

Review of Care Allowances Survey Key Findings

Children and Families Analytical Services

Summer 2018

September 2018

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Scottish Government and partners are currently reviewing foster, kinship and adoption allowances and in particular, what the 'core allowance' that looked after children and young people in foster and kinship care could include.

The approach is centred on the needs of a child and their right to have the support they need to realise their potential. The allowance is separate from any fees or skills payments made to foster carers.

The supporting guidance on the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 states that foster carers are charged with providing not just basic care but optimum care for looked after children. The Regulations sets out expectations that allowances should cover:

- a healthy diet and good physical care;
- opportunities for stimulation and exercise;
- development of social skills and participation in activities in the community;
- building self-esteem, including good presentation and acceptability by peers;
- a safe and comfortable environment;
- full inclusion in special celebrations such as birthdays, Christmas or other cultural or religious events; and
- promoting and developing educational opportunities

Local authorities have a statutory duty to have clear and accessible policies to reflect foster and kinship allowances. These allowances should be able to meet the expectations detailed above.

Looked after children with disabilities and or additional support needs will receive the support and entitlements of any child with a disability or additional support need, and in line with Corporate Parenting legislation and guidance.

2. Consultation with carers, young people, practitioners and service providers

2.1 Approach

In May 2018, an online survey of foster and kinship carers, local authority practitioners and service providers was conducted by the Scottish Government. This was disseminated via members of the National Review of Care Allowances Group, as well as other interested parties, including 3rd sector and voluntary agencies, representative bodies and wider stakeholders.

The overarching aim of the survey was to gather views on the principles of a core allowance and what is required to support children in foster and kinship care. This included gathering views on:

- Current core/additional allowances;
- Ease of access to information on allowances/benefits;
- Views on approach to use of age-bands to calculate allowances;
- Views on establishing a national minimum allowance;
- Additional support for carers and their families.

Focus group materials were developed to support Communities of Interest in 6 local authorities across Scotland and across a number of third sector organisations. Each Community focused on a particular theme – adoption, kinship, fostering and 3rd sector. The questions within the focus groups mirror those within the online survey, to allow for comparison. Summaries from the 6 discussion groups have been incorporated throughout this report. Additional material has been developed to support engagement with children and young people and 3 discussions groups were held with young people. As the questions were framed differently, a separate annex is attached, which summarises the results of this work.

2.2 Online survey sample

A total of 860 responses from across all 32 local authorities in Scotland were received, with the majority being foster carers (75%), followed by kinship carers (14%), local authority representatives (5%) and Providers (1%).

One quarter of carers (25%) reported having a child in their care who was funded by a different local authority to the one in which they were based.

Carers reported currently looking after a range of between 1 and 5 children.

3. Key findings

Part I. – Child allowance

3.1 List of components

Respondents were asked whether they felt anything was missing from the following list which should be included in a 'core allowance':

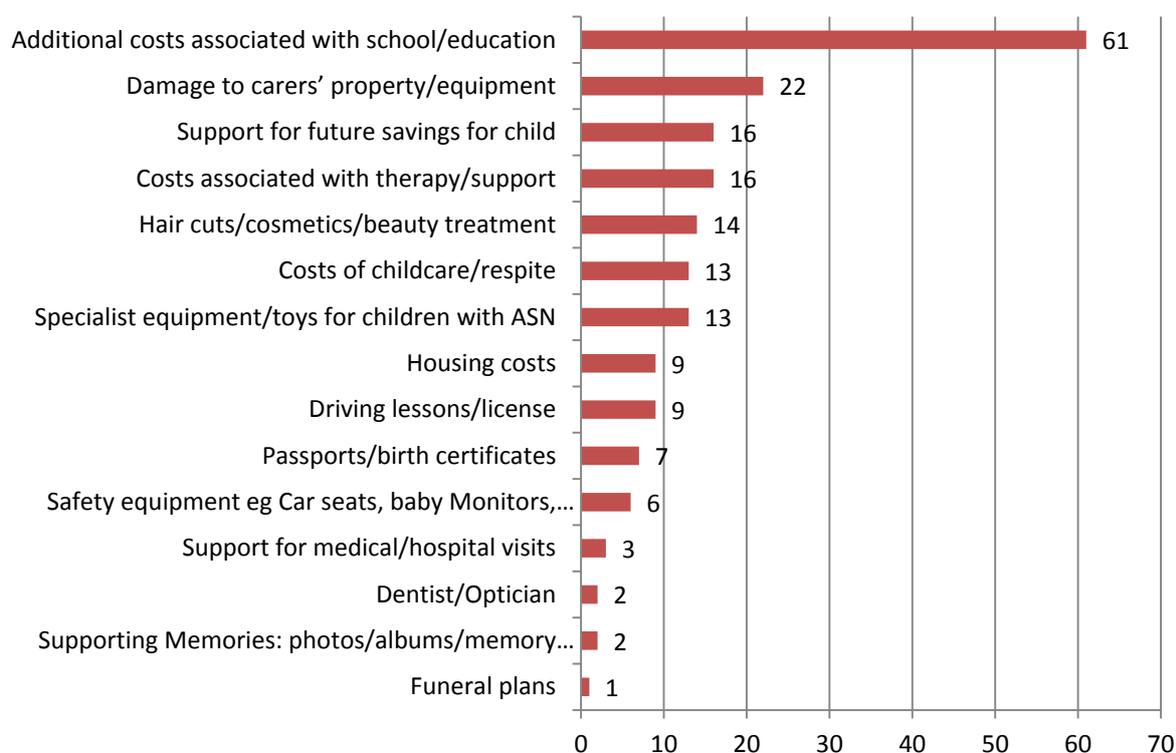
- Food
- Toiletries
- Clothes
- Wear and tear
- Hobbies and activities
- Bedding
- Furniture
- Pocket money
- Toys
- Insurance and utility bill increases
- Daily access to a computer and the internet for homework/course work
- Transport costs for the child (for the purpose of attending review meetings, children's hearings, contact, travel to school, college or other educational facility)
- Mobile phone
- Holiday costs to cover school holiday activities and family trips
- Birthday
- Christmas or other cultural or religious events

The majority of respondents thought that the list was complete. In terms of items that some felt should be covered by the core allowance, the most common responses related to the theme of additional costs associated with school/education (n=61), for example uniforms, coursework, school activities, school trips, camps, photos and school lunches.

"We foster older teenagers and there are often additional things that don't come up for younger children, such as: School and college additional expenses e.g. uniforms and equipment for hairdressing or catering courses. School trips and overseas school trips (Foster Carer, 2 children)"

"School trips, this year is £400 plus spending money but in a couple of years could be as much as £4,000 for World Challenge trip..." (Kinship Carer, 1 child)

“School costs - Sponsorship/trips/donations/holidays/fancy dress/extra equipment - It can get really costly, the schools are trying to cover costs at every turn” (Foster Carer, 3 children)



Feedback from the Communities of Interest was consistent with the views of survey respondents. One Community reported that families living in a remote location often incurred higher costs, therefore some costs relating to transport and telephones should be paid separately. Some reported that they are currently using the allowance for therapy, supplemented by a Self-Directed Support payment, whilst others purchased bespoke recreational activities. Some participants highlighted that standardised guidance for use across local authorities and agencies would be extremely beneficial. It was noted that some (foster) agencies outline what the core allowance covers within carers' handbooks, and that a uniform position would be helpful.

3.2 All Carers: Access to information on allowances

All carers were asked how easy or difficult they find it to access relevant information about foster/kinship allowances. Approximately one third of respondents (31%) stated they find it difficult to access relevant information.

Name	Percent
Very easy	10.8%
Quite easy	24.9%
Neither easy nor difficult	33.8%
Quite difficult	21.4%
Very difficult	9.1%
N	758

For respondents who reported finding it difficult to access relevant information about their allowances, the most common response related to difficulties in accessing and/or understanding the process.

- Difficulties in accessing and/or understanding the process/conflicting information (n=136)
- Barriers to accessing funding (n=15)
- Need cross-authority consistency/ information on allowances (n=14)
- Need clearer info on support for children with ASN (n=7)
- Takes long time to receive information (n=5)

“All Kinship carers that I know have different experiences of becoming Kinship carers and not one of us knows what we’re entitled to” (Kinship Carer)

“We have never been given the details of allowances, we don’t know the breakdown of the allowances and when each allowance changes based on age”. (Foster Carer)

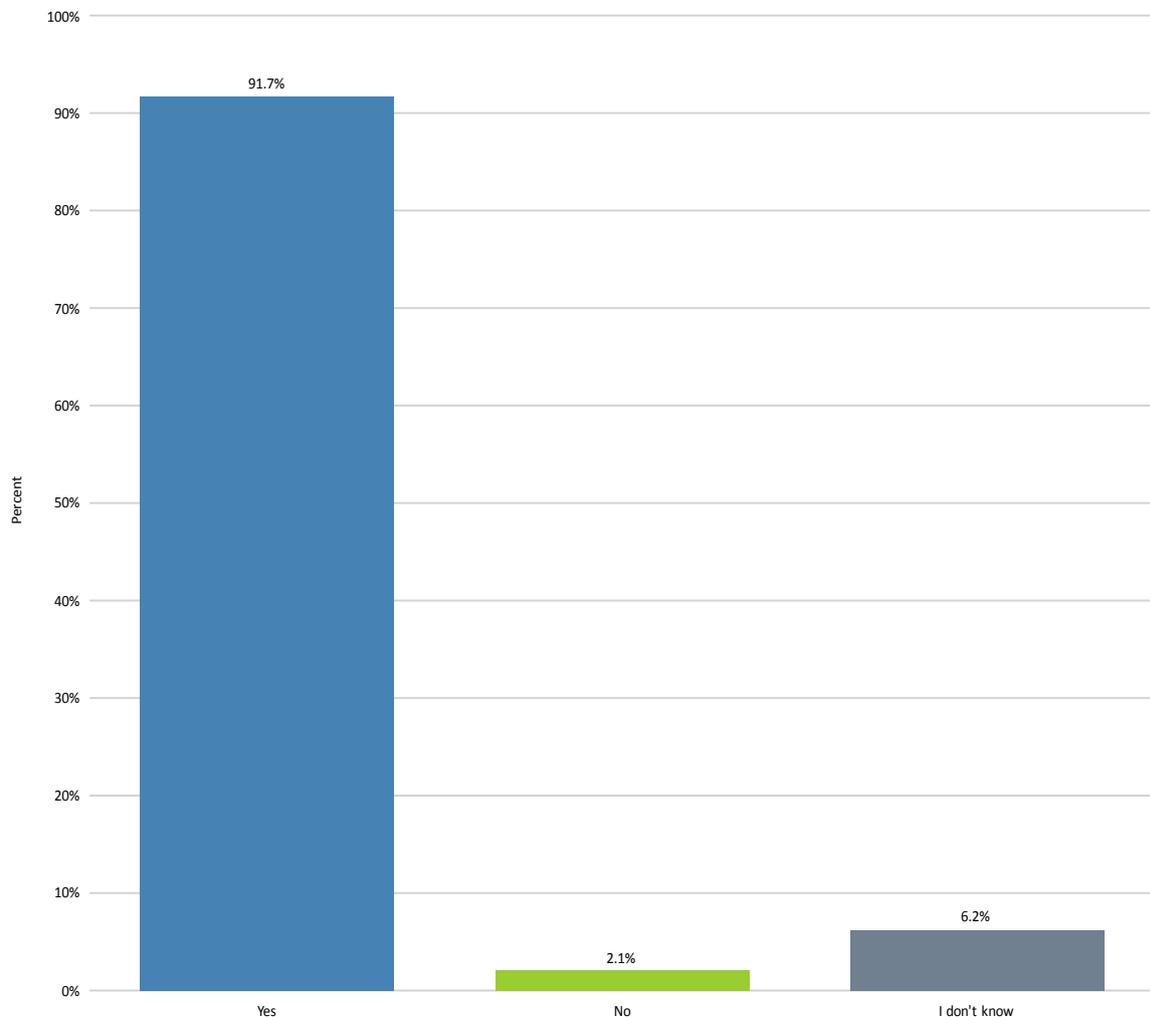
“It is never fully explained. Information varies dependant on who one asks. Carers are not issued with an allowance information sheet, and there is confusion regarding entitlements” (Foster Carer)

“Very few foster agencies advertise the rates which are paid” (Foster Carer)

The feedback from the kinship and adoption Communities of Interest generally called for more accessible and consistent information on allowances, with foster carers reporting greater satisfaction about the information they received from their local authority or agency. Some highlighted that they did not receive sufficient information at the beginning of the process, but became better informed once relationships with the local authority were developed. The foster and kinship groups mentioned the value of support groups as an information source. The adoption group referenced the need for clarity over means testing and the guidance on reapplying for an allowance.

3.3 National Recommended Minimum Allowance

The overwhelming majority of respondents felt that Scotland should have a national recommended minimum allowance for foster and kinship care allowances, with 92% in agreement. Only 2% of respondents stated there should not be a national recommended minimum allowance, all of whom were foster or kinship carers.



For those who did not think there should be a national recommended minimum allowance or who did not know (8%), the main reasons given were:

- Concern it will be set too low/could be used to stop additional payments (n=14)
- Kinship/foster carers should get same amount (n=6)
- Costs vary per local authority (e.g. transport/utilities) (n=5)
- Need further information to make a decision (n=4)
- Every child is different (n=4)
- Carers should be paid the same across the UK (n=2)
- Do not think it would be a fair system (n=1)

“Put in place a minimum allowance and that is what you will always get, the Minimum!” (Foster Carer)

“My worry is that a recommended minimum allowance would mean LA's attempting to use it as a maximum amount ignoring the needs of different children” (Foster Carer)

“I think kinship carers & foster carers should get the same amount as we're doing the exact same job” (Kinship Carer)

Feedback from the Communities of Interest was generally consistent with the views of survey respondents, with some groups citing that standardising the rate of allowances would be fair for young people and their carers. One Community expressed reservations about a national allowance, due to the higher costs of living in rural areas.

3.4 Additional costs for care experienced children

The vast majority of respondents (94%) either strongly agreed (70%) or agreed (24%) with the following statement:

“There is significant evidence to suggest that due to their often difficult start in life, the needs of a care experienced child can be greater than the needs of a child who remains with their birth parent(s). As a result, the costs of their care may be higher”.

Two per cent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

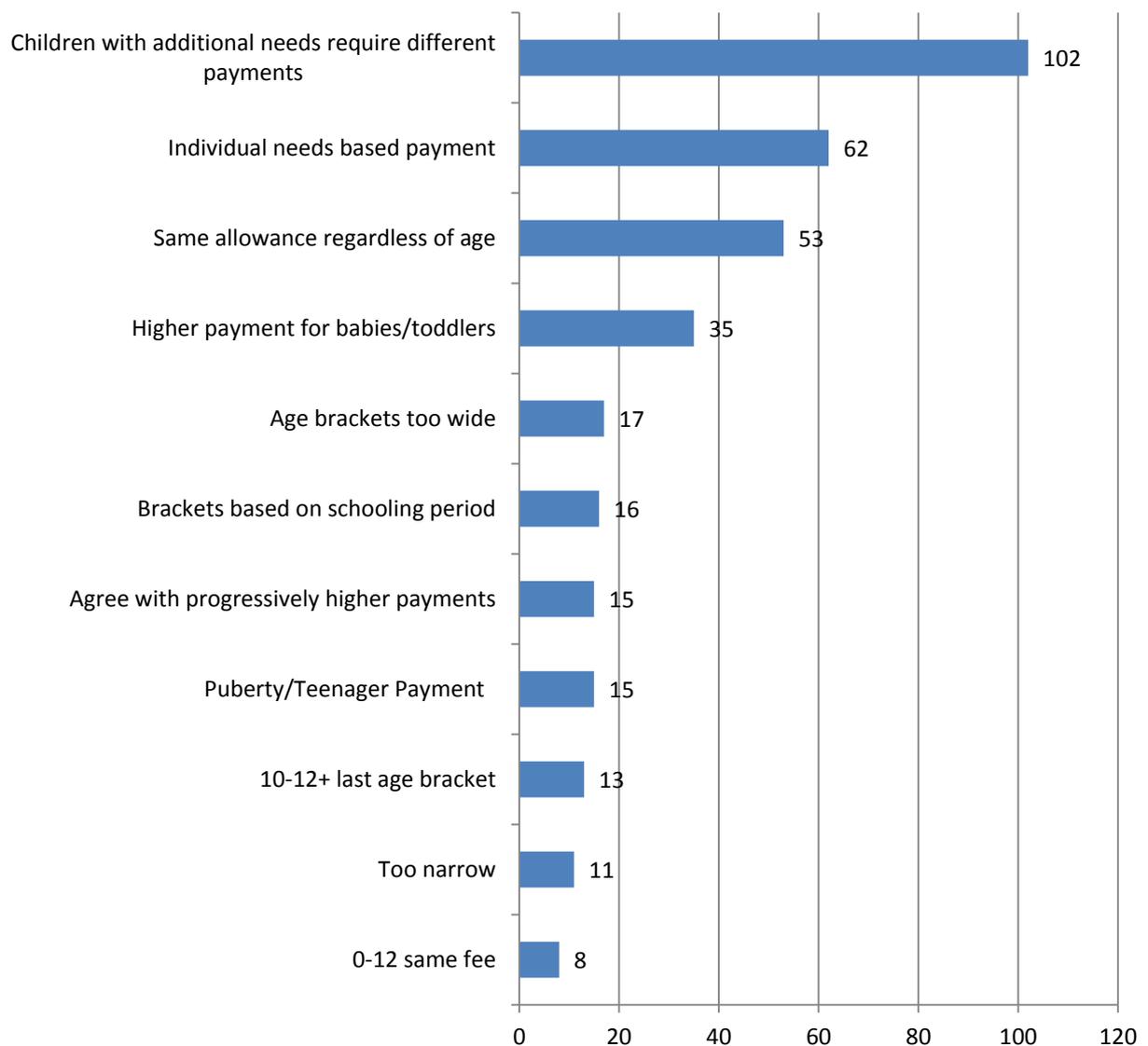
Participants in the Communities of Interest agreed with the statement.

3.5 Age bands

Across Scotland, foster and kinship allowances differ according to the age of the child, as follows:

- 0-4 years old
- 5-10 years old
- 11-15 years old
- 16+ years old

Over half of respondents agreed with the use of these age bandings (55%). For those who did not agree, the main alternative suggestions were:

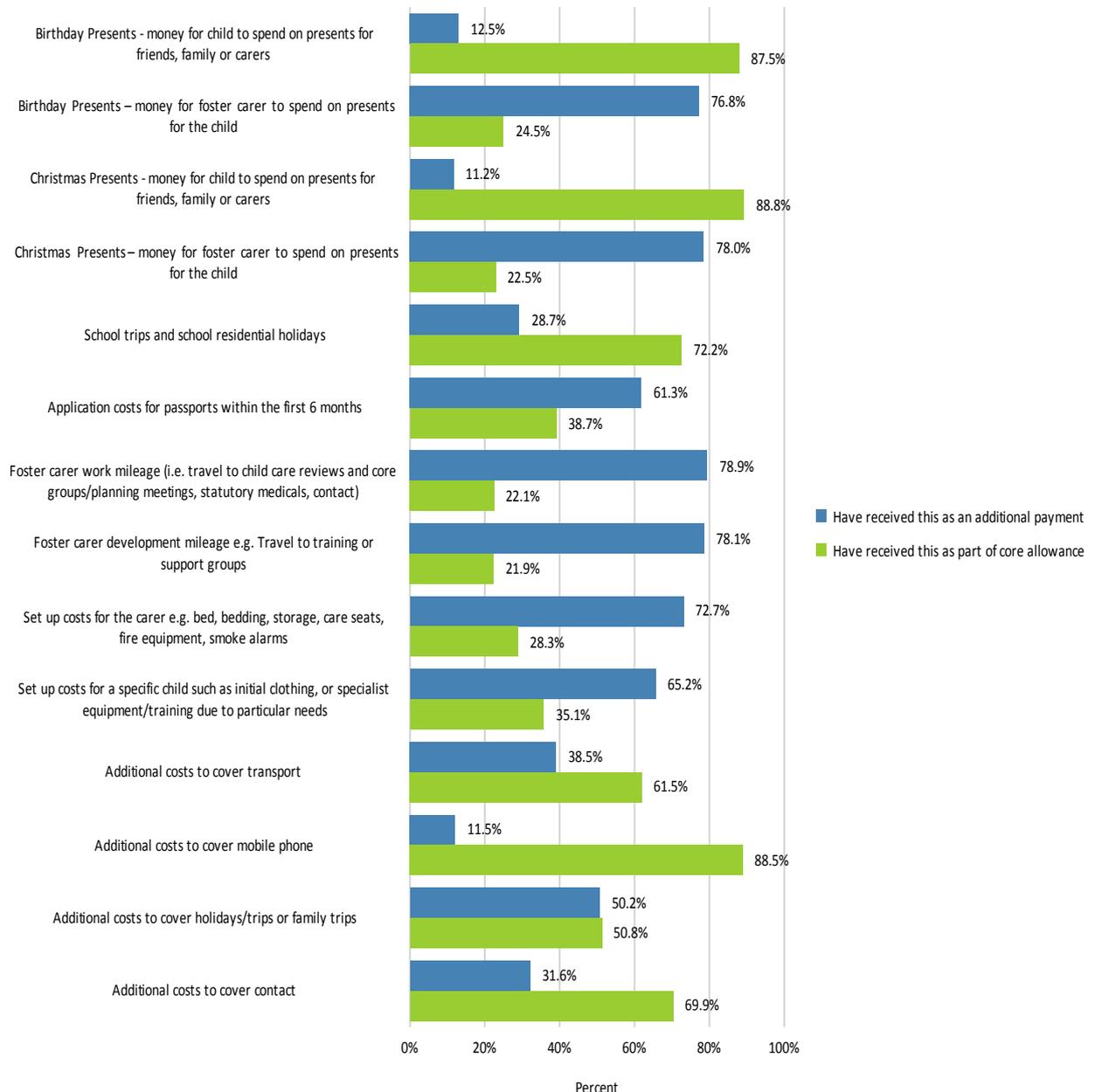


The feedback from the Communities was consistent with the survey respondents and whilst most were in agreement, some referenced the higher costs for babies and toddlers, the age brackets were too wide and that children with additional needs require different payments.

Part II. - Additional and exceptional payments

3.6 Foster carers: Additional payments

Some local authorities make additional payments to foster carers to meet certain needs, for example holidays, birthdays and initial costs to help a child settle into their new home. **Foster carers** were asked which of the following they had ever received as an additional payment from their local authority or as part of their core allowance.



Additional items which foster carers reported having received payment for which were not covered by the above list were:

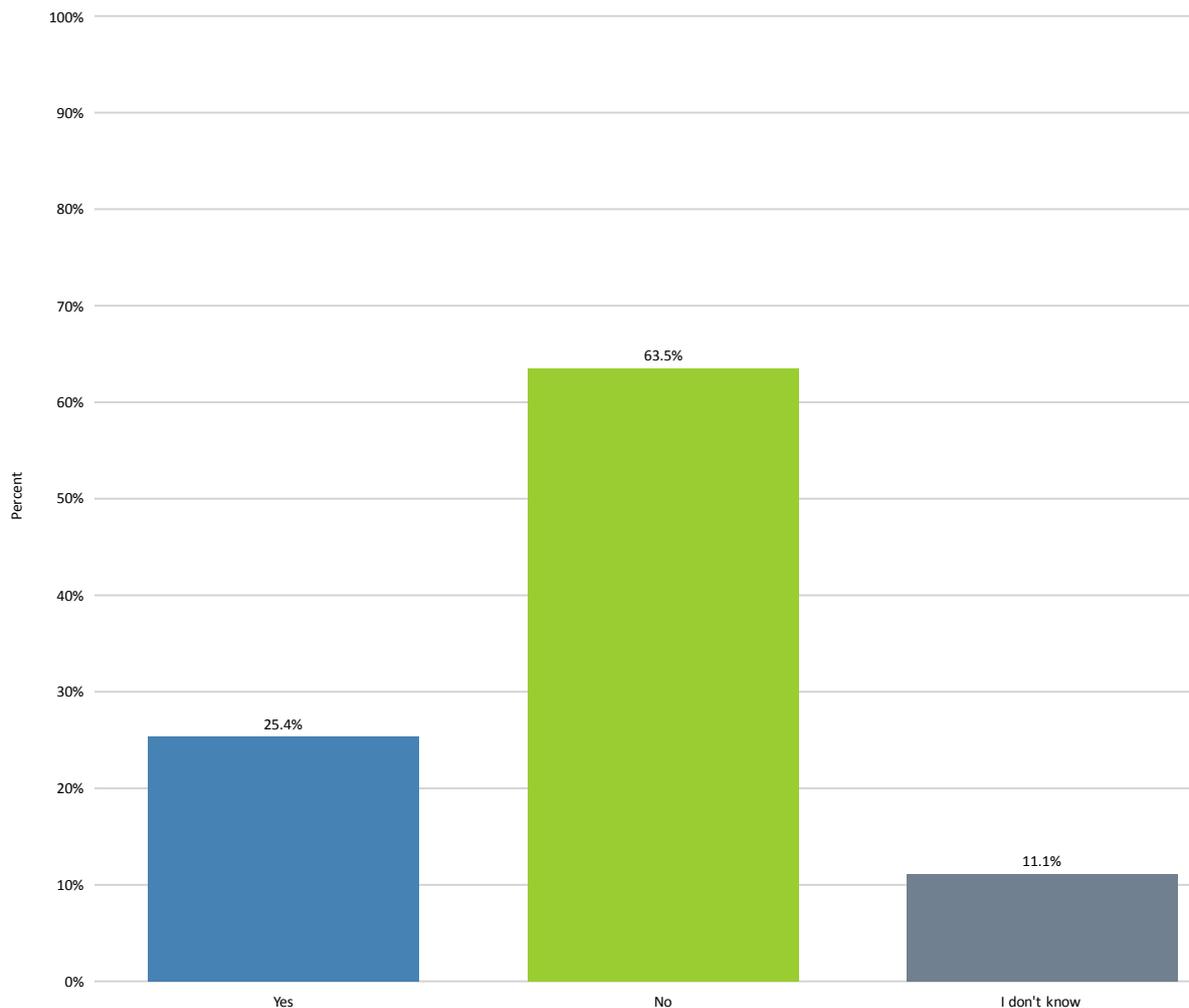
	Count
Extra-curricular activities	7
Support towards purchase of new vehicle	5
Payment for damages	4
Additional fee for taking a one child placement/singleton payment	3
Housing adaptations for child with disability	2
Extra school tuition/training for child	2
Driving lessons/test	2
Allowance for continuing care	1
Respite care	1
Pocket money for child	1
Washing allowance	1
Bonus payment for having child 52 consecutive weeks	1
Enhanced allowance for difficult behaviour	1
I-pad to support child's learning	1

The feedback from the foster Communities generally agreed that the items listed should not be part of a core allowance, although one noted that the list of core components should be expanded to achieve greater consistency. One Community reported that additional payments should cover non-routine items and scenarios, such as obtaining birth certificates, passports, provision of school uniform if a move is required during the academic year.

3.6 Foster carers: Understanding of payments

Approximately two-thirds of foster carer respondents (64%) stated that they **did not** have a clear understanding of what additional payments foster carers in their area may receive. One quarter (25%) felt that they **did** have a clear understanding and 11% did not know.

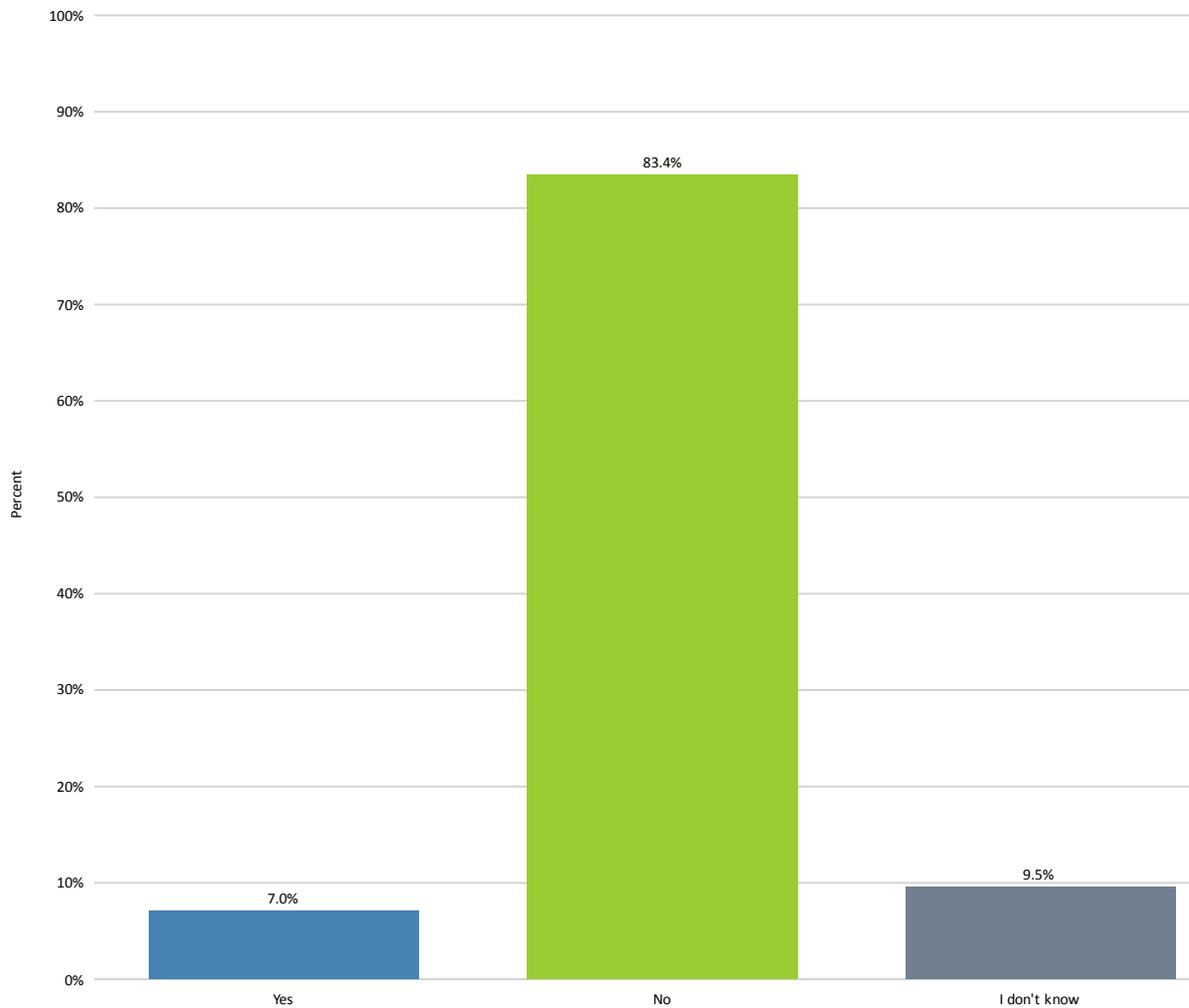
Do you feel you have a clear understanding of what additional payments foster carers in your area may receive?



The foster Communities generally report that they did not have a clear understanding of what additional payments they could be entitled to. Many received information about additional payments from their social worker and that individual and face to face contact worked best. Some noted that they used the Fostering Network for advice.

Similarly, the majority of foster carer respondents (83%) felt they did not have a clear understanding of what **exceptional** payments foster carers in their area may receive.

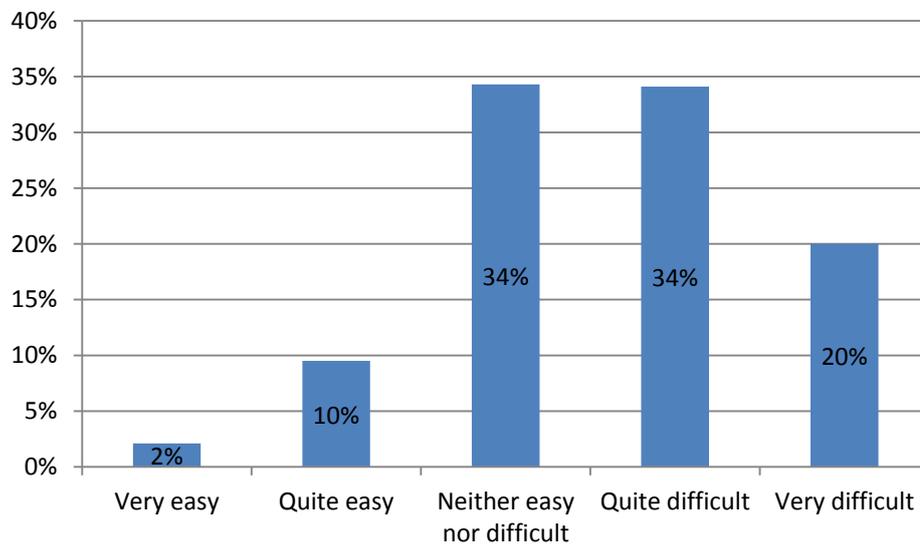
Do you feel you have a clear understanding of what exceptional payments foster carers in your area may receive?



The foster Communities supported additional guidance on exceptional payments. They all stated that foster children should have the same opportunities and support as children living with their birth parents and would welcome clarity on payments for expenses relating to special interests or talents. It was noted that this should also include university fees.

3.7 All carers: Access to information on benefits

All carers were asked how easy or difficult they find it to access relevant information about benefits entitlement. Over half of respondents stated that they find it quite difficult or very difficult (54%). Only 12% find it easy.



For carers who reported finding it difficult to access information on benefits, the main reasons given were:

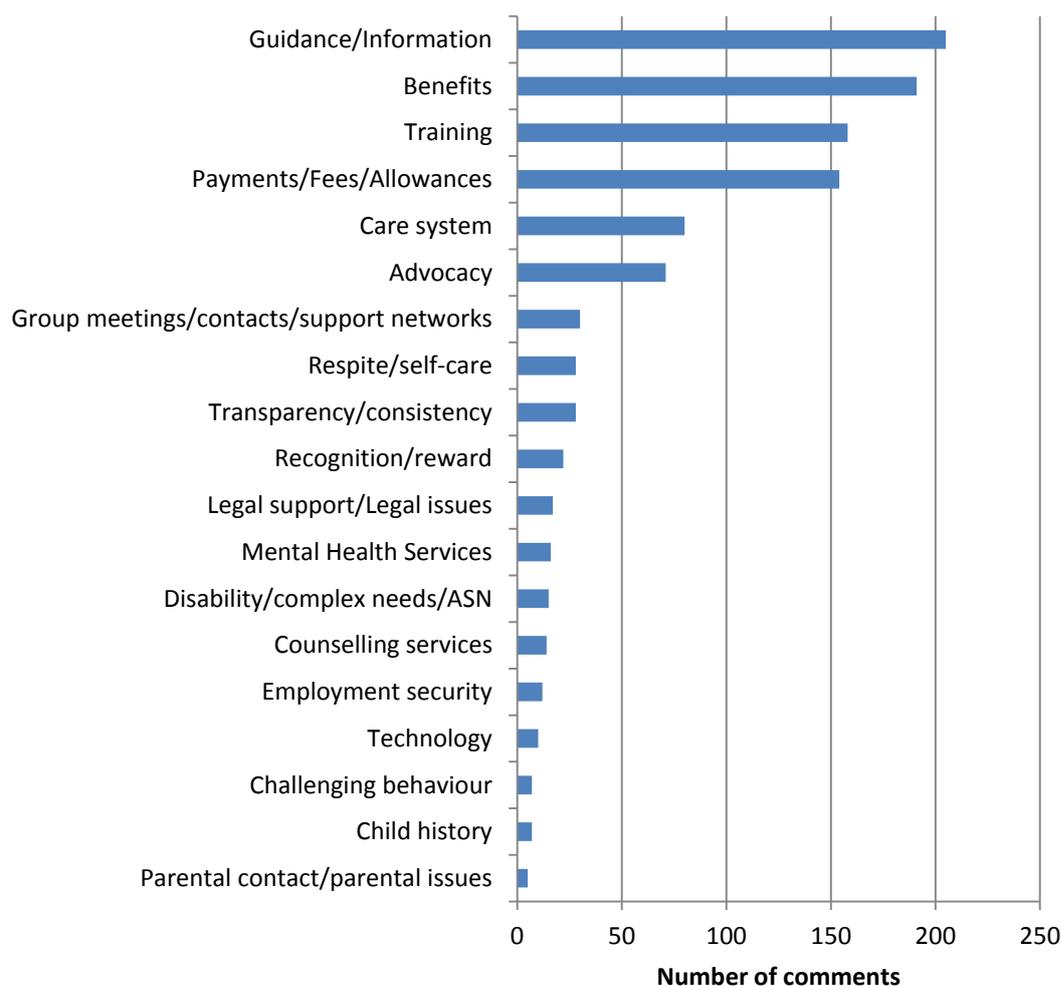
- Given no information, conflicting advice, wrong information (n=199)
- Supporting officials (e.g. Social Workers) unable to answer questions (n=29)
- Don't know where to find information/not easily accessible (n=22)
- Guidance/Benefits system is difficult to understand (n=7)

Foster carers from the Communities felt confused around the information provided by HMRC and DWP and would welcome greater support to navigate the different systems they encounter.

Part III. – Additional support for families

3.8 Further support required

All respondents were asked what further support they thought would be helpful to better meet their needs and the needs of children in care. The chart below details the themes that were mentioned across responses, and the number of comments relating to each theme.



The five most commonly mentioned support themes were guidance/information, benefits, training, payments/fees/allowances and the care system.

Primarily, respondents wished for general guidance/information that was readily available. In particular, they sought guidance in relation to completing self-assessments, taxes and insurance. There was also a large overlap between this theme and transparency/ consistency, with respondents noting that the availability and contents of guidance/ information could differ depending on the type of carer seeking the advice or the authority issuing the advice. For example:

Consistent and honest information & support which does not depend on who your link worker is.

Many respondents agreed that further support related to benefits would be useful. For example:

Being informed about benefits rather than having to find out for yourself, and missing out on entitlements.

Training was frequently mentioned in feedback, with specific requests such as training for kinship carers and training in therapeutic techniques. Several comments mentioned that getting to training could be difficult for remote and rural carers, and that funds were required to enable carers to attend.

Comments on the care system in general often related to the need for various parties within the system to cooperate and better understand what carers do. For example:

...consideration need to be given on how to help children move through the care system and not get stuck ...the whole system is disjointed

Councillors, and Heads of councils, [need to] understand exactly what we do as Foster Carers

Social Workers should be aware and up to date with allowances information

A large number of comments requested support in relation to payments/fees/allowances. For example:

More money! The costs of looking after a foster child are substantial and ongoing.

Carer fee should reflect the number of children being cared for not as we have it - one fee only.

Allowances should be standardised across the board to ensure children receive the same

The feedback from Communities of Interest was consistent with survey respondents. Kinship carers would welcome more support generally, including training to support the needs of the child in their care. Foster carers would welcome greater access to the support from agencies such as Health, Mental Health, Psychological Services and Psychiatric Services. For adoptive families, therapy was mentioned most frequently, i.e. upskilling staff within the local authority, enhancing CAMHS service or paying a premium to an adopter who can then purchase this privately.

3.9 General feedback

All respondents were given the opportunity to feed back any general comments on the subject of the survey. The most common responses given were focused on the following themes:

- Payments – (in)adequacy of payments in general (n=88)
- Payments (fairness / inconsistency across authorities, between LAs and agencies) (n=36)
- Kinship care issues – status, role, payments (usually in comparison to foster carers) (n=35)
- Payments - Other specific costs: Equipment costs, fuel and vehicle, clothes, rurality, baby costs (n=25)
- Continuing Care / through care (n=25)
- Adoption (n=14)
- Availability of information on services (e.g. for disabled children) (n=11)
- Care issues (e.g. mental health) (n=7)
- Tax deductions / benefits (n=6)
- Employment status (n=6)
- Issues with holiday allowances (n=2)
- Concern about monitoring (e.g. of spend) and review (n=2)
- Paid holidays / respite for carers (n=2)
- More research needed (n=2)

Feedback from the foster and kinship Communities referenced that carers do not undertake the role for financial gain and would welcome smoother access to services and support available. Kinship carers would like the same level of support as foster carers. Adopters said an Adoption Allowance should be based on need and be seen as a payment to replace lost income and to purchase specialist provision whether that is therapy or activities.

Annex A – Feedback from children and young people

Child allowances

Generally children and young people felt that their carers had enough money to meet their daily needs and that they were not prevented from doing anything that their peers do solely because of money. Some cited that guidance around children and young people being looked after and the fear of carers for getting it wrong can sometimes prevent young people from participating in activities. In terms of what the allowance should be cover, participants felt that this would go towards their clothes, technology (computers/tv/phones), food, holidays and doing stuff that was fun. Children in kinship care noted a difference between themselves and children in foster care, whose carers tend to fund a range of activities that their carers would not, as the money is utilised to meet basic needs, such as clothing and food.

In line with general consultation feedback, education related funding, including school trips was specifically mentioned and some felt that this should be in addition to the funding received for living expenses. Additional payments related to start-up costs and meetings were also referenced. With regard to information for carers, young people felt that there should be lots of clear information for carers to understand what was happening and that the information should be easy to read, either online or via a leaflet

Wider support

Overall the young people felt supported from their carers, social workers and the voluntary sector and some cited that the time spent with their social worker can make a difference to how they feel. Children and young people reported that they would like someone else they could talk to and have fun with – they spoke about some kids having befrienders and stated that they would like this. The young people also value the support, if required, from the relevant rights and advocacy services.

The young people all thought that carers needed to be given more support and encouragement to look at the mental and emotional health of young people, specifically linked to trauma and anxiety. The value of relationships was a common theme among young people – with their social worker, TCAC worker, at school and with other children who may or may not be in care. They noted that additional support is often required at points of transition, for both young people and their carers. When asked what their carers need, young people felt they needed someone to talk to.



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