

**9 March 2015****Agenda Item: 13****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****NATIONAL MINIMUM FOSTERING ALLOWANCES AND FEES TO FOSTER  
CARERS****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.
2. This report proposes that Nottinghamshire County Council maintains the payment rates, as set in 2014/15, in its additional and specific fostering allowances/fees to its foster carers. Due to budgetary control measures, Nottinghamshire County Council is unable to provide an inflationary increase to these payments. This is the fifth successive year in which additional/specific fostering allowances, and fees to foster carers, have not been increased.

**Information and Advice**

3. The Children Act 2004 (Section 49) introduced new powers for the Government to compel Local Authorities to pay foster carers at prescribed rates.
4. On 27 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 1 April 2007. The Council has previously agreed to pay these 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.
5. Nottinghamshire currently pays its foster carers a weekly allowance and makes available other additional and specific allowances to pay for disturbance costs (where a child is placed with a foster carer with less than 24 hours' notice), immediate clothing and school uniform costs and additional costs in meeting the individual needs of particular fostered children.
6. 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 £122 (for a child aged 0-4 years), £134 (for a child aged 5-10 years), £154 (for a child aged 11-15 years) and £179 (for a child aged 16-17 years).

7. The Department for Education has yet to announce its rates for 2015/16 but an increase of 1.8 to 2%, consistent with the most recent forecast rate of inflation for 2015 (as measured by the Consumer Price Index), is anticipated. Any increase represents a significant challenge to the Local Authority at a time when its own budgets have not been inflated similarly.
8. 846 children were looked after by the Local Authority as at 6 February 2015. Of these 846 children, 73% were placed in foster care. Of all the children placed in foster care, 38% were placed with an independent foster provider and 62% were placed with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire.
9. Foster carers approved by Nottinghamshire County Council provide a best value care placement when compared with other care providers. An internal fostering placement costs the Local Authority approximately £300 per week less than a fostering placement purchased in the independent fostering sector. The expansion of internal fostering has been a priority identified within the Children's Social Care's Transformation Programme.

### **Other Options Considered**

10. The 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/s for Recommendation/s**

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, 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.

### **Financial Implications**

13. It is anticipated that the prescribed rates for 2015-16 will represent an increase of 2% on last year's rates.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That:

- 1) Nottinghamshire County Council pays its foster carers a weekly fostering allowance, at the national minimum rates, as prescribed by the Department for Education.
- 2) Nottinghamshire County Council maintains its current payment rates in its additional/specific allowances and in its fees to foster carers.

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### **Constitutional Comments (SMG 16/02/15)**

14. The proposals in this report fall within the remit of this Committee.

### **Financial Comments (LCJ 17/02/15)**

15. The financial implications of the report are set out in paragraph 13.
16. There is no proposal, as yet, to increase the budget in the Looked After Children's Service. The increase in rates is to be funded from the current budget provision. Cost efficiencies are being explored by the Children's Social Care's Transformation Team.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

None.

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

All.

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