

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
Wednesday, 14 March 2018

1. QUESTION FROM MRS LITTLE (in attendance)
Re: Foster Carer Fees

After we have both given up paid employment in order to become Family Care Workers and committed fully to offering permanent placements to Young People who were destined for residential care homes (including maintaining a home and vehicles bigger than we would otherwise need and all the associated costs), are the terms of our fostering agreement going to remain in place in order that we can continue to honour our commitments without the service cutting our allowances at every juncture?

It is time that we were appreciated for the job we were asked to do, looking after Devon's most vulnerable Young People and it is time for us to stop wasting our time over and over again, fighting for our livelihoods. Don't you agree we have a much more worthwhile job to do?

Whilst we agree that others should have a pay increase if earned, we do not accept that we should have a cut to our allowances to finance it.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES

Devon foster carers are highly respected within the Council and their contribution to children's social care services is appreciated.

The Family Care Workers Scheme came to an end in early 2016. Carers who had been a part of this scheme were invited to become Tier 3 carers. Other carers who met the Tier 3 requirements could also apply to become Tier 3 carers.

There are no plans to amend the terms of the Devon County Council's Foster Carers Agreement. The agreement currently makes no requirements over carers giving up paid employment, and many Tier 3 carers have other income streams as well as fostering.

2. QUESTION FROM MRS STRANGE (in attendance)
Re: Changes to Fostering Allowances

In the Treasurer's Report of Revenue & Expenditure Children's Services (Budget Monitoring 2017/2018) dated 10th January 2018, reference is made to the 'external residential and supported accommodation over spends total £4.2 million, partially offset by under spending in other placement types, INCLUDING FOSTERING and post 18 placements of £1.6 million'.

Has Devon County Council Cabinet agreed to funnel yet more money into Independent Fostering Agencies (at a time when the Directors of many of these are reported to be raking in huge personal profits), while Devon's own dedicated, loyal and highly qualified and experienced foster carers' allowances are to be used to 'offset' the £4.2 million overspend to external residential and supported accommodation and will Devon give a clear message to its own fostering workforce that it is valued for the work that it does on Devon's behalf by assuring carers that they will see no reduction in allowances that were previously agreed?"

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES

Devon County Council values the contribution of its foster carers.

Our intention is to increase the provision of in house foster care. All children coming into our care need good robust placements, and if we're not able to offer them an in house foster placement then we need to look externally.

Devon is reviewing its fostering payments. We are working on models that reflect the needs of the child. We are involving our foster carers in this development that they consider to be the most effective way of supporting and stabilising placements.

Once we have confirmed models we will be consulting with foster carers further. We will then be taking this to the Council's Scrutiny and Cabinet in order to seek the approval of Cabinet members.

The teams are working hard to recruit more foster carers and are busy assessing them, however we are still unable to place all of our children needing fostering placements in house, and so need to plan for the budget requirements in order to seek external provision.

**3. QUESTION FROM MRS PETERS (in attendance)
Re: Fostering Allowances – Reduction in Tier 3 Carers Payments**

Has it been considered that alienating the present tier 3 carers by cutting their present payment may well be counterproductive in that it will almost certainly mean that more of Devon's more challenging Children in Care will have to be placed in expensive out of county residential placements?

I understand the number of young people in these high-end placements has risen considerably over the past year (average cost £4000 per week) - I believe there are currently 60 in place - do the maths! Preserving the status quo for the current ex FCWS currently is peanuts by comparison and money well worth investing into the future of our most vulnerable young people?

Would it not also be financially sound to invest money into supporting the new generation of Devon foster carers by providing a career structure to enable them to become more experienced and qualified rather than increase the number of 'out of county' placements?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES

Devon's foster carers play a key role in caring for our most vulnerable children and are held in high regard by the Council.

Decisions have yet to be made as to the model of payments to foster carers. Foster carers representatives have been involved in the development of models that we are exploring. The proposed model will be considered by Cabinet when all the work on the modelling has been done

Many of the children needing high cost placements, have needs that would mean they would struggle to be in a family setting. Our aim would be to support these children to ultimately enable them to step down from residential care into a family.

We are always considering ways of developing our foster carers. We offer a broad range of training courses specifically tailored to Foster carers and support and have particularly good feedback on the training around Therapeutic Parenting. Foster carers have given very positive feedback on the support they receive from the in-house Placement Support Team.

**4. QUESTION FROM MR LEYLAND (in attendance)
Re: Ex-Family Care Workers**

Having 4 years left on our mortgage and being unable to return to the careers we both left to concentrate on fostering, is it fair that we were told on 5 June 2017 that our payment of

£15,025 per year (based on one child being with us 365 days) needs to be reduced to be able to increase the payments to the Tier 1 and Tier 2 carers "to be fair and equitable, whilst remaining within budget"?

Would it not be fairer for Devon to find the small amount of additional budget be able to say, "we will honour our commitment to pay you your current rate per child for as long as you provide a service to us, alongside the other 32 ex-Family Care Workers, in recognition of the sacrifices you have made?"

This would be in line with the Fostering Network (the charity that advises the Government on behalf of Foster Carers) view that no foster carer should suffer financially following a review of fees and allowances.

It would also mean that we felt valued and respected by Devon County Council. Lastly, Tier 1 and Tier 2 carers could have a degree of confidence that in future years, their fees and allowances would not be cut.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES

The Family Care Workers Scheme came to an end in 2016.

At that time foster carers that were caring under that scheme were invited to become Tier 3 carers. Other carers that met the criteria in terms of their experience and wish to care for more complex children could also apply to become Tier 3 carers.

It was indeed the original intention that Tier 3 carers should take the most challenging children, however over time and with the complexity of placement sufficiency we now have carers in all tiers dealing with a broad cross section of complexities in children, and it is no longer Tier 3 carers exclusively caring for the more challenging children.

Many Tier 3 carers care for settled children and this includes children under the age of 10.

We are keen to get the model right to improve sufficiency and stability for our children. We wish to develop our in house fostering service and a fair and equitable rate of allowances will make fostering for Devon more attractive.