

SCRUTINY PANEL

22 February 2018

INCREASE FOSTERING FEE FOR SECOND OR SUBSEQUENT CHILD

Report of the Director for People

Strategic Aim:	Reaching our Full Potential	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Mr R Foster, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People (Safeguarding)	
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Ward Councillors	N/A	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Panel:

1. Comments and provide feedback on the proposal regarding increasing the Foster Carer Fee for a second and subsequent child

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Local Authority has a duty to ensure there is sufficient accommodation within their area for children in their care. The duty has been clarified and reinforced by the Issue of statutory guidance on "Sufficiency" in 2010.
- 1.2 A full sufficiency review has been completed and a statement drafted exploring the current provision for children and care leavers for whom Rutland County Council is the Corporate Parent. This provides an in-depth view of the current fostering provision in Rutland County Council, the placement data for the children and young people in our care and an analysis of associated costs. The statement sets out the challenges and strengths within the local authority, providing a clear vision to improve sufficiency moving forward (this report is due to be presented at Scrutiny in a future panel).
- 1.3 Having sufficient 'in-house' foster carers, staying put provision and supported lodgings is essential to best meet the needs of the children we care for, as it allows children to be placed close to their families, local services, Social Workers,

and education provision. It is also important when considering the cost of placements as it improves sustainability.

1.4 When in house carers are unavailable the Local Authority has to look to Independent Fostering Associations (IFAs) to provide suitable placements to our children and these are significantly more expensive, likely to be out of the county and further than the prescribed 20 mile radius, with additional challenges to ensure the quality of the placement to provide the best possible care to our most vulnerable children.

1.5 The purpose of this report and the presentation is to gather views and feedback on the proposal to increase the fostering fee, for second and subsequent children.

2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 Foster Carers receive an **allowance** for each child in their care and these are based on the National Minimum Standards, the allowance is based on the child's age and the amount believed to be needed to support a child, the same allowance is paid for each child looked after within a placement.

2.2 The **allowance** is intended to meet the child's needs, for example, food, clothing, pocket money, savings... and there is a recommended breakdown for how this money is spent on and for the child, this is set by the National Minimum Standards.

2.3 Currently in Rutland, carers are paid this allowance but they are also paid a **professional fee** this is a fee to the carer, some would consider this the 'salary'.

2.4 The **Professional fee** is paid for the first child in placement; the amount is based on their experience and their completion of the National Minimum Standards. However for second and subsequent children placed with a Foster Carer, the **professional fee** whilst still applies is significantly reduced

2.5 Further to the payment of the **allowance** and the **professional fees**, carers also receive a loyalty bonus in year four and each year after that, as well a birthday and festival bonus payments.

2.6 Rutland currently have limited Foster placement for siblings groups, which result in all siblings groups being placed out of county and in an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), at a considerable higher cost.

2.7 We need to offer further incentive to our Carers to consider more than one child when they are able to do so.

2.8 Whilst foster carers in Rutland do not care for children because of the money they receive, feedback from most of our foster carers suggests that they do not believe the current method of payment is the best way to acknowledge the work and loyalty of carers within the County. It is also significant that many of our carers are only approved for one child rather than for a sibling group/second placement.

2.9 This proposal is part of a wider strategy to improve take up of already available placements with Rutland Foster Carers, thus reducing the number of children placed outside the authority and reducing the spend on IFA placements allowing the local authority to better use this money to support our Children in Care.

2.10 The hope is that this proposal will also improve current sufficiency moving forward whilst also encouraging potential new carers to consider working for Rutland rather than an IFA.

Current payments to Foster Carers - **Allowance** for the child:

Age Group	Weekly Basic Allowance	Festivity Allowance	Birthday Allowance
0-4 years	£145	£145	£145
5-10 years	£165	£165	£165
11-15 years	£206	£206	£206
16+ years	£249	£249	£249

Fostering **professional fees** in Rutland:

Fostering Level	Requirements	Weekly Fee	Weekly Additional Child Fee
Level 1	Newly approved foster carer	£124.74	£57.26
Level 2	Foster carer with one year experience, a minimum of 20 overnight stays and completion of the TSD standards	£172.80	£57.26
Level 3	Foster carer with at least two year experience and holding a relevant NVQ/QCF Level 3 or equivalent qualification and a minimum of 20 overnight stays (in the preceding year)	£218.81	£57.26

2.11 We are seeking views on increasing the payment of £57.26 which is paid for all subsequent children. We consider this fee too low when compared to the fee for the first child and we believe there needs to be further incentive for Carers to have siblings and/or subsequent children.

2.12 None of our in- house Foster Carers currently have any siblings groups, we have one connected carer who has three children, and should this be approved the increase in payment would apply to this connected carer and would need an initial cash injection which we would consider as an 'investment to save'. All of our other sibling groups are out of county in an IFA placement (IFA's cost in the region of £700-£1000 per week, per child) and whilst this proposal may not bring changes to the current children looked after, we believe it will to those children who become

looked after in the future.

2.13 **Case Study: Example**

Two children came into the care of the local authority in March, an 8 year old boy and a 10 year old girl.

We were unable to find a Rutland Foster Carer who was able to look after the children and separation of the children was not appropriate.

The cost of placing the siblings with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) was approx. £1500 per week

Had we placed them together with a Rutland Carer the cost would have been in the region of £560.00 per week, with the increase of second fee as per this proposal the cost would be in the region of £680 per week.

For an in-house Carer this is an increase of £120 per week but a potential saving to the local authority of more than £800 per week.

Further savings are then achieved such as, mileage, travel time of staff visiting children/placements, transport costs to and from school, transport and time of supervised contact, all which costs significantly more for children in IFA's and out of county and are significantly cheaper when children are with in-house carers.

3 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1** Whilst this proposal is only part of a wider strategy to improve sufficiency within our fostering service, should the increase of second and subsequent placement fees be agreed, it is likely that significant savings can be made to the local authority whilst also improving our opportunity to provide the best possible service to the most vulnerable children and young people in Rutland.
- 3.2** The current climate suggests that there is a national shortage of foster carers with many choosing to go to an IFA to be assessed rather than working with a local authority. Whilst money is not the motivator, to be able to offer similar payments to IFAs to the carers would undoubtedly improve recruitment and service to children. It would also support loyalty to Rutland and ensure we evidence how much we value our Foster Carers.
- 3.3** The Fostering Network is clear that they believe professional fees should be paid and they should be clear and transparent. Paying equal fees for every child in placement would be their preference.
- 3.4** We are in the process of writing a retention strategy in order to retain our carers, our numbers of children becoming looking after is not increasing, however we want to continue to ensure we have high quality provisions in house when the need arises.

4 BACKGROUND PAPERS

4.1 There are no background papers

5 APPENDICES

5.1 Appendix 1 - Business Case

A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.