

Summary Sheet

Report Title

Revised Foster Carer Fees and Allowances

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Jon Stonehouse

Report Author(s)

Catherine Boaler (Service Manager- Fostering & Adoption)

Ward(s) Affected

All

Summary

- 1.1 Rotherham Council, as a 'Child Centred Borough', which is reflected in the intention of the Children and Young People's Services Directorate to be rated 'outstanding' has in pursuit of this ambition produced a revised 'offer' for Foster Carers in regards to the fees and allowances that they receive.
- 1.2 This report seeks to improve the care experience for children in Rotherham by ensuring that wherever possible they are looked after in Rotherham in a foster family environment.
- 1.3 Rotherham has a shortage of all foster care placements, but particularly foster care placements for adolescents and larger sibling groups. The Council places too many young people in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and residential care.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Director Leadership Team approves the implementation and changes to Foster Carer Fees and allowances as follows:

- An additional skill level fee to paid to the carer when caring for more than one child

- The weekly allowance, to cover the expense involved in caring for a child to remain the same (Slightly above national minimum average recommended)
- Changes to payments to Foster Carers for Birthdays, Christmas/ Cultural Celebrations and Holiday Pay for the child in placement.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1- In House Fostering Rates- Benchmarking Exercise

Background Papers

Revised Recruitment & Sufficiency Strategy

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Director Leadership Team approves the implementation and changes to Foster Carer Fees and allowances as follows:

- An additional skill level fee to paid to the carer when caring for more than one child
- The weekly allowance, to cover the expense involved in caring for a child to remain the same (Slightly above national minimum average recommended)
- Changes to payments to Foster Carers for Birthdays, Christmas/ Cultural Celebrations and Holiday Pay for the child in placement.

2. Background

2.1 This report seeks to improve the care experience for children and young people in Rotherham by ensuring that wherever possible they are looked after in Rotherham in a foster family environment. This is in accordance with the authority's ambition to become an outstanding children's services authority.

2.2 It is well understood that the needs of children and young people can only be met effectively if they live in an environment that provides a high quality of care and support. In general this is located within a family home setting, which additionally is also the most cost effective placement. It also follows that, wherever possible, children and young people should be placed within their own community which enables them to continue to have contact with the people and community of the most importance to them, thus promoting a strong sense of self, fundamental to resilience in later life.

2.3 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council currently has 642 children in care. Around 170 are placed with Rotherham Borough Foster Carers. Rotherham has a shortage of all foster placements but particularly of placements for

adolescents and for larger siblings groups. There are too many children and young people placed out of borough because there are not enough local placements.

- 2.4 The lack of sufficient foster placements means that Rotherham relies on the use of independent fostering agencies or residential provision, all of which are more costly. This has led to a position where there is significant pressure on the external placement budget. In house placements are also more likely to maintain placement stability because the SW support is more readily at hand and the placements are likely to be more local thus maintaining links for the child with family and community which assists to provide placement stability.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 In response to the current sufficiency position this proposal forms part of the work to transform the local authority's in-house fostering agency 'offer'. This includes a review of Rotherham's fostering provision, including a review of the payments to Foster Carers. It is anticipated that some existing Rotherham foster households may be able to increase the number of children they care for and provide an opportunity to increase placements.
- 3.2 However, the Council will not meet its sufficiency of placement provision for 'Looked after Children' without attracting additional carers to foster for Rotherham and ensuring existing Foster Carers are retained and developed.
- 3.3 The consultation with Foster Carers (At the Foster Carer Forum) considered the elements of the current fees and allowances as follows:
- An additional skill level fee to be paid to the carer when caring for more than one child
 - The weekly allowance, to cover the expense involved in caring for a child to remain the same (Above National minimum average recommended)
 - Changes to payments to Foster Carers for Birthdays, Christmas/ Cultural Celebrations and Holiday Pay for the child in placement.
- 3.4 Whilst financial incentives are a consideration, Foster Carers have said that they regard the level of support received from their fostering social worker as being critical to their fostering experience. This was also true when managing complex placements. They identified the wrap around support provided in such circumstances makes the difference to their commitment to foster for Rotherham.
- 3.5 In reviewing the fee rate and developing the 'offer' it is essential to ensure the fostering service remains financially competitive, whilst supporting the recruitment and retention of more locally based Foster Carers.
- 3.6 The outcome of the consultation and review is that the proposed 'offer' incorporates financial incentive and ongoing good quality support, training and development for Rotherham's Foster Carers.

- 5.3 Foster carers were very clear that their motivation to foster was not solely based on finance. However, they felt that the skills payment for additional placements felt 'fair' and may provide more of an incentive to take additional placements where possible and to attract new foster carers to Rotherham.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 6.1 Subject to DLT approval, the revised payment structure will be introduced from April 2019.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 7.1 The cost of implementing the proposed fostering allowances based on the current number of children with existing in-house foster carers would be an additional £321k per year. Based on the proposed allowance scheme the average cost of an in-house placement would be £18k, an increase of £2k per annum, per child compared to the current scheme.
- 7.2 The current average cost of an IFA placement is £44k, meaning there would be a cost reduction of £26k should a child be placed in an in-house placement at the proposed scheme rates rather than an IFA.
- 7.3 To breakeven with this proposal an additional 12.3 children will be required to transfer from IFA to in-house foster carers, and therefore increasing the net increase of in-house placements from 23 (15 + 8 carer adaptations) to 36 in the 2019/20 financial year.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 The current proposals demonstrate that Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has implemented a fair approach in that it has considered amounts paid by neighbouring local authorities; whilst also taking into account the recommended national minimum payments for allowances to devise proposals which will assist it in improving services and carrying out its statutory duties towards its looked after children.

9. Human Resources Implications

- 9.1 None predicted.

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 10.1 The proposal seeks to attract additional Foster Carers and placements such that wherever possible, children and young people can be placed within their own community. This will enable them to continue to have contact with the people and community of the most importance to them, promoting a strong sense of self, fundamental to resilience in later life.

11 Equalities and Human Rights Implications

11.1 The proposed changes to fees and allowances have been developed following consultation with foster carers (at the Foster Carer Forum). The overall assessed impact is concluded to be a positive one in terms of enhanced skill level fees (for additional placements) along with good support, and training. Foster carers felt that the changes were positive in terms of future recruitment and retention of foster carers.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

12.1 None noted.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 There is a risk that Foster Carers may receive an increase in payments for additional placements without increasing the number of children being cared for although this is felt to be very unlikely. If the planned number of Foster Carers does not increase then this could have a negative impact on the Councils budget. This is mitigated by the change in approach and the recruitment resource identified in this proposal, which will include the revised marketing/ Recruitment strategy to specifically attract Foster Carers with the capacity to care for adolescents and children with more complex needs.

13.2 The revised changes will offer an inducement to potential Foster Carers to offer their services to Rotherham Council and it is hoped will lead to current carers considering additional placements/ placements of sibling groups.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Approvals Obtained from:-

	Named Officer	Date
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services	Neil Hardwick	26.03.19
Assistant Director of Legal Services	Rebecca Pyle	26.03.19
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Amy Leech	26.03.19

Report Author: Catherine Boaler (Service Manager -Fostering & Adoption)

