

Consultation: Fostering fees and Allowances

Report of the Chief Officer Children's Services

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1. Introduction and Recommendation

- 1.1 The responsibilities a Council holds for children in care are unique and to be discharged with the utmost care and gravity. The Council is a corporate parent and, all its decision-making pertaining to children in care, must have the welfare of the child as the paramount consideration. Being child centred isn't always easy as there are always other interests in play. Members are required to discern in the myriad representations, where the best interests of the child lie.
- 1.2 This report proposes changes to the current structure of foster carers' fees.
Scrutiny members are asked to:
Support the proposed changes to the fee structure, recommending any adjustments to cabinet that they consider appropriate.
- 1.3 The matter under consideration is sensitive and complex. As a consequence, this report is detailed: it covers
- Background information about children in care and fostering
 - The case for change
 - The process for developing the recommended fee structure model
 - The model
 - The consultation on the preferred model
 - The consultation responses
 - The conclusion and recommendations

2. Background

- 2.1 Fostered children are not 'placements'. They are individual children with unique personalities and characters and often complex needs, who need support and help from a range of services if they are to recover from their early childhood trauma.
- 2.2 At any time, Devon has around 700 children in care, about half of whom are cared for by Devon foster carers (on 3.9.18 there were 720 children in care, of whom 376, 52%, were with in-house foster carers). There are 270 fostering households in Devon and we want to recruit more. Spend on in-house foster care allowances in 2017/18 was £8,305,062.

- 2.3 Foster carers are self-employed but work either for a Local Authority or for an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). They are paid an allowance (recommended nationally by the Department for Education) and a fee (set locally by the Local Authority or their Independent Fostering Agency). Allowances and fees can be disregarded for benefits and the tax regime gives foster carers favourable tax discounts.

3. The case for change

- 3.1 The current fees and allowances system has been adapted and developed over many years to respond to national and local policy and best practice innovations and to address specific issues. The unintended consequence has been increased complexity, some confusion and inequities.
- 3.2 Currently, there are five different payment schemes; three tier progression schemes; and four different age bands. This has created inequalities and an unhelpfully complex system of administration. Prospective carers tell us that they find the current payment system complex and confusing. It does not compare favourably with the local independent sector where they generally have one fee.
- 3.3 Foster carers are not always receiving equal payments for children presenting similar needs. For example, to care for the same 16-year-old child:
- A tier 2 carer would receive £397 in fees and allowances,
 - A DYPAS tier 3 carer would receive £471 in fees and allowances, and
 - A tier 3 carer would receive £536 in fees and allowances.
- 3.4 Whilst tier 3 carers are expected to have significant experience and training in caring for more complex children; in practice, many complex children are being successfully cared for by carers in other tiers.
- 3.5 A commitment to review the fees and allowances was made in 2015 but, due to changes in senior leadership, could not begin until September 2017.
- 3.6 The Council wants a model of payment that is fair and equitable. The Council wants to strengthen the focus on children and their needs, matching payments to the complexity of need.
- 3.7 Devon County Council values its foster carers and the contribution that they make to the lives of many children and young people. In addition to creating a fair and equitable system, it is our intention by creating a more transparent fee structure, coupled with our highly regarded support for foster carers, to be in a stronger position to recruit more foster carers in the future.

4 The process for developing the recommended fee structure model

- 4.1 The work to develop the proposed model commenced in September 2017 with the establishment of a project group, set up to work with foster carers and staff. A group of carers, known as the Working Party, drawn from across all three of the fostering tiers has been involved in the co-production of proposed payment models that reflect

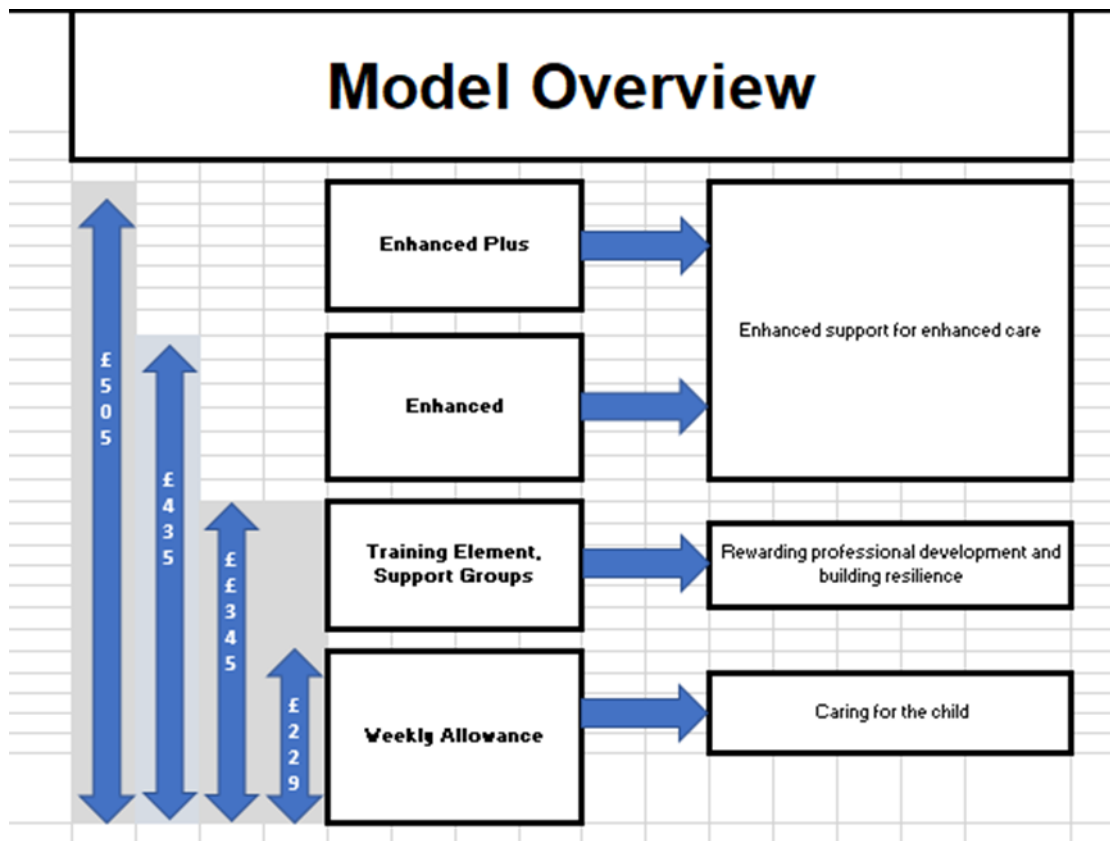
the costs of caring for a child; rewards personal professional development; and acknowledges the challenges of meeting the needs of individual children. The Working Party devised a set of governing principles that would underpin the model. These principles are included in the [consultation document](#).

- 4.2 The first finance modelling consultation with carers was held on 31 October 2017. A second workshop for carers was held on 29 January 2018 seeking feedback on the modelling developed at that time and following further review, three of the original five models were discounted by the group as not being workable
- 4.3 An engagement meeting was held with a specific group of tier three carers (see footnote¹) on 23 January 2018 which followed a briefing of the Chair and Secretary of the Devon Foster Carers Association on 12 January 2018.
- 4.4 Six updates for foster carers have been provided throughout this process in the foster carers newsletter and the topic has been a standing agenda item at the monthly Foster Carer Strategy meeting.
- 4.5 During this co-production period, a group of tier three carers made various representations in writing and in person to the Council, through its officers and its members. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee analysed all the representations and asked the Service to respond in writing to the summarised issues raised. The paper prepared for this purpose is attached at Appendix One.
- 4.6 A group of about 30 tier three carers have been particularly active, sharing their views and concerns. These are captured in the consultation feedback later. Some carers have felt it necessary to repeatedly state their views as they felt they were not being heard. The service view is unequivocal; all views have been heard, but not all are agreed.
- 4.7 The preferred model was subject to detailed financial modelling. The model was applied to every fostering household based on the children in placement on 31.3.18.

5 The model

- 5.1 The model complies fully with the governing principles agreed as part of the development work. It comprises a weekly allowance, an allocation for engagement with training and support groups, and allocations based on the needs of the child.

¹ Historically, there was a fostering scheme in Devon referred to as the 'Family Care Workers Scheme'. Carers entered this scheme with the understanding that they would give up paid employment. Some carers continued to have other income streams as well as fostering, for example running a small business from home or other paid caring roles or had a partner who was not a member of the scheme and had other paid employment and this was accepted by children's services. The Family Care Workers Scheme ended in April 2016 and carers were invited to become tier 3 carers. There is not and has never been an expectation that tier 3 carers will give up paid employment. The current Devon County Council Foster Carers Agreement makes no requirement of carers to give up paid employment.



- 5.2 **Weekly Allowance.** The Devon Weekly Allowance enhances the National Minimum Allowance published by the Department of Education. The 2018-2019 minimum rate is £222 for young people placed in London and £191 for the rest of the UK. This covers the basic costs of caring for each child. The proposed weekly allowance is **£229.00 pw**
- 5.3 **Training and Development.** This recognises and motivates continued professional and personal development. The proposed Training element payment is £58.00 pw or £3,016 pa
- 5.4 **Support Groups.** Peer support is critical to successful fostering, giving and receiving. The proposed Support Group element payment is £58.00 pw or £3,016 pa
- 5.5 These two measures are recognition of carers' skills and expertise, which is referred to in the Narey Review of Fostering. The measurement of this is straightforward and transparent and will be assessed annually. A carer household would be expected to complete a minimum of 6 training sessions per year and attend 6 support groups. A record of attendance will be maintained, considered at a carer's annual review, and payments adjusted accordingly.
- 5.6 A foster carer receiving the weekly allowance plus the training and support group elements would receive £345 per week per child, equivalent to £17,940 pa, for each child in placement. Considering the current profile of children in foster placements and assuming no changes to the model as proposed, we anticipate that approximately 55% of placements will be in this category (weekly allowance, plus training element, plus support group element)
- 5.7 **Enhanced payment.** Foster carers will receive the enhanced payment when the care they need to give a child requires extra support. The proposal is for a payment of £90 per week in addition to the weekly allowance and the training and support group

elements (equalling £435 pw or £22,620 pa for each child in placement). Considering the current profile of children in foster placements and assuming no changes to the model as proposed, we anticipate that approximately 10% of placements will be in this category

- 5.8 **Enhanced Plus payments.** For children with more complex needs, and who pose a significant caring challenge, fees - quite properly - rise substantially, and carers will receive the Enhanced Plus payments. The proposed additional payment is £70 pw, (equalling £505 pw, or £26,260 pa for each child in placement). We anticipate that 35% of placements would be enhanced plus.
- 5.9 **Placement stability.** The allowances should reward successful foster caring. Many allowance models we have considered reward foster carers for caring for a child when they first move in and are extremely unsettled and particularly challenging to care for. Foster carers have to work hard to settle a child and often, once settled, the payments reduce as the child's perceived needs diminish. In Devon we want to recognise the hard work put in by a carer, resulting in continued placement stability and propose that payments will not be reduced when a child settles.
- 5.10 **Assessing the level of payment.** We have taken the assessment tool successfully used by Plymouth fostering and developed it to work for Devon. The tool that we propose has been part of the consultation with foster carers (see the [consultation document](#)).
- 5.11 **Protection of income.** Based on our analysis about 60% of carers will either stay the same or see an increase. The Council recognises that the model will have an adverse impact on some carers. To ameliorate that impact and to take all the steps we can to protect placements for children, we propose that foster carers whose total allowances are going down by 5% or more are offered protection for two years or until the end of the placement, whichever comes first. Foster carers are not employed by the Local Authority and have self-employed status. Nevertheless, the protection proposed would mirror that of employees adversely affected by restructuring.
- 5.12 **Support to foster carers.** Devon has a very favourable and highly valued package of support to foster carers. Currently Devon foster carers have access to:
- A comprehensive training programme that includes face to face and on-line training
 - An 18-week therapeutic training programme
 - A good foster carer to supervising social worker ratio
 - Peer mentoring scheme
 - Carer participation in the development of the service
 - Membership of the national organisation Foster Talk
 - Fun activities, zoo trips, pantomime, etc
 - Membership of Devon Foster Carers Association
- 5.13 Foster carers also have access to the Placement Support Team. The team offers planned preventative therapeutic support and crisis intervention 7 days a week. It offers 1:1 therapeutic support with children and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy with carers and the children. The team have clinical supervision, a psychologist and make a significant difference in terms of supporting the resilience of carers and increasing placement stability.
- 5.14 The fee structure compares well with other fostering providers. Payments by Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) in the South West vary from £378 per week to £606 per week. The average IFA rate, locally, which includes enhancements for

complex and additional needs is £407 per week. Similarly, the new Devon offer compares well with Plymouth, Somerset and Cornwall

- 5.15 The Devon offer of up to £505 is highly competitive and easy to understand. It is intended that this will boost the recruitment of new foster carers to Fostering Devon and support the retention of our existing foster carers.
- 5.16 With our internal placement sufficiency boosted, this will reduce the numbers of children being placed in external fostering placements. When we pay for external placements, we not only pay the carer but also the agency management fees and a profit element.
- 5.17 An increase in capacity will facilitate 'step down' placements for more of our young people, moving them out of expensive residential care and back into in house placements, and a well-supported family environment.

6. The consultation on the preferred model

- 6.1 The consultation on the preferred model commenced on 25 July 2018 when full documentation of process and proposals was sent to all carers. [The consultation document can be found as Appendix Two at the end of this report.](#)
- 6.2 A small number of carers have suggested that holding the consultation during the summer holidays was intended to restrict and limit participation and feedback. This is not so. The nature of the co-production approach means that feedback is actively sought at all stages. Consultation events ran from 10am to 3pm and were planned to enable drop-ins and personal one to one conversations as well as wider discussions. Childrens activities were available at each event. Two consultation events were added to take place after the school holidays. This report is written in advance of the final two events. Some carers found they were able to attend more than one event.

6.3

Venue		Number of carers attending
25 July	Exeter	23
30 July	Totnes	13
31 July	Barnstaple	9
1 August	Tiverton	2
2 August	Exeter	5
14 August	Cullompton	14
11 September	Exeter	
12 September	Torrington	

All carers have been invited to contribute to the consultation and comment via email and at the time of preparing this report 40 emails had been received, the majority being from the ex-Family Care Worker group of carers.

- 6.4 Individual letters explaining the potential financial impact of applying the model based on children placed on 31st March 2018 were sent out to carers during the week commencing 20 August. Follow-up calls were made to the 20 carers who would be most financially impacted to explain the calculation and to answer any questions.

7. Consultation feedback

- 7.1 The open day format was appreciated by many carers who attended as it allowed for individual conversations about their own circumstances and what the proposals meant for them. It is a truism of consultation that those who are broadly happy may not bother to respond while those who are unhappy are more likely to respond. In this matter the 60% of carers whose fees are either increased or unchanged may be more likely to be broadly in favour, while those who expect to experience a decrease may be more likely to be against. Some key issues have been raised.
- 7.2 **Cross-county team of staff.** A major modernisation programme followed an inspection of children's services in 2013 which introduced plans to strengthen locality based working. The fostering teams now have local management across four areas of Devon. The staff and manager in each team have a good understanding of the needs of each of the children in their area and they also have a good understanding of the support needs of carers in their area. Each foster carer continues to have their own supervising social worker and local support groups are in place open to all foster carers.
- 7.3 **Summer holiday group activities.** The local teams and support groups have organised events and each area has an allocated budget to arrange activities. Christmas parties were held in each area over the Christmas season. Some events have been organised by carers and carer's organisations, other events were organised by staff. Many have been financially supported by the Fostering Service. All carers and their families were invited to a Christmas Panto that was well attended and *A Big Day Out* has been organised in partnership with the Exmoor National Park. Feedback from events so far has been excellent. Events and activities are planned for the summer holidays with other regular activity groups being planned.
- 7.4 **Support staff.** All foster carers can request support from our in-house placement support team. The Placement Support Team offers support on planned referrals which are longer term on-going work, and they also offer crisis and unplanned work on a duty system. The team offer this crisis work on an out of hours basis for Special Guardians and adopters as well.
- 7.5 The work of the team has shifted from largely offering practical support, such as child minding, to offering more therapeutic support. Prior to coming into care, many of our children have had multiple carers, and this can have a significant impact on their ability to develop attachments. We need to minimise the number of people coming in and out of our children's lives. The Placement Support Team has had a significant impact on improving placement stability.
- 7.6 **Guaranteed 14 days holiday a year, and respite.** Respite care is recognised as an important facility and remains available to all children. Respite arrangements have now become part of a child's care planning. This means that it is more individually focused around the support needs of that placement, and promotes placement stability. As carers are self-employed, they are free to take a break between placements that suits them and their families.
- 7.7 **28 days paid notice.** Historically tier 3 carers would be paid for 28 days after giving notice on a placement. If the child left after a week, the carer would still be paid for the

28 days. This came to an end, following full consultation with foster carers, at a strategy meeting in April 2017.

- 7.8 **Funding for taxis and increased expectations on carers to support family contact.** Many of our children have had multiple carers prior to coming into care. When we look after them we are keen to do what we can to promote the building of attachments. Part of this can mean reducing the number of people a child comes into contact with. We want children to be taken to and from school by their main carer whenever practically possible. At times this can conflict with other demands and in these cases, we would seek an alternative. There is good evidence that family contact in most cases, is good for children. Supporting family contact is a usual expectation for foster carers.
- 7.9 **Reimbursement for mileage used.** We reimburse foster carers for mileage incurred and there no plans to cease this.
- 7.10 **Internet grant.** Historically, all carers had received £15.00 a month to cover broadband costs. This payment had been set up several years ago, however over time broadband has become part of normal household expenses and it was agreed, through foster carer strategy groups, to stop this payment in April 2017. To protect children's confidentiality, carers should only be printing information on children in only a very few circumstances.
- 7.11 **Birthday Holiday and Festival Allowances**
The consultation has highlighted concerns around the administration of birthday, festival and holiday allowances. The current proposal is that these are included in the child's weekly allowance. However, carers have expressed concern about this. Some carers have expressed a view that inclusion of these elements into the weekly fee would assist in planning and budgeting through the year. Other carers have expressed a concern that if a child comes into placement near to a celebration then they would not have the opportunity to have saved enough.
- 7.12 **Assessment tool.** During the feedback some questions have been asked about the detail of the assessment criteria tool and how it would be implemented. Carers want to be involved in the assessment process and identified some specific criteria that would need to be added. For example, children having experienced neo-natal abstinence, and children who have complex contact arrangements.
- 7.13 **Protection.** Some carers have expressed concern regarding the proposed protection period of two years and have requested protection for the full duration of their approval as foster carers for Devon County Council. We do not propose to extend the period of protection.
- 7.14 **Training and support groups.** Some carers have expressed concerns about the level of availability of training and support groups to meet the obligations required of them. Our aim with training and support for foster carers is to support them to manage their own development on an ongoing basis.
- 7.15 Training is interpreted in its broadest sense. Training can include training courses, online training, conferences and other learning i.e. agreed reading / research

depending on the child and carers needs. This will enable maximum flexibility. It will be based on a framework of Personal Development agreed between the carer and Supervising Social Worker. There will be enough Support Group capacity to meet the need.

7.16 Other more general feedback not in favour of the proposal (and not already covered elsewhere in this report) has included the following:

- We do not want any changes.
- Want to maintain income even if changed for others.
- State they were asked to give up employment and would now find it difficult to re-enter the labour market.
- Fees should not be based on the needs of the child – want it to remain on the experience of the carer.
- Concerned at loss of carer progression for carers.
- Concerned at loss of status.
- Some carers state that they do not feel listened to or consulted.
- You are ‘Robbing Peter to pay Paul.’
- We maintain that this is a money saving exercise.
- You are taking resources from carers for teenagers.

7.17 For those carers who fundamentally object to a model built around children's needs rather than carers' experience/career progression, it may have been difficult to engage with the detail of the model. The same group of carers report their sense of an erosion of the support they have had in previous times. We know that all parts of the public sector have seen change and none more so than local government, where efficiencies and different ways of working that enable us to improve outcomes in the context of increased demand and complexity have been challenging for all. For some, this change, which is a fundamental remodelling, is reported to be the straw that will break the camel's back. This is deeply regrettable, nevertheless the Council remains confident that the model is most true to the agreed framework of governing principles and to the Council's core responsibility that it builds from the child's best interest over and above all other interests.

7.18 Other more general feedback in favour of the proposal has included the following:

- It has been good to be included in decision making of the 'new model'.
- Sounds fair to me.
- We feel this is a fairer system.
- The scheme seems well thought out. I like the fact that the child is in the centre of the plan.
- As a carer for primarily babies it appears to be a better system.
- Assessment criteria taking into account complex contact arrangements and baby FAS etc. is good to know.
- Overall, the new plan is looking positive and more balanced.
- Very well explained and enjoyed being included in the process – which as carers we feel is very important!
- We are really encouraged by the transparency that will now exist within the service. We will benefit from the service coming in line with private foster

agencies and we believe that it will reward carers who are doing an amazing job with tricky children of all ages

- We support you in creating a service that is more fair and transparent between 0-18 years of age, whilst also in line with private fostering agencies. Ultimately, I believe you will attract more foster carers into Devon Fostering.
- We are in favour of this model, and feel, in particular that it is a more skills-based model than the current one. We are tier 2 carers. We have been told by independent professionals that the children are some of the most traumatised children they have worked with. Since they arrived with us we have learnt so much, through support and training. We now feel so much more prepared to care for these, and any future children who may be placed with us. Our skills have improved and because of this we can, if we chose to, take some of the more complex children who will need more enhanced support, and this is not based on the tier that we find ourselves on.

7.19 Feedback left by a young person in care at one of the consultation events:

“I am surprised as how much people actually care about children in care. Thanks for actually caring.” – Charles, age 14.

7.20 Changes to be made following consultation feedback. The Council has considered in depth the strong representations made by a small group of very active carers, supported by the IWGB (Independent Workers of Great Britain) and, to an extent, by the Fostering Network (a campaign group dedicated to championing fostering and lobbying government on behalf of foster carers), that the model is fundamentally flawed and that a fee structure should be based on carers’ experience and recognised career progression. We agree that any scheme should recognise carers’ experience and expertise hence the allocations for training, development and support groups. However, we do not agree that the scheme should be based on this; we believe it should be fundamentally grounded in children and their needs.

7.21 Birthday, Holiday, and Festival allowances. Based on the feedback received we are undertaking a piece of work that reconsiders the best way of doing this. This will not change the overall allowance over the year.

7.22 Assessment of needs tool. We value the feedback received and will be amending the assessment of need tool to include some of the additional criteria identified by carers. We will also be further developing the process through which the tool is completed and how carers can be involved in this.

8 The conclusion and recommendations

8.1 Changes to fostering fee structures are notoriously challenging and this has been no exception.

8.2 The Council is confident that the process of the review has been open, transparent and fully inclusive.

- 8.3 The Council is permanently committing an additional £400k into the base budget of fostering to enable the scheme to come into place, and a further £600k to provide the two-year protection for those carers most adversely affected by the changes to be introduced. It would be surprising if those at risk of adverse financial impact were in favour and those who stand to gain were against.
- 8.4 The Council needs foster carers who want to look after children who are often in deep distress, troubled and oftentimes troublesome and we want to reward those carers who look after the more challenging children. We know our current scheme is off-putting for potential foster carers and we have had strong endorsement of the model from carers as well as challenges from some. Some carers have indicated their intention to mount a more public campaign in the event of the Council agreeing the model. It is to the credit of all carers that, to date, protests have not impacted on children.
- 8.5 Some carers will be adversely affected, most will not, and many stand to gain.
- 8.6 The touchstone for the Council is how does it best serve the children for whom it is a corporate parent?
- 8.7 **Scrutiny members are asked to:**
Support the proposed changes to the fee structure, recommending any adjustments to cabinet that they consider appropriate.
- 8.8 A final proposal will be made to cabinet on 10th October 2018. Subject to the governance process and decision-making, the scheme will commence three months later and there will be a model evaluation and review after 12 months that will be reported back to the Children's Scrutiny Committee

Darryl Freeman

Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills: Councillor James McInnes

Chief Officer for Children's Services: Jo Olsson

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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SCRUTINY MEMBER BRIEFING – FOSTER CARER ALLOWANCES

Overarching concerns and queries:

Position of foster carers as tier three carers / The removal of the Family Care Worker Service.

The Family Care Worker Scheme ended two years ago, and carers were invited to become Tier 3 carers.

A lack of involvement and consultation about the possible changes.

In September 2017 a project group was set up to work with foster carers and staff to develop a new model of foster carers fees. We have worked with foster carers throughout the whole process with workshops. The working group on the project has included foster carer representatives

Consultation

The review of fostering payments is working to build a model of payments that are fair and equitable. A sample group of carers, known as the Working Party, drawn from across all three of the fostering tiers have been involved in the co-production of proposed payment models that reflect the costs of caring for a child, rewards personal and professional development, and acknowledges the challenges of meeting the needs of individual children.

The first finance modelling consultation with carers was held on 31st October 2017. The Working Party started their contribution at this point outlining the principles for the project and developing potential models. In addition, a carer with significant commercial experience has been an active member of the Officers group tasked with implementing the project.

An engagement meeting was held with ex-Family Care worker foster carers on 23rd January 2018 which followed a briefing of the Chair and Secretary of the Devon Foster Carers Association on the 12th January 2018.

A second workshop for carers was held on 29th January 2017 to share the development of the models and seek feedback and ideas from the group. Following further review, three of the original five models were discounted by the group as not workable.

Updates (6) have been given in foster carers newsletters throughout this initial co-production stage. In addition, it has been a standing item on the monthly Foster Carer Strategy meeting. The issue was discussed at Cabinet Scrutiny on 23rd January 2018 and two Tier 3 carers made representations.

Scrutiny members were given a masterclass on foster carers fees on 20th March. The Fostering Service has worked with foster carers throughout the process to date. It would not be possible to involve all of Devon's Foster Carers in this co-production stage however the representative group of carers have worked closely with other members of the Fostering Service. The Fostering Service has shared information and involved carers throughout the process. This sharing of information and involvement will continue.

Regarding the concern regarding clarity about decisions, no decision has yet been made regarding the Model/s to be put forward for consultation. However, once a decision has been made it will be shared, giving an appropriate notice period for the implementation of any change.

We very much want to work closely with our carers, in getting the model right to ensure our children are growing up in placements that are well supported and stable.

Currently we are working on the financial modelling and it is lengthy complex work designed to confirm the financial viability of any proposal. When the proposal is ready we will share with the wider foster carer community for further consultation and seek their views before presenting to scrutiny and cabinet.

An apparent requirement over carers giving up paid employment.

We understand that historically there was a fostering scheme titled the 'Family Care workers scheme'. Carers entered the scheme with the understanding that they would give up paid employment in order to be a part of this scheme. However, many carers in this scheme had other income streams as well as fostering, and this was accepted by the department. The family care workers scheme ended two years ago and carers were invited to become 'Tier 3 carers'.

Expectations of Foster Carers.

The current DCC Foster Carers Agreement makes no requirements on carers giving up paid employment.

We are aware that Foster carers who were part of a scheme known as the Family Care Workers Scheme, joined that with an understanding that they wouldn't take on any other paid employment to keep them available to care for particularly complex children. This scheme ended two years ago. The scheme created a strong identity amongst the group of carers who could offer each other significant support.

Foster carers are self-employed, and Devon foster carers informed us that they wanted to stay that way. As with all self-employed workers there is no guarantee of income.

We are aware that there are Tier 3 carers who have taken the opportunity to have other income streams in addition to fostering. For example, running a small business from home, or taking on other paid caring roles. Many foster carers in all tiers find that the income they receive from fostering means that they can manage their money differently and they don't feel the need to take on other forms of employment.

Terms and conditions of the original foster carers' agreements.

See document attached:



Agreement
Form.doc

Actual or implied "employment" status for foster carers – being tested in the High Court.

There was recent ruling where foster carers in Glasgow were found to be employees of Glasgow CC. however, the particular arrangement that Glasgow had with its foster carers differed to the one that DCC has with our carers.

Pay, terms and conditions being amended.

We pay an allowance for the child. Foster carers are not employees, they are self-employed so there are no 'terms and conditions' as such.

It's important to remember that fostered children are NOT placements. They are individual children with unique personalities and characters and many complex needs, who need support and help from all of us if they are to recover from their early traumatic childhoods.

Devon are working very hard to ensure that foster carers get the right support to enable them to care for our children well.

Responses to specific concerns and issues raised:

Loss of a dedicated cross county team of staff.

The fostering teams now have local management across four areas of Devon. The staff and manager in each team have a good understanding of the needs of each of the children in their area. They also have a good understanding of the support needs of any carers in their area.

Each foster carer continues to have their own supervising social worker and local support groups for all local carers which is inclusive of all carers in each area.

Loss of summer holiday group activities

The local teams and support groups have organised events and each area has an allocated budget to arrange activities. Christmas parties were held in each area over the Christmas season. Some events have been organised by carers, and carer's organisations, other events were organised by Staff many have been financially supported by the Fostering Service. All carers and their families were invited to a Christmas Panto that was well attended and A Big Day Out has been organised in partnership with the Exmoor National Park. Feedback from events so far has been excellent. Events and activities are planned for the summer holidays with other regular activity groups being planned.

Loss of Support Staff

All foster carers can request support from our in-house placement support team. The Placement Support Team offer support on planned referrals which are longer term on-going work, and they also offer crisis and unplanned work on a duty system. The team offer this crisis work on an out of hours basis for Special Guardians and adopters as well.

The work of the team has shifted from largely offering practical support, such as child minding, to offering more therapeutic support. Prior to coming into care, many of our children have had multiple carers, and this can have a significant impact on their ability to develop attachments. We need to minimise the number of people coming in and out of our children's lives. The team's brief is to support attachments between the child and the carer, through guidance in therapeutic interventions. The Placement Support Team has had a significant impact on improving placement stability.

Loss of guaranteed 14 days holiday a year, and loss of Respite

Respite care is recognised as an important facility and remains available to all carers. Respite arrangements have now become part of a child's care planning. This means that it is more individually focused around the particular support needs of that placement and promotes placement stability.

As carers are self-employed, they are free to take a break between placements that suits them and their families.

Loss of 28 days paid notice

Historically Tier 3 carers would be paid for 28 days after giving notice on a placement. If the child left after a week, the carer would still be paid for the 28 days. This came to an end, following full consultation with foster carers at strategy meeting in April 2017.

Loss of funding for Taxis and increased expectations on carers to support family contact

Many of our children have had multiple carers prior to coming into care. When we look after them we are keen to do what we can to promote the building of attachments. Part of this can mean reducing the number of people a child comes into contact with. We want children to be taken to and from school by their main carer whenever practically possible. At times this can conflict with other demands and in these cases, we would seek an alternative.

Withdrawal of reimbursement for mileage used

There are no plans to withdraw reimbursement of mileage for foster carers.

Internet grant

Historically, all carers had received £15.00 a month to cover broadband costs. This payment had been set up several years ago, however over time broadband has become part of normal household expenses and it was agreed, through foster carer strategy groups, to stop this payment in April last year. In order to protect children's confidentiality, carers should only be printing information on children in only a very few circumstances.

Kath Drescher

09/07/2018