalised via 3 elements:



The Payment for skills aspect of the Framework is based on the 5 outcomes of Every Child Matters in England.

The Tiered system consists of 4 tiers, with each tier having entry and progression requirements.

The progression requirements require completion of training and demonstration of application of learning via a portfolio.

Within NI the fostering service already has in existence a training pathway, which could be developed and applied to such a framework. Furthermore the framework if applied to NI could adopt the Every Child Matter outcomes to the 8 Outcomes derived from Health and Wellbeing 2026 - Delivering Together (October 2016) and Draft LAC Strategy (2018)

Leeds Payment for skills costings

PFS Level	st 1 Placement	nd 2 Placement	Subsequent Placements	Year Fee for 3 placements
1	Weekly allowance as Per BO framework	Weekly allowance as Per BO framework	Weekly allowance as Per BO framework	n/a
2	£122.41 per week £6,365 p/a	£122.41 £6,365 p/a	£61.21 £3,183	£15,913
3	£173.42 £9,018 p/a	£173.42 £9,018 p/a	£86.71 £4,509 p/a	£22,541
4	£224.42 £11,669 p/a	£224.42 £11,669 p/a	£224.42 £5,895	£29,173

Consultation with Leeds fostering service – April 2018

Leeds implemented model in 2006/7 as part of an improvement agenda, with increase in IFP numbers and a drive for consistency and transparency.

Consultations process took place with BAAF and Foster Carers.

Previously Leeds had a number of schemes with 40-60 carers e.g. carers who did assessments, remand scheme, teenage scheme who all received fee and allowances. In addition to the schemes Leeds had Child specific fees in exists. This is reflective of the fee available currently in Northern Ireland.

Leeds' Application of Payment for Skills Framework:

- All Professional Fee paid carers where assimilated to level 4
- Kinship Carer were aligned to Level 1 at the point of introduction to the model
- If kinship placement is challenging then can progress to do competency training, to be up banded. Out of 170 kin, many remained as level 1 and majority of Kinship carer progress to SGO'S.
- Level 2 & 3 – Progression opportunity to recognise aspiration to be full time foster carers (reduce hours) and gave foster carers professional opportunities.

- Assimilation Process – Set up of panels, foster carers submitted to panel to review a) Training received and b) attending support groups and whether these met expectations of level 2 or 3.

First few years mainly all at level 2 and then introduced level 3 to carers. Took a number of years to fully implement so level 3 not available until then.

Impact of Model

Implementation demonstrated improvement in capacity – they achieved an increase in recruitment and decrease in IFA's. The Model enabled redirection from independents as competitive fees, placements security e.g. 30 IFA households transferred.

Child Specific fees - continued-reduced and then stopped. Hence therefore there was a period of increased costings during transition.

Good for competency evidence and recruitment agenda.

Foster Carers feel more represented and valued. Support and confidence of foster carers developed over time compared to an adversarial relationship – Leeds Foster Care Association working in partnership with the Leeds fostering Service

- Improved Recruitment
- Improved Support
- Improved Training
- Foster carers also get corporate benefits via the enriched team, which developed alongside the fee framework e.g. free access to leisure facilities, events and offers.

Challenges

- Getting Terms and conditions right was a challenge for Leeds. This now established and subject to ongoing review every 2 years with Foster Carer stakeholders.
- Financial support document revised every financial year
- Leeds identified need to use framework flexibly.
- No Special guardianship in NI which may impact on costs for kinship placements.
- Carers have rights under terms and conditions and likewise so too has the Trust/Local Authority.
- Project development of the framework and its applications, staff seconded to achieve this.
- ADM's make decisions of levels following panel presentation, hence application process in NI would require consideration.

Issues for Discussion

In 2008 when considering a Regional foster Care payment Scheme in NI, one of the key critics of applying a tier base framework in NI was the concern that this approach was administratively complex.

When considering this model with Principal Social Work staff for fostering across the region in June 2018, there was a support for the model yet concern about capacity to take forward the work required to cost and implement this model within existing resources.

There is a recognition that to apply this model would drive regional consistency, however we would have a significant change management agenda. However across the regional there is equally recognition of the need for change within fostering services in terms of recruitment, retention and support including financial.

To progress this model the following issues would require consideration

- Establishment of a regional lead and project team
- Training of regional SSW staff on the proposed model to enable an assimilation exercise to progress accurate costings.
- Financial services support and costing to consider bridging from current schemes to new model.
- Consultation process with foster carers and key stakeholders ie Fostering Network and fostering services staff.
- HSCB and Departmental review of capacity to apply this model following costings and consultation.

Head of Service – Fostering, Adoption and Family Centres

South Eastern H&SC Trust

9th May 2019