

Devon County Council Foster Carer's Fees Uplift

Report of the Deputy Chief Officer Head of Children's Health and Wellbeing

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation: that the Cabinet agree the proposed uplift to the fees paid to Devon County Council's foster carers.

Cabinet is asked to agree an initial investment of £136,000 in 2022/23 from reserves and consider a base budget increase of £281,000 as part of the 2023/24 budget setting process

1. Summary

Devon County Council is responsible, as a corporate parent, for children who become cared for by the local authority, either because a court has made an order about the child's care or under a voluntary arrangement with the child's parents. In Devon, as nationally, there is a shortage of suitable foster carers for children who need to live in a foster home. The County Council has a duty to provide a sufficient number and range of foster carers to meet our children's needs and recruiting more foster carers is a high priority in our improvement plan.

DCC foster carers are paid an allowance to meet the needs of the child or children they care for, an additional amount that is assessed in relation to children's assessed needs, and also a weekly payment in relation to attendance at training and support groups. This structure was introduced in January 2019 and the allowances paid have not been revised or raised since then.

2. Introduction

Foster carers are required to be approved with either a local authority or independent fostering agency (IFA) in order to have children placed in their care. Devon, like other local authorities, relies on foster carers employed directly by the county council, and those employed by a number of independent fostering agencies that operate in the region. Both offer children care that is regulated and inspected by Ofsted and has to meet quality standards set for foster care agencies. IFAs provide valuable flexibility by offering care to children when there may not be a suitable available in-house carer available to meet a child, or sibling groups, needs. However, while IFAs offer a valuable service Devon County Council is committed to increasing the number of in-house carers ensuring there is a wider choice and range of carers who can look after our children in Devon.

Foster carers can choose whether they apply to foster for a local authority, or an independent fostering agency, and their decision will be affected by a number of things including terms and conditions and the financial allowances paid.

Many IFAs are part of the ‘Southwest Peninsula’ multi- provider contract approach. Currently, the average weekly cost to the county council of a fostering placement with these providers is £971. These costs reflect the full commercial business cost for the organisation, an element of which will be allowances for foster carers. Two local IFAs, advertise on their websites, standard allowances for their carers of £400 and £435 per week respectively. Additional enhanced payments can increase weekly allowances to approximately £600.

Currently, Devon County Council’s foster carers are paid a standard weekly allowance of £329.10, which includes an element for attending training and support groups. An additional of £90, or £160, may be paid if the child has additional needs that meet the criteria for a further allowance.

Supporting the recruitment of foster carers locally in Devon, is important to Devon County Council meeting its statutory sufficiency duties and to achieving priorities identified within [Devon’s Sufficiency Strategy](#). It is important that Devon County Council is able to offer competitive fees to foster carers to support recruitment and retention as part of this strategy but also as a means of creating more Devon homes or Devon children.

3. Proposal

That Devon County Council agrees an uplift of 1.75% for foster carers and SGO carers, in line with the public sector uplift for 2021/22, commencing 1st October 2022. The proposal was discussed by the Senior Leadership Team on the 13th of June 2022 who recommended the proposal to increase DCC allowances by 1.75% for 22/23 and to review the uplift and consider any further uplift within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 23/24.

It is proposed to action the uplift from the 1st of October 2022. The financial impact for 22/23 is £136,000, and if the rates were to stay the same in 23/24 the financial impact would be £281,000.

	22/23 1st Oct 2022		23/24 Full Year Effect
Fostering	82,000		172,000
SGO	43,000		89,000
Adoption	8000		15,000
Child Arrangement Order	3000		5,000
Total	136,000		281,000

4. Options

- Maintain the level of the current allowance. This does not recognise that carers have not received and uplift in allowances since 2019, or that becoming an IFA carer is financially more attractive and could affect DCC’s ability to retain and attract in-house carers.
- Amend the proposal to revise the amount of the proposed increase to fees.
- Agree the proposed uplift to support in-house DCC foster carers and special guardians.

5. Consultations

No formal consultation has been completed but carers have been raising this matter for some time with officers in the foster carer strategy group.

6. Strategic Plan

This proposal supports the County Council's strategic aim to transform, develop and improve our children's services.

7. Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations.

8. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

Adopting this policy would be environmentally neutral.

9. Equality Considerations

If adopted, the policy promotes the rights of foster carers and special guardian with caring responsibilities for vulnerable children in local authority care.

10. Risk Management Considerations

No risks have been identified.

11. Public Health Impact

Supporting foster carers to provide children with high quality care, close to their communities, improves children's experiences and outcomes including in relation to their physical and mental health and well-being.

12. Conclusions

Endorsing and adopting this proposal will support the Council's statutory obligation to provide children in care with homes in Devon, close to their families, friends, and communities. It will also support the children's services improvement priority to increase the number of in-house foster carers, which if successful will also reduce our reliance on IFAs and consequently reduce costs.

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[Electoral Divisions: All]

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Futures: Councillor Andrew Leadbetter

Chief Officer Melissa Caslake

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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