

21st September 2020**Agenda Item: 4****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL
WORK****NATIONAL MINIMUM FOSTERING ALLOWANCES PAYMENT RATES TO
FOSTER CARERS 2020-21****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report proposes that Nottinghamshire County Council continues to pay its foster carers the National Minimum Fostering Allowances, at the rates prescribed by the Department for Education. Allowances are payments made by the Local Authority, to its foster carers, for the living costs of fostered children.

Information

2. The Children Act 2004 (Section 49) introduced new powers for the Government to compel local authorities to pay foster carers at prescribed rates.
3. On 27th July 2006, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) announced the recommended rates for the National Minimum Fostering Allowances for Foster Carers. These rates were effective from 1st April 2007. The Council has previously agreed to pay the recommended rates each year since 2007. Prior to March 2011 other additional/specific fostering allowances and fees to foster carers were annually inflated by the rate of inflation as determined by the County Council.
4. The report proposes that the Council continues to pay its foster carers the National Minimum Fostering Allowances, at the rates prescribed by the Department for Education. These allowances are payments made by the Local Authority to its foster carers to cover the costs involved in looking after a fostered child. Nottinghamshire currently pays its foster carers a weekly allowance of £132 (for a child aged 0-4 years), £146 (for a child aged 5-10 years), £167 (for a child aged 11-15 years) and £194 (for a child aged 16-17 years). The weekly allowance, as of 1st April 2020, will increase to £135 (child 0-4 years), £149 (child 5-10 years), £170 (child 11-15 years) and £198 (young person 16+).
5. 925 children were looked after by the Local Authority as of 30th June 2020. Of the 925 children in the Council's care, 656 are placed in foster care (70.9%). Of these 656 children,

398 (60.6%) are placed with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire County Council. 39.4% are placed with an independent, external foster care provider.

6. Foster carers approved by the Council provide a best value care placement when compared with other care providers. An internal fostering placement costs the Council approximately £300 per week less than a fostering placement purchased in the independent fostering sector.
7. Since the Fostering Service's newly established Recruitment and Assessment team was formed in November 2019 the throughput of prospective foster carers has increased. Between January and June 2020 14 new foster carers were approved at panel. If this rate continues over the next six months this would see an increase of 75% on last year's figures.
8. In spite of the lockdown measures put in place to halt the Covid-19 virus, the marketing activity which was delivered just prior to lockdown has resulted in a spike in enquiries, and the Foster Care Fortnight campaign which ran from 11th - 24th May 2020 has generated significant interest:
 - **11,701** visits to the fostering web pages within four weeks of campaign launch, compared with 1,208 visits in the preceding four weeks (12th April until 10th May)
 - **105** new subscribers to the recruitment email within four weeks, against a target of 50
 - **32** enquiries were received within four weeks of launch, of which eight have already progressed to initial visit stage.
9. There are currently 26 potential mainstream and 19 family and friends foster carers booked into panels between July and December 2020, a total of 45 applications. The success rate over the last three years is 92%, so a further 41 carers to be approved by the end of this calendar year is forecast.

Other Options Considered

10. The Local Authority is required to pay the National Minimum Fostering Allowances (Section 49, Children Act 2004; Standard 28.1 National Minimum Fostering Standards 2011). No other options have been considered.

Reason for Recommendation

11. The Local Authority is required by law to pay its foster carers the National Minimum Fostering Allowances. Payment of the National Minimum Fostering Allowances ensures the Authority's compliance with Section 49, Children Act 2004.

Statutory and Policy Implications

12. 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

13. The increase in the National Minimum Fostering Allowances rates the Council pays its foster carers will be contained within the overall 2020/21 Fostering budget.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That Nottinghamshire County Council continues to pay foster carers a weekly fostering allowance, at the national minimum rates, as prescribed by the Department for Education.

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Constitutional Comments (EP 25/08/20)

14. The recommendation falls within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SAS 27/08/20)

15. The increase in the National Minimum Fostering Allowances rates the Council pays its foster carers will be contained within the 2020/21 fostering budget for child specific payments which is £3.934m.

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.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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