



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
DATE:	10 th August 2023

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children, Young People and Education
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: EB Foster Carer Allowances uplift including short breaks 2023/24.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A payment review has considered the Local Authority challenges in terms of the recruitment and retention of foster carers. It has also taken into account competitors in neighbouring Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies in terms of rates of pay. It has also reflected the new national minimum amounts the Government set out in February 2023.

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 the existing cohort of carers and prevent the rate of transfer to Independent Fostering Agencies. In order to achieve this, the Council's medium term financial plan has allocated an additional £500,000 to the foster care payments budget in 2023/2024.

It is necessary to present an annual payments paper for Executive Board decision making this year 2023-24, as financial support is more important than ever in the current climate around the cost of living. Any Foster Carer payment proposal has also taken into account Special Guardianship Carers and short break carers.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board considers the report and agrees to uplift foster carer allowances that match the national minimum allowances. This would enable the local authority going forward to base the annual uplift on inflationary basis against the national minimum standards.

In addition, the Board considers and agrees the proposed uplift for 2023/24 of 20% for short break payments, which have not been reviewed for some time.

3. BACKGROUND

Over many years it has become increasingly challenging for the Local Authority to attract potential Foster Carers and short break 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. This places a small authority like BwD at risk of both recruiting new carers but also retaining current carers. As such, there is a greater need to remain competitive but also the support and training offer needs to be attractive.

Blackburn with Darwen's proposal is to enhance the Foster Carer financial, training and support offer to attract new applicants, and boost recruitment figures. The introduction of the Fostering 'front door' has ensured efficiency and a robust response to recruitment and enquiries. A Digital Transformation project is well under way to make this process seamless through the use of a digital platform for prospective applicants. To add to this, the team will be further strengthened within the assessment process by creating a dedicated assessment team, which aims to improve the timeliness from an initial visit to a full foster carer approval status.

The current offer to in-house foster carers, family and friend foster carers and special guardianship order (SGO) carers is set out in the table below. Both friends and family carers and SGO carers are paid at Band 1 with in-house foster carers paid at Bands 2 and 3 dependent on their experience and skills.

2022 - 2023			Additional fee per child			Supplementary allowances		
Carer level	Age band	Weekly rate	1 st	2 nd	3 rd +	Holiday	Birthday	Christmas/EID
Band 1	0 – 4	145.61				331.04	165.52	165.52
	5 – 10	165.52				331.04	165.52	165.52
	11 – 15	205.91				411.82	205.91	205.91
	16 +	250.28				500.55	250.28	250.28
Band 2	0 – 10	165.52	63.71	63.71	63.71	331.04	165.52	165.52
	11 – 15	205.91	63.71	63.71	63.71	411.82	205.91	205.91
	16 +	250.28	63.71	63.71	63.71	500.55	250.28	250.28
Band 3	0 – 10	165.52	177.48	120.59	63.71	331.04	165.52	165.52
	11 – 15	205.91	177.48	120.59	63.71	411.82	205.91	205.91
	16 +	250.28	177.48	120.59	63.71	500.55	250.28	250.28

Specialist & Discretionary Payments	0 – 10	Up to 520.20				331.04	165.52	165.52
	11 – 15	Up to 520.20				411.82	205.91	205.91
	16 +	Up to 520.20				500.55	250.28	250.28

The current offer to in house short break foster carers is set out in the table below.

Morning: Between 10am and 2pm for <i>up to</i> 4 hours	Afternoon: Between 2pm and 6pm for <i>up to</i> 4 hours	Day care should commence at 10am and end at 6pm. - Max hours per day	Overnight payment
Payment @ £8 per hour = £32 (<i>maximum</i>)	Payment @ £8 per hour = £32 (<i>maximum</i>)	Payment of £64 (<i>maximum</i>)	£50

Short break care is from a one 4 hour session, up to and no more than 7 days.

Foster Carers Payment Options

A number of options were considered as part of the review –

Option 1 – Following previous year's approaches by applying a percentage uplift to allowances. In 2022/2023 this was 2%. This option was ruled out due to not being a reasonable offer overall.

Option 2 – To align with the neighbouring authority. This was also ruled out as the additional costs would have been in excess of £1m and therefore out of budgetary scope.

Option 3 – To link the fee related to the costs of the child to the National Minimum allowances. This option is equitable and will ensure that subsequent year's uplifts will track the new National recommendations and uplift accordingly.

The proposal is to adopt Option 3 with the suggested new foster carer payment rates being outlined in the table below:

Proposed			Additional fee per child			Supplementary allowances		
Carer level	Age band	Weekly rate	1 st	2 nd	3 rd +	Holiday	Birthday	Christmas/EID
Band 1	0 – 2	154.00				308.00	154.00	154.00
	3 – 4	159.00				318.00	159.00	159.00

	5 – 10	175.00				350.00	175.00	175.00
	11 – 15	199.00				398.00	199.00	199.00
	16 +	233.00				466.00	233.00	233.00

Band 2	0 – 2	154.00	85.00	85.00	85.00	308.00	154.00	154.00
	3 – 4	159.00	85.00	85.00	85.00	318.00	159.00	159.00
	5 – 10	175.00	85.00	85.00	85.00	350.00	175.00	175.00
	11 – 15	199.00	85.00	85.00	85.00	398.00	199.00	199.00
	16 +	233.00	85.00	85.00	85.00	466.00	233.00	233.00

Band 3	0 – 2	154.00	195.00	195.00	195.00	308.00	154.00	154.00
	3 – 4	159.00	195.00	195.00	195.00	318.00	159.00	159.00
	5 – 10	175.00	195.00	195.00	195.00	350.00	175.00	175.00
	11 – 15	199.00	195.00	195.00	195.00	398.00	199.00	199.00
	16 +	233.00	195.00	195.00	195.00	466.00	233.00	233.00

Specialist & Discretionary Payments	0 – 2	Up to 520.20				308.00	154.00	154.00
	3 – 4	Up to 520.20				318.00	159.00	159.00
	5 – 10	Up to 520.20				350.00	175.00	175.00
	11 – 15	Up to 520.20				398.00	199.00	199.00
	16 +	Up to 520.20				466.00	233.00	233.00

The new national minimum allowances pay fairly to foster carers as governed nationally and increase the skills based payments for band 2 and 3 carers giving recognition for each additional child placed. Compared to the current child fee, some of the national allowances are slightly lower, however the skills fee for the additional child is higher and as such means that no one is to any detriment.

In addition, the new allowances for band 1 are slightly higher for children up to age 11 but slightly lower for children aged 11+. As such, the proposal is that current Band 1 carers will continue to be paid at their current levels so that they are not to any detriment until such time as the child reaches the next age bracket, at which point payment will align with the new structure. All new band 1 carers, will receive the new rates.

Short Breaks Payment Option

Short break payments have not received any uplift for many years and as such it is proposed to offer an above inflationary uplift of 20%.

Morning: Between 10am and 2pm for <i>up to</i> 4 hours	Afternoon: Between 2pm and 6pm for <i>up to</i> 4 hours	Day care should commence at 10am and end at 6pm. - Max hours per day	Overnight payment
Payment @ £9.60 per hour = £38.40 (<i>maximum</i>)	Payment @ £9.60 per hour = £38.40 (<i>maximum</i>)	Payment of £76.80 (maximum)	£60

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

An annual pay increase over the past number of years has been 1% rising to 2% in the latter years. The current proposal looks to offer a different model for foster care payments and for short breaks a significant percentage uplift due to the payments not having had a review for some time.

Whilst paying foster carers at the national minimum allowances creates equilibrium, the fee for skills can be raised which for most, offers remuneration. However, it is recognised that there is a slight reduction for band 1 aged 11 – 15 years and 16 plus. Although new band 1 foster carers who care for this age group will be paid at a slightly lower rate, current carers will have their current payment honoured.

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 the commissioning budget, however as a service it 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 2023-2024.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council's medium term financial plan allocated an additional £500,000 to the foster care payments budget in order to enhance the current offer and make it more attractive to potential new carers. The option recommended within this report would remain within the available budget if all current carers moved to the new payment structure. We would see expenditure increase by £5,000 per week for those children currently in foster care placements, whilst there would be an expected reduction of £600 per week against the special guardianship order budget. As we are proposing to protect payments to any carers who would see a reduction in income under the new structure, we can expect a budget pressure for a period of up to 5 years. In 23/24 this pressure would be up to a

maximum of £85,000 which would then reduce in future years as the children either leave care or transfer into the next age bracket. A budget increase for this additional pressure will be requested as part of the quarter 1 revenue monitoring report to Executive Board.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

"The proposed revised offer to foster carers is in line with the minimum rate of allowance for 2023/24 and ensures compliance with the Council's obligations under the Care Standards Act 2000 and the expectation that foster parents should not be financially disadvantaged because of their fostering role."

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

The Foster Carers Association has been made aware of the review and that options will be considered by the Executive Board

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 in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION: 1

CONTACT OFFICER:	Suzanne Kinder
DATE:	23 rd June 2023
BACKGROUND PAPER:	