

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**  
**Wednesday 10 October 2018**

**1. QUESTION FROM LEIGH STRANGE**  
**Re: Future Service Users**

Has any consideration been given to those children who might need to use the Service in future if many of Devon's existing, loyal and experienced carers feel they are unable to work with a Fostering Service that reduces allowances aimed at supporting the very children they're required to protect?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

Very careful consideration has been given to the potential risk of some carers deciding that they no longer wish to foster for Devon County Council.

This would be a matter of great regret, as we value all of our carers.

We have mitigated risk in three ways

1. By ensuring our offer is competitive and that we are attractive to new carers as well as to existing carers
2. By ensuring our support to carers is of the highest possible standard, so that we retain the very high calibre carers we have
3. By putting in place protection that ameliorates the loss of income for affected carers, giving them time to make plans for the future.

**2. QUESTION FROM DAVID LEYLAND**  
**Re: Proposed New Working Party**

As carers, en masse, were not involved in the consultation, would DCC consider using the learnings since 25 July to allow carers to be part of a new Working Party that produces a model that is acceptable to more carers?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

I am satisfied that, over the last 12 months, all carers have had ample opportunity to help shape the model. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee that has examined the issues in great detail, has endorsed the model proposed by the Council.

The council has committed to an Overview and Scrutiny review in 12 months.

**3. QUESTION FROM PATRICIA BAGSHAW**  
**Re: Carers Views and Consultations**

As the proposal seems to have remained unchanged from the start of the wider consultation period in July to when it was presented at scrutiny Committee in September, how have carers views been incorporated in it making the consultation period meaningful?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

Many carers report that they have been very fully engaged in developing the model and feel confident that they will continue to be fully involved in its implementation. Consultation feedback has led for example to the following changes:

1. Carers asked that the payment for birthdays, holidays and festivals is not spread but is paid at the time of the event. This has been agreed
2. Carers made suggestions about issues that should be included in the framework for decision making about standard/enhanced/enhance plus. These have been agreed.
3. Carers expressed concern that children's behaviours should not shape the criteria for the framework for decision-making, thus avoiding any risk of labelling. This has been agreed

**4. QUESTION FROM PETER LYNN  
Re: Formulation of Model**

What official body of work or Government flagship authority example did the Council use to formulate this model? I.e. was it just an idea or was there strategic thinking involved

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

The most recent government position is set out in the Narey Review of Fostering, published this year. The council's model fully reflects the recommendations of the Narey Review.

The Fostering Network recommended consideration of the Mockingbird model which is in place in some Local Authorities. The LA intends to consider this further in the development of its emerging edge of care and crisis response services, currently at a very early stage of development.

The Council is fully engaged, through the Association of Directors of Children's Services network with best practice in all other Local Authorities. The fostering service including its senior managers have, between them, thousands of years of experience in lots of different Local Authorities. There isn't a single model that is better for children than any other model and all good fostering services constantly evolve.

**5. QUESTION FROM KERRY LITTLE (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)  
Re: Cuts to Service**

107 Carers (40%) are facing cuts of up to 35%, so in the spirit of being 'fair and equitable' are 40% of all DCC staff (obviously including senior management and those with many years experience and a huge skill base) also being forced to accept a huge cut in order that the remaining 60% of the workforce can have an increase and attract new staff?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

You will be aware that over the last ten years, Local Government has endured very substantial cuts, of about 50%. The Council has worked tirelessly to try to ensure Children's Services are protected from these cuts, as far as it is humanly possible. The proposals here will see increased investment in fostering in an extremely difficult context.

The Council has undertaken numerous restructurings and redesign programmes that have involved job losses, as well as changes to terms and conditions, for staff at all levels of the organisation. In order to protect frontline services to the community, all staff and managers in Devon County Council have been required to do more with less.

**6. QUESTION FROM P J MANN-TRUDGETT (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)  
Re: Fostering Service and the Matching of Needs**

While I welcome a meaningful assessment of need for each Child in Care, ensuring they can more easily access support services outside of the home environment – how are the Fostering Service going to match the needs of the Child or Young Person to Devon's Foster Carers without a formal acknowledgement of our skills & experiences?

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR**

Supervising social workers have full and detailed knowledge of carers' skills and experiences. They will apply this knowledge when considering any matches. This is not different to what happens now.

### **7. QUESTION FROM LORRAINE TAYLOR Re: Workload of Foster Carers**

How can members of this Cabinet or the Fostering Service expect foster carers to accept lower allowances, with higher expectations and no reduction to our workload? Would it be acceptable to ask the same of social workers or managers?

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

My response to question five is part of my response to this question. At the moment, we are paying carers different rates to do exactly the same job. That isn't right. I believe the needs of the child have to be at the heart of resource allocation decisions.

### **8. QUESTION FROM TERESA WEST Re: Foster Carer Consultation**

Are members of this Cabinet content that much of its' foster care workforce believes this 'consultation' was merely a tick box exercise?

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

I am aware that some carers think that, I don't agree.

### **9. QUESTION FROM PATRICK BLOSSE Re: Proposed Model**

As a member of the Working Group that helped to develop the ground rules on which this model was meant to be based, I am very disappointed that the proposed new system does not meet the objectives of equity, placement stability, reward for carers' skills and experience and simplicity that we set out to achieve. Furthermore, my fear that consultation was being poorly managed was well founded. Throughout the development process, Working Party members were instructed not to talk to their fellow carers, open sessions have been held at the most inconvenient times, key information about how parts of the system would work have been withheld, and hardly any of the consultation feedback has trickled through to the report in front of you. The Fostering Services Manager assured the Working Group that, if the model proved to be 'unacceptable' it could be scrapped, and we could start again. This model is unacceptable to the majority of foster carers and it is the children in care who will suffer as a result. Are the members of the Cabinet willing to admit that the model is 'unacceptable' and ask the officers to start again?

## **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation for your involvement in the working group.

I have to acknowledge that the model is unacceptable to some carers. It is not unacceptable to the majority. Applying this model will see 50% of carers receiving increased financial recognition of the very valuable work they do. Many of them have been in touch to thank the Council for tackling this extremely sensitive and very difficult issue.

I do not intend to ask the officers to start again though I have asked that we review in 12 months.

### **10. QUESTION FROM ANDREW RANDALL Re: Measures and Reliance on IFA's**

Following this review will Devon County Council finally take measures to avoid over reliance on IFA's, which drain almost HALF OF THE ENTIRE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE BUDGET, in future? It appears to many of us that THIS is the root cause of many of Devon's children being 'funnelled' into the independent sector, which costs significantly more to Devon's Fostering Service.

#### **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

First let me reassure you that IFAs do not drain almost half of the entire children's social care budget. The actual percentage is less than 10%

The gap between our spend on IFAs and our spend on in-house foster care is not wide when you factor in the costs of the staff we employ to support in-house fostering.

Our preferred placement for every child in care is an in-house fostering placement. To ensure as many children as possible have access to this we need to significantly increase our pool of in-house foster carers. The review is designed to achieve this.

#### **11. QUESTION FROM STEPHANIE RANDALL**

##### **Re: Assessment Criteria**

The Assessment criteria and process for grading the children was only recently revealed at the Scrutiny Committee as a "Work in Progress". How can the Cabinet vote on this aspect when they do not know how this is actually going to work and what confidence can foster carers have in a process that has not been formalised and consulted on?"

#### **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

The assessment framework has been proposed and consulted upon. Some changes have been suggested through the consultation process and accepted. The detail will be finalised after the cabinet decision today. Council members are not qualified to have a view on the detail of the assessment framework, that is for professional staff to determine, taking into account the views of carers.

Taking a co-production approach means that carers, who want to work with us, can continue to influence and help to shape the 12-month review.

#### **12. QUESTION FROM SARAH BRADLEY (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)**

##### **Re: Finalisation of Proposals**

How can the Cabinet approve proposals which are not fully thought out, we do not have answers to many issues, such as if we only manage to attend 5 out of 6 required training courses, do we forego the whole amount, or would we be paid 5/6 of the £116 per week?, if we attend 6 support groups would the support element be paid in full, if the training element is not? what is the final arrangement with birthday and Christmas allowances.

I realise this sounds like more than one question so my final question would be,

Are Cabinet willing to approve something that is not finalised, how can they know what they are agreeing to if the final details are a "work in progress", how do they do not know what they are approving, and are they happy approving something on this basis?

#### **REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

My reply to the previous question, hopefully addresses the broad question you have asked. A three-month period from decision to implementation is planned for officers to hammer out the final details.

**13. QUESTION FROM LINDA CROWDEN  
Re: Creation of the Model**

Are members of this Cabinet aware that only a handful of foster carers took part in the creation of this model and, since they were disallowed from speaking to other carers about it, could only consider their own personal situation and experiences? This was not 'consultation'.

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

Yes, a small group, representative of all the different foster carers in Devon, joined the officers in the fostering service to form the working group, to co-produce the design principals and the model which was then widely consulted upon.

The approach taken is entirely consistent with co-production principles.

**14. QUESTION FROM ANNE PURDY  
Re: New Pay Structure**

As a carer currently offering 3 placements to Devon's Fostering Service - two of which are teenagers, and another youngster who will soon become one - how will they convince me that we should stay with Devon Fostering under this new pay structure, which is unfair and penalises many of us? '

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

I very much appreciate the contribution that you and other carers make in looking after children in care and I don't under-estimate the difficult choices some carers are facing. I think your first step is a candid conversation with your supervising social worker about your options, to help you weigh up the pros and cons of leaving and staying. The planned protection arrangements mean that you should have time to reflect in a calm and measured way and come to the decision that is right for you and your family.

**15. QUESTION FROM DEBORAH SIMPSON  
Re: Impact of Cuts**

Children's Services is a department which is set up solely for looking after abused and vulnerable children. Why are the children and their carers looking at a fees/allowance cut? If DCC need to raise funds to look after the children in its care (and attract more foster carers) it should be looking at the amount paid to IFA's and to the salaried staff. Surely cuts should be made to staffing before children, particularly senior management, not the very children it is there to serve.

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

Children's Services has a much wider set of functions and responsibilities than you think, for example all the early years and school support functions ranging from school admissions to Special Educational Needs.

The proposals being considered by cabinet today are an investment not a cut. Resources are being realigned to make the system more fair and equitable, they are being increased not cut.

My answer to earlier questions picks up the very significant cuts that have been endured by the Council that have impacted all grades of staff.

**16. QUESTION FROM MANDY HEGGADON  
Re: Allowances and Attendance at Training.**

I would like to ask how the standard allowances of £116 that are only payable for attending the 6 training and 6 support groups will be implemented and monitored. For example what constitutes 1 training event when courses can be anything from 18 days to just 2 hours.

If carers do not meet this requirement will this allowance not be paid?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

This is a question for a professional rather than a Member.

I have asked that someone from the Fostering Service contact you to discuss this with you.

As I said in answer to an earlier question there are some detailed implementation issues to be hammered out in the three-month period between our decision and go-live.

**17. QUESTION FROM M COLGAN**

**Re: Labelling of Children**

Why is it acceptable that this model wishes to label children as good, bad, unmanageable etc and scale them on this 'difficulty'. In the modern era we are moving away from labels, you aren't allowed to discriminate by age or colour, etc, so these children should not have a label either, furthermore those giving said labels are not child psychologists, behaviour therapists or trained at all to allow them to accurately grade a child with anything more than guesswork and opinion, often based on limited contact with the child. How is this in any way acceptable?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

I am very troubled by this question. There are a number of questions today where the level of misinformation is truly disturbing. There is nothing in the model that labels children good, bad or unmanageable. The framework focuses on children's circumstances and experiences. It is a framework that is used successfully in other Local Authorities, for example in Plymouth

**18. QUESTION FROM PETER PURDY**

**Re: Consultation and Proposed Model**

There appears to have been no change to the proposed model from the way it was drafted before the consultations to the way it was presented to Scrutiny Committee and this Cabinet AFTER the consultations. Why did the 'consultations' not heed any of the concerns voiced by those foster carers and are members of this Cabinet willing to endorse a model that is not yet finalised and could radically change the landscape further for Devon's foster carers? "

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

My response to questions three and eleven cover this question

**19. QUESTION FROM ANN LYNN**

**Re: Loss of Foster Carers**

If DCC lose £1 million pounds worth of foster carers as a result of this review to the independent sector, (given that they asked for this in the budget) will the resulting loss of supervising social workers help balance the books or will it make a different budget look improved?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

There are no plans to reduce the number of supervising social workers. Our strategy is to grow in-house fostering capacity. If we do lose carers as a consequence of the review,

something I would very much regret, we will double our efforts to recruit more carers as we are completely committed to a thriving and effective in-house fostering service.

**20. QUESTION FROM MAGGIE PETERS**  
**Re: Use of IFA's**

It is clear to us that too much money is being spent on the use of IFAs in Devon (almost HALF of the entire children's social care budget) and Devon's children are being disadvantaged because of the reliance on them. (it is well understood that children fare better in their own communities than being sent out of county).

Why are more questions not being asked about the use of IFAs?

**REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES**

We spend less than 10% of the children's social care budget on IFAs, 9.6% in fact. Devon's children are not disadvantaged by us using IFA carers, sometimes an IFA placement is the very best option for a child. Nevertheless, as I have said already, our strategy is to increase our in-house capacity to create a service that is thriving and completely focused on serving the interests of children in our care