

29 September 2014**Agenda Item: 12****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****PROVISION OF FUNDING FOR ADAPTATIONS TO LOCAL AUTHORITY
FOSTER HOMES****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks approval to provide funding totalling £247,000 for adaptations to five Local Authority foster homes.

Information and Advice

2. KOD and PP, RJ and AJ, JT and CT, JW and RW, and JW and JW are approved foster carers. The five Local Authority foster homes require adaptations as follows.
3. KOD and PP foster a family member. The fostered child's care plan is one of long term fostering with KOD and PP. Additional bedroom and living space needs to be created in the foster home to secure this child's care plan. £30,000 is required for the extension to the foster carers' property. The need for an extension has been actively promoted by the child's Independent Reviewing Officer and is supported by the social care teams who are involved with the child.
4. RJ and AJ are currently caring for nine fostered children - a sibling group of six children; a sibling group of two children and one singleton child. The care plan for the sibling group of six children is long term fostering with RJ and AJ. Additional bedroom and living space needs to be created in the foster home to secure these children's care plans. £100,000 is required for an extension to the foster carers' property. The need for an extension to the foster carers' property has been promoted by the children's Independent Reviewing Officer and is supported by the social care teams who are involved with all nine fostered children.
5. JT and CT are currently caring for a sibling group of three children. The children were placed with them on a short term basis but their care plan has now been changed to one of long term fostering with JT and CT. Additional bathroom and living space needs to be created in the foster home to secure these children's care plans. £35,000 is required for an adaptation to the foster carers' property. The need for an adaptation is supported by the social care teams who are involved with the children.
6. JW and RW care for a sibling group of four young children. The care plan for these children is long term fostering and it is planned that they will remain in this placement

until they reach adulthood. An additional bedroom and increased living space is required to secure these children with these carers and to ensure a safe care policy can be implemented. £100,000 was agreed at the Children and Young People's Committee meeting on 3 December 2012, but delays in care proceedings, delays in planning permission and the need to underpin the property have resulted in the costs rising. £20,000 is required for the extension to the foster carers' property. A further £3,000 is requested to enable the foster carers to rent a property whilst the work is completed. The need for an extension has been actively promoted by the children's Independent Reviewing Officer and is supported by the social care teams who are involved with the child.

7. JW and JW provide therapeutic fostering. They are currently caring for a young person aged seventeen years. The foster carers are keen to develop their fostering career and have proposed a conversion to their garage to create additional placement capacity for a teenager. This proposal is supported by the fostering team. £11,000 is required for this conversion. The investment of £11,000 represents good value to the Local Authority in that additional placement capacity would be created at a relatively low cost.
8. CW is a 7 year old child who has lived in a residential unit since February 2014. The unit is offering CW therapeutic support to help with emotional development. Foster Carers JJ and PJ are exceptional carers, bringing a great deal of prior skills, knowledge, training and experience into their role. These carers are hard to find. They are offering a therapeutic placement with support from the lead therapeutic Social Worker on the fostering team. It is in CW's best interests to move from residential care into a family/home environment as soon as possible. In order to accommodate CW, alterations are needed on the carers' home to provide an additional bedroom space. This would involve the garage being converted into a bedroom and bathroom, with an alternative garage area being built. The cost of this would be £48,000 which includes the cost of planning permissions/designs. It is likely to take up to 16 weeks to complete all the necessary work. The carers have stated they would use this room for the purposes of fostering for the duration of their career. The cost of care for CW in residential care is currently £4,000 per week.
9. There is a strong culture of permanency and sustainability within the care planning processes for children in the Local Authority's care. To ensure placement stability and positive outcomes for fostered children, the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that its children live in an environment that meets the children's immediate and future needs. It is important that foster carers are supported in maintaining good levels of physical and emotional resilience and that the emergence of stresses and strains, arising from restricted physical space within a foster household, are prevented.
10. Whilst there needs to be a realignment of budgets, there is sufficient capacity within the children's social care budget to provide grants of £247,000. In respect of the adaptation and conversion requests, a legal charge would be imposed upon the properties. The term and conditions of a legal charge ensure that the investment of public money is protected for a period of ten years.

Other Options Considered

11. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

12. The Local Authority's looked after population continues to rise and there is significant pressure upon the external placement budget. A saving of £6.59 million has to be achieved by 2017. Any measure that can reduce potential expenditure represents a significant efficiency to the Local Authority. The request for £11,000, to convert a garage into a living space for a looked after child, is such an efficiency measure.
13. Standard 10, the national minimum standards for fostering (2011) requires that "the foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there...children live in foster homes that provide adequate space... each child over the age of three years should have her/his own bedroom...". The requests for adaptations to foster households are made with the intention of ensuring compliance with this standard for the seventeen children concerned. The Local Authority, through its care planning processes for its looked after children, considers it appropriate for these children to remain in the long term care of the foster carers. To support the achievement of its own care plans, the Local Authority is required to make adaptations to the foster carers' properties.

Statutory and Policy Implications

14. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

15. The service user is a looked after child. By creating additional internal fostering capacity, local placement choice will be increased and reliance upon external placement provision will be reduced. By supporting existing placement arrangements for looked after children, the potential for continued placement stability will be enhanced.

Financial Implications

16. £135,000 worth of these projects are planned to take place this financial year and are included in the current year forecast for the Fostering Service budget. The remaining £112,000 worth is expected to commence in the new financial year and will be funded from the Fostering Service budget for 2015-16 and included in routine forecasts then.

Human Rights Implications

17. A child's right to family life is enhanced when the Local Authority has sufficient and sustainable family placement provision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That:

- 1) approval is given to provide funding of £30,000 for an adaptation to a Local Authority foster home to foster carers KOD and PP. Standards legal charges upon the foster carers' property will apply to protect the Local Authority
- 2) approval is given to provide funding of £100,000 for an adaptation to a Local Authority foster home to foster carers RJ and AJ. Standards legal charges upon the foster carers' property will apply to protect the Local Authority
- 3) approval is given to provide funding of £35,000 for an adaptation to a Local Authority foster home to foster carers JT and CT. Standards legal charges upon the foster carers' property will apply to protect the Local Authority
- 4) approval is given to provide funding of £23,000 for an adaptation to a Local Authority foster home to foster carers JW and RW. Standards legal charges upon the foster carers' property will apply to protect the Local Authority
- 5) approval is given to provide funding of £11,000 for an adaptation to a Local Authority foster home to foster carers JW and JW. Standards legal charges upon the foster carers' property will apply to protect the Local Authority
- 6) approval is given to provide funding of £48,000 for an adaptation to a Local Authority foster home to foster carers JJ and PJ. Standards legal charges upon the foster carers' property will apply to protect the Local Authority.

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Constitutional Comments (LM 15/09/14)

18. The Children and Young People's Committee has delegated authority within the Constitution to approve the recommendations in the report.

Financial Comments (KLA 18/09/14)

19. The financial implications of this report are set out in paragraph 16 above.

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.

Provision of funding for home extension to enable a sibling group of four looked after children to remain with foster parents as the subject of a Special Guardianship Order throughout childhood – report to Children and Young People’s Committee on 3 December 2012

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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