



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
DATE:	Thursday, 7 March 2024

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

SUBJECT: Uplift of Foster Carer payments 24/25

Annual Foster Carer Allowance uplift. To include allowances relating to Special Guardianship Orders and placements for Parent and Child, Staying Put and Short Breaks.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An annual payment review has considered the ongoing Local Authority challenges in terms of the recruitment and retention of foster carers. It continues to consider allowances from competitors in neighbouring Authorities, moreover this year as a regional cluster is formed of a brand new, fostering recruitment and retention hub. The DfE has funded and awarded a twelve-month pilot for BwD (as lead), Lancashire County Council (LCC), Blackpool, West Morland and Furness and Cumberland Councils to come together and deliver a collaborative recruitment service. The hub aims to launch in May 2024 and is based on the premise that it regionally supports the increase from enquiry to approval of foster carers. To add to this, consideration has also been given to Independent Fostering Agencies in terms of rates of pay.

To support ongoing recruitment and retention, the payment rates awarded need to try to be competitive and well promoted to attract prospective foster carers whilst alongside this, the service equally provides a strong and supportive package offer. It is paramount that not only efforts are made to increase fostering enquiries, but retaining the existing cohort of foster carers remains a priority for the stability and permanence options for children who are in care.

To support this, the DfE have also awarded BwD the support of Fostering network to introduce the Mockingbird Model into the fostering service. The Mockingbird aims to deliver sustainable foster care through an evidence-based model that is structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people, and foster families, supporting them to build a resilient and caring community and it is due to launch in October 2024.

To achieve all of this, the Council's medium term financial plan has allocated an additional £300,000 to the various payment's budgets in 2024/2025.

It is necessary to present an annual payments paper to Executive Board decision making this year 2024 – 25, to offer financial support to foster carers, but also take into account Kinship Foster Carers, Special Guardianship Carers, Short Break Carers, Parent and Child Carers and foster carers who continue to care for young adults on a 'Staying Put' arrangement.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board agrees to uplift foster carer allowances so that they are in line with the new national minimum allowances for 2024/25.

Considers and agrees the proposed uplift for Parent and Child to a competitive one-off payment of £850 weekly plus additional child feed as outlined, as well as the Short Break carers uplift and the payment for 'Staying Put' which is proposed at 6.88% in line with national minimum allowances.

In 2023 – 2024, foster carer allowances aligned with the national minimum allowances so that foster carers were paid as governed nationally, this increased the child fee payments for band 2 and band 3 giving further recognition for each additional child placed. In addition, band 1 for Kinship Carers became slightly higher following the uplift and remained the same for older children so that no one was to detriment. Aligning in this way, enabled the Local Authority to match the annual % uplift given nationally which is in this proposal. To add to this, agreement was reached in 2023 – 2024 to significantly increase the payment by 20% to Short-Break Carers who had not had any uplift for many years. Despite these uplifts, there remains disparity between neighbouring Authorities as well as with Independent Fostering Providers and harmonisation of fees seems a long way off if ever possible.

It remains the case that it is increasingly challenging for Local Authorities nationally to attract potential foster carers, including short break and parent and child carers to the role, more so due to the current climate of the cost of living. Following the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care and recommendations taken forward by the government to boost foster care sufficiency, the DfE has pledged £27m to increase numbers of foster carers via a recruitment campaign and the developments of regional hubs. The development of the Fostering Recruitment Hub with BwD as lead, offers the Local Authority an opportunity to increase our pool of foster carers by taking a regional approach, providing local homes for local children. However, for a small Authority like BwD, there remains risk of both recruiting new foster carers but also retaining them, particularly if they live in BwD but bordering authorities who continue to pay higher. As such, there is a greater need to remain as competitive as possible within the authority’s financial plan.

Current 2023 – 2024 Foster Care Allowances

The current offer to in-house foster carers, kinship, and Special Guardians (SGO) carers is set out in the table below. Kinship carers remain band 1, with mainstream foster carers at band 2 or band 3 depending on the age of the child (child fee). Specialist and Discretionary Payments are also outlined and are awarded to foster carers who care for those children and young people who are assessed as requiring the highest level of care. These payments are only agreed through a Payment Panel process and are reviewed annually.

		Weekly rate	Additional fee per child			Supplementary Allowances		
			1st	2nd	3rd +	Holiday	Birthday	Christmas / Eid
Band 1	0-2	154				308	154	154
	3-4	159				318	159	159
	5-10	175				350	175	175
	11-15	199				398	199	199
	16+	250.28				500.56	250.28	250.28
Band 2	0-2	154	85	85	85	308	154	154
	3-4	159	85	85	85	318	159	159
	5-10	175	85	85	85	350	175	175
	11-15	199	85	85	85	398	199	199
	16+	250.28	85	85	85	500.56	250.28	250.28
Band 3	0-2	154	195	195	195	308	154	154
	3-4	159	195	195	195	318	159	159
	5-10	175	195	195	195	350	175	175
	11-15	199	195	195	195	398	199	199
	16+	250.28	195	195	195	500.56	250.28	250.28

Current 2023 – 2024 Short-Break Allowances

The current offer to Short-Break carers is outlined in the table below (please note a short-break payment does not supersede 7 days).

Morning: Between 10am and 2pm for up to 4 hours	Afternoon: Between 2pm and 6pm for up to 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 (maximum)	Payment @ £9.60 per hour = £38.40 (maximum)	Payment of £76.80 (maximum)	£60

Current Parent and Child Allowances

1 parent and 1 child - £850

1 parent and 2 children (as above but with an additional second payment based on the eldest child's age and in line with our current foster care payments). See below.

Age of Child	Weekly Payment
0-2	154
3-4	159
5-10	175
11-15	199
16+	250.28

2 parents and 1 child - £850 plus the 16+ payment of £250.28

2 parents and 2 children – as above plus the age-related child fee for the eldest child.

If the parent is also a Looked After Child, which means that the foster carer has additional responsibilities, the payments are as follows:

1 Parent and 1 child - £850 (already includes a 16 plus payment) plus a discretionary payment of the child's age as per the table above.

Current 2023 – 2024 Staying Put Allowances

In 2023 – 2024 the payment for foster carers to continue caring for a cared experienced young adult, named 'Staying Put' from the 2023 date ONLY, is:

Weekly Maintenance Allowance	Rent to FC by young adult	Young Adult Contribution - weekly	Total to FC - Weekly
£86.52	£64.25	£15.00	£165.77

The Proposed Allowances for 2024 - 2025

Foster Care 2024 – 2025 Allowances

The proposal for the foster carer allowances, aligned with the national minimum payment/rate (NMR), is to provide a 6.88% uplift to the child fee/weekly rate only and continue to pay the same fee for each additional child or young person. The below table outlines the new allowances. (To note: 16+ remains the same as it still exceeds NMR).

		Weekly rate	Additional fee per child			Supplementary Allowances		
			1st	2nd	3rd +	Holiday	Birthday	Christmas / Eid
Band 1	0-2	164.20				329.19	164.20	164.20
	3-4	169.94				339.88	169.94	169.94
	5-10	187.04				374.08	187.04	187.04
	11-15	212.69				425.38	212.69	212.69
	16+	250.28				500.56	250.28	250.28
Band 2	0-2	164.20	85	85	85	329.19	164.20	164.20
	3-4	169.94	85	85	85	339.88	169.94	169.94
	5-10	187.04	85	85	85	374.08	187.04	187.04
	11-15	212.69	85	85	85	425.38	212.69	212.69
	16+	250.28	85	85	85	500.56	250.28	250.28
Band 3	0-2	164.20	195	195	195	329.19	164.20	164.20
	3-4	169.94	195	195	195	339.88	169.94	169.94
	5-10	187.04	195	195	195	374.08	187.04	187.04
	11-15	212.69	195	195	195	425.38	212.69	212.69
	16+	250.28	195	195	195	500.56	250.28	250.28

Short-Break 2024 – 2025 Allowances

The same national 6.88% uplift is being proposed for short-break allowances as outlined below.

Morning: Between 10am and 2pm for up to 4 hours	Afternoon: Between 2pm and 6pm for up to 4 hours	Day care should commence at 10am and end at 6pm. - Max hours per day	Overnight payment
Payment @ £10.26 per hour = £41.04 (maximum)	Payment @ £10.26 per hour = £41.04 (maximum)	Payment of £82.08 (maximum)	£64.13

Parent and Child 2024 – 2025 Allowances

1 parent and 1 child - £850 – This remains unchanged as the 16+ rate has not increased.

1 parent and 2 children (as above but with an additional second payment based on the eldest child's age and in line with the uplifted foster care payments). See below.

Age of Child	Weekly Payment
0-2	164.60
3-4	169.94
5-10	187.04
11-15	212.69
16+	250.28

2 parents and 1 child - £850 plus the 16+ payment of £250.28

2 parents and 2 children – as above plus the age-related child fee for the eldest child.

If the parent is also a Looked After Child, which means that the foster carer has additional responsibilities, the proposal would be:

1 Parent and 1 child - £850 (already includes a 16 plus payment) plus a discretionary payment of the child's age as per the table above.

'Staying Put' 2024 – 2025 Allowance.

The same national 6.88% uplift is being proposed for the Staying Put allowance as outlined below.

Weekly Maintenance Allowance	Rent to FC by young adult	Young Adult Contribution - weekly	Total to FC - Weekly
£95.25	£67.08	£15.00	£177.33

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The proposal in this paper is to uplift our foster carer allowances, which are based on the national minimum allowances. Although this proposal supports a fair increase, there remains widespread challenge nationally with the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the current market remains increasingly competitive. As a small Local Authority, the aim is always to remain attractive to potential carers and the more appealing our pay and recruitment drive, with the additional package offer of support, the more foster carers will choose to do the role for BwD. This will not only provide better outcomes for our cared for children and young people, with local, loving homes for them, but will also enable a reduction in the budget for more expensive commissioned placements that are often not located locally.

Placement sufficiency is a key issue for the service, and it is envisaged that the launch of Fostering Recruitment Hub will strengthen our ambition to increase our in-house fostering provision.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Foster Carer Payment Policy and subsequent Guidance will be revised following decision making from this paper.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council's medium term financial plan allocated an additional £300,000 to the various placement budgets for 2024/25 to enhance the current offer and make it more attractive to potential new carers and retain those foster carers already executing their caring role.

As illustrated in the table below, the proposals in this report would remain within the available budget based on the current numbers of carers.

	Total cost 2024/25	Total cost 2024/25	Budget Pressure
	0% uplift	6.88% NFM	
SGOs	3,031,336.52	3,214,920.32	183,583.81
Approved Foster Carers	2,772,579.08	2,816,210.87	43,631.80
Friends and Family	607,101.05	634,929.88	27,828.82
Unapproved FC	95,054.70	100,446.55	5,391.85
Short Breaks	110,287.21	117,874.97	7,587.76
Staying Put	317,326.83	317,929.60	602.77
	6,933,685.39	7,202,312.19	260,436.28

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

'The proposed revised offer to foster carers is in line with the minimum rate of allowances for 2024 /25 and ensures compliance with the Council's obligations under the Care Standards Act 2000 and the expectation that foster carers should not be financially disadvantaged because of the fostering role'.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None arising other than those referred to elsewhere in this report.

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

Strategic Director of Childrens and Education.
Strategic Director of Finance and Resources

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:	Amy Brooks, Suzanne Kinder
-------------------------	-----------------------------------

DATE:	20 th February 2024
--------------	--------------------------------

BACKGROUND PAPER:	
------------------------------	--