

Single Member Cabinet Decision

Executive Forward Plan Reference	E2219
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Fostering allowances annual review

Decision maker/s	Cllr Chris Watt, Cabinet Member for Children
The Issue	Annual review of fostering and related allowances
Decision Date	28 th February 2011
The decision	<p>The Cabinet Member agrees</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase in fostering age related allowances and permanence allowances in line with Fostering Network recommendations as set out in appendix 1 2. No change in fostering fees, savings rates for children in care, or supported lodgings as set out in appendix 1 3. To note the current level of care leavers maintenance which is linked to Job Seekers Allowance as set out in appendix 1.
Rationale for decision	<p>The Council has duties in statute, regulations and guidance to act as a Corporate Parent and provide placements for children in its care, to promote adoption, special guardianship and residence orders as forms of permanence and to maintain and support young people moving on from care to adulthood. The proposal in this report ensures that basic living costs for these vulnerable children and young people continue to be met by the Council acting as Corporate Parent.</p>
Financial and budget implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The recommendation is to increase fostering age related allowances in line with the actual cost of looking after a child worked out annually by the Fostering Network. It is recommended to maintain foster carers fees at the same level as 2010/11 in line with local government pay. The total resulting net increase in in-house placement costs is estimated to be less than the cost of a single placement for one year with an Independent Fostering Provider (IFP), which averages around £45,000. The increase in costs will be managed within overall placement budgets by continuing to increase the number of in-house foster carers thus reducing pressure on the IFP budget. 2. Regulations require that the maximum rate for adoption and special guardianship allowances must be based on the fostering age related allowance, which ensures that the actual cost of looking after a child is always supported when children leave care through an adoption or special guardianship order. The allowances actually paid will depend on individual annual financial reviews based on the new rates and any change in circumstances for families in receipt of allowances. It is anticipated that any resulting increase can be managed within existing budget

	<p>allocation for permanence allowances.</p> <p>3. The recommendation is for no change in savings rates for children in care or supported lodgings rates.</p> <p>4. Care leavers maintenance is linked to Job Seekers Allowance rates. The current expectation is that there will be no increase in these rates for 2011/12.</p>
Issues considered	Social Inclusion; Human Resources; Young People
Consultation undertaken	Section 151 Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer
How consultation was carried out	Report copied to relevant officers for comment.
Other options considered	<p>1. A revised local scheme of fees and allowances for foster carers was introduced in April 2005. Our age related allowances since 2005 have been based on the Fostering Network recommended rates and thus cover the full direct and additional costs of looking after a child in foster care. This was based on the Council's commitment to meet the full cost of looking after children for whom we are the Corporate Parent. Foster carers face day to day costs which increase or decrease in line with inflation, and this is taken into account by the Fostering Network in making its recommendation. Reducing or freezing allowances for Bath and North East Somerset carers against the Fostering Network recommendation would depart from the Council's 2005 commitment to cover the full costs to foster carers of looking after children and effectively ask carers to subsidise these costs. This option would risk significant damage to the progress being made in recruiting and retaining local carers.</p> <p>2. The scheme of fees introduced in 2005 recognises the skills of foster carers. These fees have been increased each year in line with local authority wage and salary increases, apart from 2006 when there was no change. It is not necessary or right to increase these fees in the context of a wage and salary freeze.</p>

Signatures of Decision Makers	
Date of Signature	
Subject to Call-in until 5 Working days have elapsed following publication of the decision	