

The new Foster Carer Finance and Support offer 2023 was approved by Cabinet on Wednesday 15th March 2023. The new offer will commence from 1st April 2023 and includes a broad range of enhanced support to our foster carers in recognition of the critical role they play in improving outcomes for our children in care, and reflects the Government Childrens Services Reformation agenda of “stable Homes Built on Love”

A letter from Cllr Lucy Smith will be sent to all our carers outlining the revised offer
Foster carers have made representation to Childrens Scrutiny Committee, seeking support for a review of fees and allowances, they requested that any agreed uplift be updated to April 2022.

Uplift of Professional and Maintenance fees agreed by Cabinet.

Firstly, we have increased our basic rates above the government minimum for the ‘Professional fee’ and ‘Maintenance allowance’ in relation to each child you care for. The rates for these fees are illustrated below.

Professional Fee

Child's Age	Professional fee 2021-2022	New uplifted Fee 2023		
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
0 – 4 yrs		No longer in use	£132	£135
5-10 yrs			£150	£155
0 – 10 years	£130			
10-15 yrs			£170	£190
16+ yrs			£198	£222
11 –17yrs	£140			

The Maintenance Fee:

Child's Age	Maintenance fee 2021 - 2022	New uplifted fee 2023 <i>(inc Government Min 2.3% uplift already implemented)</i>
0 - 4yrs	£138	£159
5 - 10yrs	£152	£175
11 - 15yrs	£173	£230
16yrs plus	£202	£237

We have also uplifted Birthday, festival, holiday, clothing, and graduation allowances. The right column under each heading represents the uplifted allowance. To the left of it are 2021-2022 allowances.

Age	Birthday		Festival		Holiday		Initial Clothing Previously determined needs led basis	Graduation	
0-4yrs	£70.50	£150	£141	£200	£352.50	£400		£100	-
5-10yrs	£78.00	£180	£156	£225	£390	£450		£150	-
11-15yrs	£88.50	£210	£177	£250	£442.50	£475		£200	-
16yrs +	£103.50	£250	£207	£300	£517.50	£550		£250	-
18yrs +	-	£300 18 th & 21 st Birthday	-	-	-	-	-	-	£100

Carer Payments officers will liaise with carers to provide additional individual advice where required to changes to payments.

We have also expanded our financial support package to include the following:

50% Council Tax discount

To support existing Foster Carers/Supported Lodging Carers within the Borough as well as encourage new Foster Carers and Supported Lodging hosts to join Bury, we will provide our carers at Bury Council with a 50% discretionary council tax discount. In 2023 this payment will be paid alongside the fortnightly foster carer payments once your council tax bill has been provided to your carer payments officer.

In 2024 the discount will be applied directly to carers council tax prior to new annual bills being issued.

Adjustment Fee

Foster Carers could receive a discretionary payment equivalent to the Foster Carer Professional Fee for two weeks at the end of a challenging placement, when a long-term placement comes to an unexpected end, a difficult disruption, or at a time of bereavement, to offer some time and space to the Carers without worrying about having no income from Fostering. The payment will be requested by your SSW for approval by the Head of Service where Foster Carers have met these criteria. This will reduce the pressure Foster Carers experience to immediately accept a new placement when they are simply not ready.

Short Breaks

Foster Carers will receive an annual Short Break Allowance of 7 nights for which the Foster Carer will be paid their Foster Carer Fee whilst the child or young person stays with a different foster carer. If the Short Break has not been used by the end of the financial year the Foster Carer will not lose the allowance, it will be paid to the Foster Carer at the end of that financial year.

Retainer Fee

This is to help to alleviate the worry of Carers being unable to financially manage if there was a gap in between caring for children, especially where the carer is reliant on a fostering income. The retainer fee is linked to the day rate equivalent of the Professional Fee for 4 weeks maximum per year per Fostering household.

We are also committed to continuing to provide the following:

PAMS Assist/Silver Cloud

At Bury, we offer our Foster Carers the employee benefit scheme called PAMs Assist and Silver Cloud. This is extended to Foster Carers which covers emotional / wellbeing support as well as financial and legal advice and is a robust accessible form of support. Carers have fed back previously that they like knowing this is there for them to access if they choose and see this as an additional support for them as Foster Carers. Mental Health support following the pressures of the Covid Pandemic has been reassuring.

Max Card

The Max Card is the UK's leading discount card for cared for and looked after children. Families can use their Max Card at venues across the UK to get free or discounted admission. Bury Council already purchases the Max card for our children and young people aged 3 years and over.

New incentives to support our carers will also be rolled out from the 1st of April, these include:

Blue Light Card

This is a discount service for the emergency services, NHS, social care sector and armed forces, providing members with thousands of discounts online and on the high street. Blue Light card holders can download an App and access a huge range of discounts for the family. This is beneficial for fostering families to get discounts on a variety of different things, including activities, day trips, goods, cinema etc. The cost of this benefit is £5 fee payable every three years. We will encourage our carers to apply for this themselves and claim this back from us via their expenses.

The Mockingbird Model

An exciting new Fostering model has also been given agreement for us to progress with by Cabinet. The 'Mockingbird Model' is an evidence-based model originally developed by the Fostering Network and is being widely used by authorities across England. The Mockingbird model allows us to offer some of our more traumatized children and young people homes with highly skilled and experienced Foster

Carers, further reducing the need for high-cost specialist IFA and residential arrangements, some out of borough for our children. This model also supports placement sufficiency and efficient use of Council resources.

Taken from the DfE Evaluation Report (September 2020) *'The Mockingbird programme aims to replicate the support available through an extended family network. It creates a constellation of 6 to 10 satellite fostering families who are supported by 1 hub home that is operated by an experienced foster carer, offering planned and emergency sleepovers, advice, training, and peer support. The Mockingbird programme worked to meet the need for continuity and support for children and young people in care and for additional support for foster carers....'*

In a Mockingbird 'Constellation' a group of 'Satellite carers' are supported by a salaried Hub Carer. This model has proven highly effective in not only supporting Foster Carers to sustain the level of care a child or young person requires but also contributes towards stabilizing the child or young person in their time of trauma. 2023 will see the launch of the first Mockingbird Constellation for Bury Fostering Service. We hope to commence this initial launch with providing all our foster carers with information in May 2023. You will receive separate information regarding this from Service Lead Annette Hope in April. The table illustrated below sets out our combined professional fees and maintenance allowances for Level 4 for Mockingbird specialist Foster Carers, bands are based on the Individual needs of the child placed and the Carers experience and skills.

	0-4 yrs.	5-10 yrs.	11-15 yrs.	16yrs plus
Level 4 band A	£594.49	£594.49	£594.49	£594.49
Level 4 band B	£605.12	£605.12	£605.12	£605.12
Level 4 band C	£615.74	£615.74	£615.74	£615.74
Level 4 band D	£626.34	£626.34	£626.34	£626.34
Level 4 band E	£636.96	£636.96	£636.96	£636.96

The Hub Carer will be central to supporting the constellation, they will be a 'salaried' carer and paid £33,121 per annum, the equivalent of Level 4, Band E 16yrs plus. We will recruit specifically to this role via an advertisement.

Finally, our new 'Foster Carer Handbook' outlining all fostering guidance and support will be published in May 2023. We acknowledge how important the Handbook is to our carers in their roles. Within this will be all support elements for 2023 onwards, plus detailed information for all circumstances. For example, family time, the different meetings Foster Carers attend, matching process, expectations of the Foster Carer role, recording and reporting information, education, disruption processes, allegations, caring for children safely, the role of the Supervising Social Worker, complaint processes and much more.

There was an ask from our foster carers via Childrens Scrutiny Committee that any agreed uplift to professional fees and maintenance fees to be backdated to the 1st of April 2022 but this in not budgeted for within this financial year and children's services are also significantly overspent. It is recognised that foster carers have also been impacted by increased costs within the current financial year and therefore a one off £200 payment was made. This was made to 106 foster carers and 13 continuing care carers at a total cost of £23,800.

It is recognised that this is not the equivalent to the value that would be paid if the fees had been backdated. Modelling for individual foster carers identifies that depending upon the age of the child and assuming they were looking after one child for the full year the increase in fees is

0-4-year-old	£624
5-10-year-old	£1,300
11-15-year-old	£5,356
16+	£5,824

There are several variables within the business case, and it depends upon actual numbers of foster carers and individual placements, i.e., number of children in placement and circumstances but taking a snapshot in time the full costs to the Council if the proposal had been backdated to 1st April, the cost incurred would be approximately:

Foster Carer Fee	214,006
Fostering Allowance	173,160
SGO Allowance	52,868
Total	440,034