

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR ADOPTION & FOSTERING**

**The Children Bill Report Stage**

**Briefing on National Minimum Allowances for Foster Carers**

- **Context and key issues**

Allowances are currently paid to foster carers to cover the costs of looking after fostered children. However, fostering services are free to set their own rates and consequently, allowances vary significantly throughout the UK. This means that the majority of foster carers are out of pocket as a result of fostering children, and that children and young people do not have access to the same range of opportunities as other young people living with their families in the community. This is particularly worrying as most children who are in foster care and looked after by local authorities have already experienced significant disadvantage in their lives and need to benefit from the widest range of opportunities and activities which can be made available to them. This also has a serious impact on the recruitment and retention of foster carers. Foster carers are critical to the delivery of effective support for often very vulnerable children who are separated from their families, yet the fostering service is currently in crisis.

The current shortage of local authority foster carers, estimated at 10,000, leaves very little choice for children coming into local authority care in an emergency and many children are moved from carer to carer, often at a great distance from their family and their school, because no carer is available locally. Not only is this disruptive and upsetting for children in crisis, but it means that there is very little prospect that children “on the move” will be able to benefit from educational opportunities – hence we believe that the lack of stability in foster carer is a key contributory factor to one of the most important goals of the Government’s agenda for children, that of educational achievement. Children who do not know where they will be living and who have no reliable and consistent adults in their lives will not be able to learn and will not make progress, however supported they are within the school environment.

- **The amendment**

As it stands, the Children Bill does not address the issue of allowances, and BAAF believes that the Bill should be amended so that a national minimum allowance can be imposed. An amendment addressing this has been tabled by Annette Brooke MP and Roger Williams MP (NC10) that states:

*The Government shall by regulations establish a national minimum fostering allowance payable by all Children’s Services Authorities in England.*

- **Discussion of Government progress**

The Minister for Children, Young People and Families, Margaret Hodge, in a recent reply to MPs who raised this issue, stated that the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services already require that each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses which cover

the full costs of caring for each child or young person placed with them. BAAF believes that the anecdotal way in which the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) currently assesses compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Allowances is subjective because it depends on the relatively small sample of carers selected to comment by the inspectors. A benchmark figure would provide a much more reliable figure. BAAF has reviewed inspection reports by CSCI and has found that in a number of these reports, the inspectors considered that the allowance was inadequate but that their powers were limited to recommending improvements – in many cases, the improvements recommended have simply not taken place. The reality is that CSCI has few teeth to ensure compliance.

The Children's Rights Director at CSCI, Roger Morgan, has stated:

*Fostering allowances need to be on a fair basis and linked to the individual needs of each foster child. The standards need strengthening on this in light of the variability found by Inspections. A national minimum allowance would certainly contribute to fairness of provision, but must never lead to paying to the minimum for a child whose needs need more.*

BAAF recognises that the Government has done much to improve the quality of foster care, including introducing the Choice Protects programme, a commitment to improve training and support. It would be very sad if these measures were not successful because of the failure to grasp the importance of ensuring all children a basic allowance.

- **Call for support**

We urge you to support the amendment tabled by Annette Brooke MP and Roger Williams MP. This will have the effect of providing foster carers with the practical support they require in order to continue to care for some of our most vulnerable children and young people. A national minimum allowance is an effective way of providing this support and showing our foster carers that we value the work they are doing.

The following organisations support our call for a national minimum fostering allowance:

**The Fostering Network**  
**NCH**  
**The Who Cares? Trust**  
**Barnardo's**

**NSPCC**  
**The Children's Society**  
**Voice for the Child in Care**

For further information and discussion, please contact Felicity Collier, Chief Executive at BAAF on 020 7593 2011 (out of hours 0190 857 1273), [felicity.collier@baaf.org.uk](mailto:felicity.collier@baaf.org.uk), or Rose Durey, BAAF Parliamentary Officer, on 020 7593 2032 or [rose.durey@baaf.org.uk](mailto:rose.durey@baaf.org.uk).

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