

Public Document Pack

Executive Member Decisions

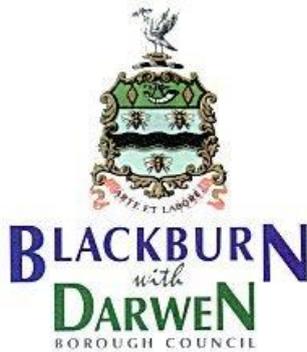
Friday, 20th November, 2020

AGENDA

1. **Foster Carer and Special Guardian Payments Proposal
2020/21**
EMD - Foster Carer payment **2 - 8**
Appendix1 - Foster Carer Payments 2020-2021
EIA Checklist - Foster Carer Payment

Date Published: 20th November 2020
Denise Park, Chief Executive

EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION



REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children's Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Children's Services and Education (Please Select)
DATE:	09/11/20

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children's Young People and Education
WARD/S AFFECTED:	All

SUBJECT: Foster Carer and Special Guardian Payments Proposal 2020/21

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A payment review has considered Local Authority challenges in terms of the recruitment and retention of foster carers. This also takes into account our competitors in neighbouring Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies, in terms of rates of pay. In order to recruit and retain foster carers, the payment rates awarded need to be competitive and well promoted in the Borough and beyond.

An attractive pay allowance, alongside a strong support package offer, is paramount in order to increase new fostering enquiries and also to retain our existing cohort of carers and prevent the rate of transfer to Independent Fostering Agencies.

It is necessary to present an annual payments paper for Executive Member decision making, this year 2020-21, financial support is more important than ever in the current climate. Any Foster Carer payment proposal must include the same percentage for Special Guardianship Carers following legal advice and guidance.

Appendix 1 outlines the rationale for requesting a 2% annual percentage increase in line with inflation and this has already been factored into the budget for 2020-2021. This percentage mirrors the increase awarded last financial year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Member considers the report alongside Appendix 1, which makes a recommendation to award all Foster Carers and Special Guardianship Carers, a 2% annual pay increase for 2020-2021. This is in line with inflation for the year.

3. BACKGROUND

It is increasingly challenging for the Local Authority to attract potential Foster Carers, significantly more so in the current climate. Neighbouring Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) are also reviewing and increasing their allowances to remain competitive in the market.

Blackburn with Darwen's proposal is to enhance the Foster Carer financial and support offer to attract new applicants, and boost our recruitment figures. A review of the Fostering 'front door' is also underway to ensure an efficient and robust response to recruitment, enquires and assessments.

- This paper has been revised and amended to reflect a 2% percentage increase for all foster carers and SGO carers in line with inflation and this has already been reflected in this year's budget allocation. An 'invest to save' approach has been overridden by a 2% increase for the year overall.

- Should this percentage be agreed, this will be communicated to exiting foster carers but will also be beneficial in promoting Blackburn with Darwen's Fostering pay and support offer alongside our recruitment campaigns.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

- An annual pay increase has been awarded for the past 5 years at 1%, and last year offering a 2% pay increase to assist with the retention and recruitment of Foster Carers.

- There is a widespread challenge nationally with the recruitment of Foster Carers, and the market is increasingly competitive. As a small Local Authority, the aim is to remain attractive to potential Foster Carers above our major competitors. The more appealing our pay and recruitment drive, the more placements we can achieve in-house, therefore making a longer term saving on commissioned agency placements.

- Placement sufficiency is a key issue for the service and the primary focus is to promote an annual pay increase for foster carers alongside recruitment campaigns and initiatives. Attracting more foster carers will protect and reduce our commissioning budget, however as a service we can only do this with an attractive support offer and allowances for our in-house carers. Placement sufficiency and stability remains a key priority for 2020-2021.

-The proposal is to match the Foster Carer pay increase for Special Guardianship (SGO) Carers, as legal advice and SGO guidance promotes the same offer for those carers, with no financial detriment.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Foster Carer payments policy and guidance will be revised following decision making from this paper.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A 2% increase would be an additional £60,992 for fostering households, bands 1-3 from the fostering budget.

A 2% increase would be an additional £41,987 for Special Guardianship Carers from the SGO budget.

Total additional expenditure - £102,979 (based on expenditure in 2019/2020)

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legal advice has been sought and to pay Special Guardianship Order Carers a different rate, or to omit them from the pay award would be detrimental and risk possible Judicial Review.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional resource implications from this decision.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

None required

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded and published if applicable.

VERSION:	2
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Pamela Price, Service Lead, Placements
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DATE:	06/11/20
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	Please consider Appendix 1 alongside this paper.
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Foster Carer Payments 2020/21

For the past six years, the annual pay increase for foster carers and Special Guardianship Order carers has been a 1% increase. Last year, a review of the rates of pay and the impact upon the recruitment and retention of foster carers was undertaken, and a 2% annual increase awarded. This was viewed very favourably by foster carers, saying that they felt valued and appreciated by this increased annual percentage and it also took into account the cost of living in line with the Corporate pay increase.

It remains very clear that pay and benefits still need to be enhanced, to become more competitive and to enable BwD to compete with neighbouring Authorities and Independent Agencies (IFA's), certainly in the current climate with Covid-19 and the impact of this upon recruitment. The IFA's are responding with targeted tactics to encourage Local Authority foster carers to transfer, with the offer of a higher allowance therefore the retention of foster carers is an additional challenge.

It is unfortunate that since 1st April 2020, two fostering households transferred to Independent Fostering Agencies and likewise there have been a number of potential fostering applicants who have expressed an interest in BwD, but have since decided to progress with their assessment with an IFA. The financial package does play a part in these decisions.

Our BwD recruitment strategies are constantly under review to remain visible and competitive, but it would be hugely beneficial to have a financial and supportive package that is comparable with other North West Authorities. A bus stop campaign in January 2020 focused specifically upon emphasising our support package, which includes Revive therapeutic support, corporate rate gym membership and holiday and birthday allowances. There were numerous registrations of interest from this campaign and this has just been relaunched again in October alongside billboards in the Borough to maintain a blended approach to both community visibility and digital campaigns. Virtual recruitment events are scheduled and our Heart Radio advertising has been successful at bringing in enquiries and applications. The conversion rate from enquires to approval is consistently a challenge, and this is a similar story in other Local Authorities locally and nationally.

Objectives for the Service:

- to be competitive in the foster carer recruitment market
- to retain, develop and stretch the skills of our current carers
- To develop the offer of support which research cites as being of equal importance to prospective carers as the financial package
- to improve foster carer skills and resilience to ensure placement stability for all children and young people in foster care
- to ensure that as many children in our care are looked after in- house, close to home, and by well trained, skilled and supported foster carers
- to develop an annual plan for recruitment campaigns which are visible both in the community and on social media
- to recruit more emergency foster carers and short break carers to respond to demand

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly affected our recruitment of new fostering households, hence the proposal to strengthen and promote our existing offer for numerous reasons. To date there have been a comparable number of registrations of interest to last financial year, and given the state of play this is positive, suggesting that BwD is attractive to potential foster carers. It is however, a challenge when our geographical competition, Lancashire County Council, pays a higher rate than BwD and they are our direct competitors in terms of recruitment and retention. There is

no consistent pay offer across North West Authorities, or nationally, therefore establishing an attractive offer of both pay and support is paramount.

In November 2019, an Allocation and Tracking Panel was established to ensure tight timescales for the assessment of new applicants and robust oversight of new carers from the point of enquiry through to approval. This is to ensure that drift and delay does not lead to applicants transferring elsewhere.

In order to remain competitive in the recruitment market, and to support retention in the long term, a further percentage increase is requested for foster carers and SGO carers which mirrors last financial year with a 2% pay increase. It is necessary to point out that the offer to foster carers must be matched for SGO carers and they should not be at a financial detriment for applying for an SGO to achieve permanence. Both Legal and Government advice recommends and supports this view. This 2% increase has been factored into the 20/21 budget as an annual pay enhancement across all three fostering payments bands.

There will also be a separate paper submitted imminently which will outline a proposal to be considered for the 'Fostering Front Door' and our marketing objectives primarily around the fostering team staffing structure. This will look at addressing how BwD recruits fostering households and how family finding and matching is undertaken to utilise our own resources to the very best of our ability.

BwD Fostering have joined the DfE SEED funding consortium with Lancashire, Blackpool and Cumbria to bid for funding to research and develop our approach to commissioning and recruitment, and this also enables us to compare how our geographical neighbours are approaching fostering allowances and their recruitment campaigns.

Proposals to be considered for approval:

Award all foster carers and SGO carers an additional percentage increase of 2% for 20/21

Based on figures obtained from finance:

A 2% increase would be an additional £60,992 for fostering households, bands 1-3 from the fostering budget.

A 2% increase would be an additional £41,987 for Special Guardianship Carers from the SGO budget.

Total additional expenditure - £102,979 (based on expenditure in 2019/2020)

Rationale:

This paper has been amended to reflect a single option request of a 2% annual pay increase for all foster carers and Special Guardianship Carers for 2020-2021. As outlined, this percentage increase has been already factored into this year's budget and would replicate the pay increase for 2019-2020. Feedback from the Foster Carer Association has been that the 2% pay increase would be well received by our Foster Carers, and would generate a response of feeling valued and acknowledged for their hard work and commitment. This percentage option reflects an inflation increase request,

and would be promoted in terms of foster carer allowances as part of the overall recruitment drive. The Fostering Network promotes and campaigns for consistent, annual pay increases for foster carers to support recruitment, retention, and to support their standard of living, in order to best meet the needs of children and young people in our care.

Pamela Price
Service Lead – Placements

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

This checklist is to be used when you are uncertain if your activity requires an EIA or not.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a tool for identifying the potential impact of the organisation's policies, services and functions on its residents and staff. EIAs should be actively looking for negative or adverse impacts of policies, services and functions on any of the nine protected characteristics.

The checklist below contains a number of questions/prompts to assist officers and service managers to assess whether or not the activity proposed requires an EIA. Supporting literature and useful questions are supplied within the [EIA Guidance](#) to assist managers and team leaders to complete all EIAs.

Service area & dept.	Children's Services, Fostering	Date the activity will be implemented	19/10/2020
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Brief description of activity	Executive Decision requested for Fostering and Special Guardianship annual pay increase recommendations. Annual pay increase request.
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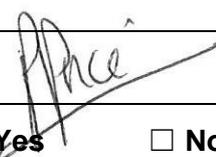
Answers favouring doing an EIA	Checklist question	Answers favouring not doing an EIA
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Does this activity involve any of the following: - Commissioning / decommissioning a service - Change to existing Council policy/strategy - Budget changes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Does the activity impact negatively on any of the protected characteristics as stated within the Equality Act (2010)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	Is there a sufficient information / intelligence with regards to service uptake and customer profiles to understand the activity's implications?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	Does this activity: Contribute towards unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act <i>(i.e. the activity creates or increases disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristic)</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	Reduce equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not <i>(i.e. the activity fail to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people)</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	Foster poor relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not <i>(i.e. the function prevents people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low)</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
FOR =	TOTAL	AGAINST =6

Will you now be completing an EIA?

Yes

No

The EIA toolkit can be found [here](#)

Assessment Lead Signature	
Checked by departmental E&D Lead	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Date	19/10/2020