

## **REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

### **REVISION OF THE ADAPTATIONS TO PROPERTY OR HOUSE MOVES POLICY FOR DISCRETIONARY FUNDING TO FOSTER CARERS, ADOPTIVE PARENTS OR SPECIAL GUARDIANS**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks Cabinet approval of a revised Adaptations to Property Policy, to be amended to the 'Adaptations to Property or House Moves Policy', attached as **Appendix 1**, for Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) foster carers, adoptive parents, and special guardians of NCC child/ren who may be considering an adaptation to their property, or a house move in connection with their role. The report also seeks approval for the policy to be reviewed following each four-yearly election cycle.
2. This is a Key Decision because it will have significant effects on two or more electoral divisions.

#### **Information**

3. Foster carers in Nottinghamshire play a hugely important role in enabling children and young people who are unable to stay with their birth families to live in a caring, family home. Part of the Council's commitment in Ambition 3 of The Nottinghamshire Plan is to keep children, vulnerable adults and communities' safe. This policy supports the Council's ambition to increase the number of foster placements available to children in the Council's care by supporting foster families to continue to safely care for children within their family home, and enabling more children in care to live in family-based placements.

Children's Social Care receives requests for financial support from NCC foster carers, adoptive parents, families and friends through Special Guardianship Orders, to adapt their home / move house to provide a permanent placement for an NCC child/children.

4. An Adaptations Policy was approved in January 2016 with the aim to:
  - increase the number of placements
  - provide permanence for NCC looked after child/ren or young people
  - provide permanence for NCC children / young people to whom the County Council has responsibility.

5. To achieve these aims, the County Council provides financial assistance to NCC carers of NCC child/children to adapt or extend the present property to create extra room or to assist the purchase of an alternative property to alleviate overcrowding or take extra children.
6. This revised Adaptations to Property or House Moves Policy provides an update to the existing process and ensures greater transparency and equitable use of resources, targeted at those most in need.
7. To be eligible to apply for a funding request under the Adaptations to Property or House Moves Policy, one of the following is required:
  - an NCC foster carer or adopter to be the carer/s of an NCC child/children and the legal owner of the property in question
  - the family and friends/carers of NCC child/children to be under a Care Order or subject to Care Proceedings.
8. A request for funding under the Adaptations to Property or House Moves Policy will only be considered when any one of the following applies:
  - to provide extra capacity in their home to care for another child on behalf of NCC
  - to secure a long-term placement for a child already in their care
  - to enable sibling groups for whom they are caring to remain together
  - to meet the needs of a child with multiple disabilities in their care
  - to meet certain health and safety requirements, which otherwise would mean that a child in their care would have to be moved
  - to enable a house move to care for another child on behalf of NCC. .
9. In the event an NCC carer/carers meet one or more of the eligibility requirements outlined above, the supervising social worker will consider the carer's alternative options for finance, the need for legal contracts and charges on property, including recovery arrangements and the ability of the carers to contribute financially towards some of the costs.
10. There are separate application and approval processes for requests for financial assistance of up to £2,500 and over £2,501 (both approved by the Council's Finance department); these are both detailed in the policy (**Appendix 1**) and in the Application Process Flowchart (**Appendix 2**).
11. NCC adopts a flexible, shared-cost policy in relation to providing financial assistance. Therefore, there is some expectation that an NCC carer/carers makes a financial contribution to the cost of the adaptation, where possible.
12. In cases where a decision is made not to give financial assistance, applicants can ask the Corporate Director, Children and Families, to review that the policy has been complied with.
13. It is proposed that the policy be reviewed following each four-yearly election cycle.

## **Other Options Considered**

14. The option of not providing any funding was rejected as not being in the best interests of children and potentially not cost effective when comparing with long-term placements outside of a family-based setting. This is discretionary funding.
15. Historically, the greatest impact of the existing Adaptation policy has typically been for smaller amounts (approximately £2,500) and therefore should be easier to obtain. The system provides a relatively straight forward process for carers to apply for up to £2,500 (application form and approval of the CFS Service Director) to help fund minor adaptations which could support a child staying with them, allowing for stable family-based placements to continue.

## **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

16. The County Council already regularly gives financial assistance to NCC carer/carers under the existing Adaptations Policy. The update to this policy provides a robust framework, with a clear fair and straightforward process, with clear layers of decision making and accountability.
17. The benefits for the County Council are that small investments such as this can provide a longer term saving by a child remaining with an internal foster carer, rather than needing to move to a more expensive external provider. It also promotes goodwill and encourages carers to stay with the Council.
18. This means the Council can be more targeted in its approach and support carers who cannot afford to make changes to their own property specifically for a child. It is anticipated that very few applications for larger amounts will be made.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

19. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability, and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **Financial Implications**

20. Any financial assistance up to £2,500 is approved by the CFS Service Director using existing budget. Financial assistance at or above £2,501 is subject to a business case and is submitted to CAMG and approved in line with the Financial Regulations. Budget for the financial assistance will be identified and approved as required.

## **Public Sector Equality Duty implications**

21. When making decisions the Council must have regard to its public sector equality duty. The Council has a duty to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not by thinking about the need to:
  - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
  - Advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not
22. This policy will support, provide for and secure foundations for NCC child/children under the care of the County Council.

## **Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications**

23. This policy assists with placing of children in care in a family setting.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That:

- 1) Cabinet approves the Adaptations to Property or House Moves Policy, attached as **Appendix 1**.
- 2) the policy is reviewed following each four-yearly election cycle.

**Councillor Tracey Taylor**  
**Cabinet Member, Children and Families**

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## **Constitutional Comments (CEH 16/08/23)**

24. The report falls within the remit of Cabinet to consider.

## **Financial Comments (CDS 31/07/23)**

25. There are no financial implications arising directly from this policy, however, financial assistance under this policy in excess of £2,500 are subject to a business case and need to be approved via the Capital Assets Management Group (CAMG) and the requirements under the Financial Regulations. In the event of a carer ceasing to care for the children then legal charges may potentially apply to the property to ensure that public money is protected.

## **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Adaptations to Property Policy 2016

Adaptations Application Capital Programme Business Case

Carers Adaptations Application form

Financial Assistance Agreement (over £2,501)

**Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

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