

11 March 2013**Agenda Item: 9****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****LARGE FAMILY TRANSPORT ALLOWANCE****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks authorisation for a grant payment to be made to foster carers to enable the purchase of a large vehicle.

Information and Advice

2. Nottinghamshire County Council makes provision for its foster carers to receive a weekly allowance, Large Family Transport Allowance. To receive this allowance, foster carers have to meet certain eligibility criteria which, if met, results in an additional allowance of £43.50 per week.
3. Large Family Transport Allowance is designed to support foster families, with large numbers of children living in the foster household, to meet the additional transport and travel costs that arise.
4. AB and BB are approved foster carers for Nottinghamshire County Council. They are currently caring for a sibling group of three fostered children (aged 11 years; 8 years and 6 years). These children have been in placement since July 2012. Their care plan is one of permanent fostering with AB and BB. Care Proceedings have yet to be concluded but the children's Guardian Ad Litem has advised that it is indicated that this care plan will be agreed by the court. In addition to this sibling group, AB and BB also care for a young person aged 18 years. This young person was fostered by AB and BB and has remained in placement under the Local Authority's 'Staying Put' policy. AB and BB also have a birth child aged 14 years living in the household.
5. The foster carers currently have to use two cars to facilitate every day family activities. The foster carers meet the eligibility criteria for the Large Family Transport Allowance and are in receipt of this allowance. In addition, at times of holidays and special family occasions, the department has financially supported the foster carers in their hire of a large vehicle. This has enabled the whole of the foster family to be safely transported at the same time.
6. The children's Guardian Ad Litem made formal representation to the authority, on 23 January 2013, that consideration be given to providing the foster carers with a grant to purchase a large seven/nine seater vehicle. In addition, the children's Independent Reviewing Officer has made similar representation.

7. The fostering service does **not** have a dedicated budget to provide foster carers with a grant to purchase a large vehicle. However, given that:

- the authority is currently providing £2,262 per annum in respect of the Large Family Transport Allowance
- the foster carers' eligibility to this allowance is indicated for the next four years (until their birth daughter reaches the age of 18 years)
- it will be another seven years before the oldest foster child reaches the age of 18 years
- the local authority is required to ensure that foster carers are provided with such support as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them (Regulation 17(1) Fostering Services Regulations 2011)
- the local authority is required to ensure compliance with Standard 28:1 (Payments to Foster Carers) – National Minimum Fostering Standards 2011.

it would seem fair and reasonable to provide the foster carers with a grant of up to £15,834, that is, an amount commensurate to seven years of Large Family Transport Allowance.

8. The average cost of a seven/nine seater vehicle is £20,000. The authority has corporate parenting responsibilities to four of the five children in the foster household. It is fair and reasonable that the authority provides an amount in proportion to its responsibilities.

Other Options Considered

9. There are no other options available to consider.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

10. The purchase of a large vehicle would undoubtedly reduce stress levels within the foster household. Such a purchase would support the foster carers in maintaining a good level of physical and emotional resilience which would, in turn, support the continued placement stability of the three fostered children.

Statutory and Policy Implications

11. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service 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

12. Whilst the overall amount to be paid to this family for transport over the next seven years might not be increased by paying their entitlement up front rather than by instalments, it may cause an in-year overspend in the year in which the grant is paid. This would be reported by the Service Manager for Fostering as part of the usual budget monitoring cycle, and if possible covered by underspends in other divisional budgets.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That:

- 1) a grant payment of up to £15,834 be authorised in principle for payment
- 2) the grant to be payable upon conclusion of the Care Proceedings
- 3) upon payment, the foster carers' receipt of the Large Family Transport Allowance to cease
- 4) the grant be subject to a legal agreement.

Steve Edwards
Service Director, Children's Social Care

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Jayne Austin
Fostering Service Manager
T: 0115 977 4154
E: jayne.austin@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (NAB 25/02/13)

13. Children and Young People's Committee has authority to approve the recommendation set out in this report by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (KLA 28/02/13)

14. The Financial Implication of the report are set out in paragraph 12 above.

Background Papers

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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