

**NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL  
DECISION**

**DECISION OF: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
WITH ADVICE FROM: DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES  
DIRECTORATE: PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES**



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**DECISION NO: PC21 (2018/19 SCHEME)**

**SUBJECT: FOSTER CARER CHILD ALLOWANCES 2018/19**

**KEY DECISION: NO**

**BACKGROUND:**

This is a proposal to review and alter the foster carer finance structure within North Somerset. Foster carer allowances have not increased since 2015 within North Somerset. It is suggested they need to be increased to ensure they meet the national recommended government allowance and are reflective of the allowances paid by our neighbouring local authority partners. This to ensure foster carers are receiving the correct remuneration for their care of our children and want to continue to foster for North Somerset Council. A profiling exercise has been undertaken to consider the fees of other neighbouring authorities, to consider what we as a fostering agency should offer our carers as well as reviewing the current nationally recommended foster carer child allowances. The proposed recommendations set out as the current proposal for North Somerset fostering service. The increase in the number of foster carers within North Somerset is a key requirement to the successful delivery of the savings in respect of Children Looked After placements in the MTFP and the restructure of the fostering finance policy has been proposed to support this objective.

The fostering service was subject to an internal audit in 2017 which recommended the foster carer remuneration was reviewed as it had not increased in several years.

The remuneration provided to foster carers is in 2 parts, the fostering fee and the child allowance which is based on age. The foster carer fee element for North Somerset remains like neighbouring authorities therefore it is not suggested that this increase at this time. It is recommended the age-related child allowance amount for our carers is increased in line with the national guidance. This will ensure we reflect the child allowance age banding used by the government which reflect the national average rates to ensure parity with the government recommendations.

## DECISION:

1. To increase the Child Care Allowance in line with the current national guidance as detailed below from 1 April 2018
2. That allowances are reviewed on an annual basis and that the prevailing national guidance and other relevant factors are used to determine the revised rates

### Fees and allowances for North Somerset

<i>Fostering Fee</i>		<b>Age Related Allowance</b>		
<i>Skills Level</i>	<i>Fee</i>	<b>Child's Age</b>	<b>2017/18 Allowance</b>	<b>2018/19 proposed Allowance</b>
<i>Foundation</i>	£69.26	<b>0-4</b>	£115.36	<b>£130.00</b>
<i>Intermediate</i>	£92.35	<b>5-10</b>	£129.98	<b>£143.00</b>
<i>Advanced</i>	£147.57 (6 week retainer of 73.78 if no child in placement)	<b>11-12</b>	£147.08	<b>£164.00</b>
<i>Specialist Placement – attached to carer rather than child</i>	£220.18 (6 week retainer of £110.09 if no child in placement)	<b>13-17</b>	£189.10	<b>£191.00</b>

### Current National Guidance (provided on age related child allowance only):-

Minimum weekly allowance - 2018 to 2019

	<b>Babies</b>	<b>Pre-primary</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>11 to 15</b>	<b>16 to 17</b>
London	£146	£149	£168	£190	£222
South East	£140	£144	£160	£182	£214
Rest of England	£127	£130	£143	£164	£191

### Age related Child Allowance Proposal Increase

After an analysis of the current recommended rates and review of the child related allowance of neighbouring local authorities it is proposed North Somerset Foster Carers receive the national recommended allowance set out above to ensure we are providing our foster carers with the appropriate remuneration for caring for our children. The proposed allowance will include all other expenses including birthday, Christmas and holiday activity allowances.

It is suggested that the allowance would be back dated until the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2018. It is further recommended the child allowance element of the foster carer fee structure is reviewed annually, with a review of the foster carer fee element in 2 years' time to ensure this remains competitive against neighbouring authorities.

### **Other Payments**

The review of the foster carer finance policy has also been an opportunity to consider the other components of foster carer remuneration for specialist elements as set out below:-

### **Mother and Parent Placements**

North Somerset wish to develop a parent and child parenting team which will include the use of in house parent and child placements. There is currently no fee structure in place for these placements locally. The following fee structure for these placements is proposed

£220.18 – foster carer fee, reflects current complex fee structure  
Child related allowance for the child within the fostering household  
16+ related allowance for each parent within the fostering household

This would mean (based on proposed figures) if a mother and her baby was in a mother and child placement within North Somerset the fee structure would be £220.18 (complex foster carer fee) + 130.00 (allowance for child 0-2) +£191.00 (allowance for parent – same as allowance for 16+) - total £541.18

This cost is significantly less than an IFA or residential placement who are currently commissioned to provide this service on behalf of North Somerset Council.

### **Shared Care**

Currently North Somerset has no fee structure for foster carers who care for children in term time arrangements in residential school, children who are in hospital but legally must remain placed with carers, or children in residential care placed with lined foster carers in school holidays.

It is proposed that when these arrangements are in place foster carers receive 50% of their fostering fee and it is expected that they will keep in contact with the child or young person, visit them as appropriate, and be their delegated parent whilst they are in the alternative setting.

This proposal would bring North Somerset in line with neighbouring authorities and provide a clear pathway for children and foster carers in these circumstances. Currently any financial remuneration in this area is discretionary by service leader approval and as an arrangement is unsatisfactory. It has been challenged by foster carers recently.

### **Foster Carer child care fee**

Currently foster carers are paid £4.00 per hour to care for Children Looked After placed with other foster carers. This is often agreed to enable carers to attend training etc. when children

are out of school. We have been using this increasingly recently to support foster placements and prevent placement breakdowns by giving some respite to carers who are struggling. This is to support placement stability but also to prevent the use of more high cost intervention. This fee has also not increased for several years. We are proposing this fee increases to £6.00 per hour. In terms of additional cost, it will be an invest to save model as this will prevent the use of higher cost interventions.

### **Foster Carer Assessor Casual Fees**

Currently the foster carer casual assessor fee within North Somerset is £1500 and has been set at this rate for the past 5 years. It is recommended to attract more assessors that North Somerset brings its fee structure in line with neighbouring authorities to £1800 to ensure foster carers are not experiencing undue delays when being considered for assessment, particularly as currently there is often not capacity to complete these assessments within the fostering team, due to staff capacity issues. This will be delivered from the current fostering team budget.

It is estimated this increased cost will be between 3k -7k per year.

### **REASONS:**

This decision paper has set out proposals regarding the change in foster carer fees and children's allowances to make these fees more favourable, more attractive to foster carers and therefore it is anticipated it will have a positive impact on recruitment and retention of foster carers overall. The aim of these proposals is also to bring North Somerset fees more in line with neighbouring local authorities and to regularise fee structures for more complex or unusual placement arrangements that may be used for cases of significant complexity.

Although an increase in fees is suggested which will have a financial implication within the budget for 2018/19 this is deemed necessary to support the principle of increased foster career recruitment and retention.

This proposal forms part of the overall Children Looked After placement budget and will need to form part of the cost and volume monitoring work that is ongoing in this area. The finance restructure proposal should assist us in achieving the reductions required as part of the MTFP.

### **OPTIONS CONSIDERED:**

A number of options were considered, with the current proposal reflecting a balance between remuneration and affordability

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The table below illustrates the expected additional costs for 2018/19 based on the current categorisation of carers.

	Current Weekly Fee	Proposed Weekly Fee	Weekly Increase in Fee	Estimated Volumes by age	Weekly Increase in Costs	Annual Increase in Cost
<i>Category (national age categories in brackets)</i>						
0-4 (Baby and Pre-Primary)	£115.36	£130.00	£14.64	20	£293	£15,226
5-10 (Primary)	£129.98	£143.00	£13.02	20	£260	£13,541
11-12 (11-15)	£147.08	£164.00	£16.92	40	£677	£35,194
13-17 (16-17)	£189.10	£191.00	£1.90	20	£38	£1,976
						<b>£65,936</b>

Whilst these additional costs do not form part of the 2018/19 budget, it is anticipated that these increases are required to sustain and increase the pool of in-house foster carers. A fall in the number of foster carers would have a more significant impact on the Council's financial position. It is worth noting that the annual cost differential between an in-house placement and an independent placement is around £25,000. As a result, should the new fees generate 3 additional carers or prevent 3 carers from leaving, then it would represent value for money.

It is recommended that a yearly increase for the child related allowance for fostering is considered as part of the yearly budget setting process.

## LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

North Somerset Council like all Authorities are encouraged by the Department of Education to ensure foster carers are appropriately re-numerated for the care they provide to our Children Looked After, in line with national government guidance.

## CONSULTATION

Consultation has been held with Foster Carers in a number of forums including foster carer engagement meetings, meetings with the foster care association and the foster carers conference where it has been clearly fed back that they would wish to see an increase in the re-numeration they receive.

## RISK MANAGEMENT

In respect of fostering household sufficiency, if these proposals were not approved, there is an increased risk that North Somerset Council will struggle to recruit and retain carers under the current foster carer re-numeration arrangements, particularly in respect of the feedback we have received from our foster carers on this issue.

## EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

A Summary EIA has been completed and there are no Equality Impact Implications.

**CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

There are no additional corporate implications.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

This is not applicable to this decision.

**SIGNATORIES:**

**DECISION MAKER(S):**

Signed: ..... *Abel J. B...* .....

Title: Executive Member for Children and Young People's Services

Date: ..... *31.7.18* .....

**WITH ADVICE FROM:**

Signed: ..... *Meila Smith* .....

Title: Director of People and Communities

Date: ..... *31.7.18* .....

**Footnote: Details of changes made and agreed by the decision taker since publication of the proposed (pre-signed) decision notice, if applicable:**