

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Lifelong Learning Committee – 11 January 2012

ANNUAL INCREASE AND REVISION OF FOSTER CARE FEES**Report by Executive Director (Education and Children's Services)****ABSTRACT**

This report proposes further developments in Perth & Kinross Fostering Services which will enable the service to respond effectively to the challenges of providing high quality local placements for teenagers. Included within this proposal is an annual uplift in Foster Carer fees of 2.3% in line with National Fostering Network recommended levels.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1.1 Approves the proposed introduction of Level 4 fees, paid specifically to carers who are providing placements for young people aged 12 and over, who are being accommodated in the community;
- 1.2 Approves the annual increase of 2.3% for Perth & Kinross Carers (effective from 1 April 2012) in line with the Fostering Network recommended increases for fees and allowances for carers;
- 1.3 Approves the formal ending of the Care4 specialist foster care scheme; and
- 1.4 Instructs the Executive Director (Education and Children's Services) to report back to this Committee by January 2013.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 For most children, skilled carers are available locally offering secure temporary placements where required and a route to permanent placements away from home for our most vulnerable children.
- 2.2 At present we have 56 sets of registered foster carers in Perth and Kinross with another 12 currently being assessed. This is the highest number Perth and Kinross have ever had and recent recruitment campaigns have proved successful. Our focus is now on those carers who wish to offer either permanent care or care for young people over 12 years of age.
- 2.3 The Fostering Network is a national organisation which provides information, advice and support to local authorities with regard to Fostering and Kinship Care. This includes recommendations on fees paid to Carers.
- 2.4 Increasing fees annually in line with Fostering Network recommendations allows Perth & Kinross Council to compete in what is a highly competitive

market and has seen our number of Foster Carers expand in line with our requirements for younger children.

- 2.5 The Care4 scheme was introduced as a specialist fostering scheme and was approved by Lifelong Learning Committee in 2006 (report no.06/817 refers).
- 2.6 Despite widespread campaigns it has proved difficult to attract carers for “harder to place” teenagers often with the most challenging backgrounds and behaviours.
- 2.7 Foster Carer payments in Perth and Kinross consist of two elements: (see appendix 1)
 - An allowance which is dependant on age. These allowances are paid at Fostering Network recommended rates
 - A skills-based fee against which carers are currently assessed at 3 levels (1,2 and 3).
- 2.8 Payments for Kinship Carers, which are in line with Fostering Payments, have supported many children to remain within their extended family. Some adopters also receive allowances in recognition that they are caring for the most challenging children.
- 2.9 Over the past 5 years there has been increasing growth in the number of foster carers who are registered with Independent Fostering Providers who are willing to offer placements to teenagers. Payments made to these carers are at significantly higher rates than in Perth and Kinross; e.g. a £390 per week fee. This has encouraged carers to view fostering as an alternative to employment.

3 PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The challenges of teenage placements continues, and although we have managed to attract some respite carers for teenagers we still urgently require full time placements. A recent internal review of young people who are in external, high cost residential accommodation highlighted that if appropriately skilled carers had been available then 6 young people could have been accommodated in foster care locally.
- 3.2 In April of this year a payment for Level 4 was agreed at Education and Children’s Services Senior Management Team as a pilot to attract two sets of carers, who were looking after Perth and Kinross children, from Independent Foster care Providers (IFP’s). These two sets of carers are now registered with Perth and Kinross and provide 3 placements to teenagers between them. This has resulted in a reduction in expenditure of £129,453, (see appendix 1) by avoiding payment of fees that would have been paid to the IFP.
- 3.3 This proposal creates a Level 4 payment as a “spend to save” incentive to recruit carers, to specifically meet the high level of need identified, for young people over 12 years of age. These children would be accommodated directly from their family or other local provision. The fee proposed for Level 4 is

£270.17 per week which is £100 more per week than the current Level 3. The new rate includes an increase for inflation from 1 April 2012.

- 3.4 To ensure equality, and to retain current carers, Level 4 will also be extended to carers who are currently approved and who are providing placements for young people placed with them when aged 12 years and over. There are currently 12 placements which would meet this criteria, and 9 sets of carers who would be entitled to the higher rate.

For new carers this process will be part of the routine assessment and decision making by the Fostering and Permanence Panel who approve carers in terms of suitability and number and age of children to be placed.

- 3.5 This proposal does not affect the carers of children who are growing up in their care families and have reached the age of 12 years in care.
- 3.6 There may be circumstances where it is necessary to pay foster carers a higher rate than that set at Level 4, e.g. carers with qualifying children who are registered with an Independent Foster Care provider, transferring to Perth & Kinross Council registration.

Where this is considered appropriate a Business Case/ Report will require the authorisation of the Executive Director (Education and Children's Services).

- 3.7 Guidance on Level 4 criteria will be added to the Foster Carer Handbook if this proposal is agreed.
- 3.8 The implementation of these proposals would enable the Care 4 scheme to be discontinued. This proposal therefore requests the formal ending of the Care 4 scheme.
- 3.9 This proposal also asks that Committee approve the annual increase of 2.3% in line with Fostering Network recommendations. (see appendix 1)

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation across Education and Children's Services has taken place in the preparation of this report.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The implications arising from this report will be contained within ECS revenue budget. Specific financial information in relation to this paper is contained in appendix 1.

6 COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVES 2009-2012

- 6.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2009-2012 lays out five Objectives which provide clear strategic direction, inform decisions at a corporate and service

level and shape resources allocation. This report relates to the following objectives:

(i) A Safe, Secure and Welcoming Environment

Foster Care has proven to be the most desirable form of care for young people who for a variety of reasons cannot be accommodated within their families. This is evidenced by improving outcomes in terms of learning, future attachments and responsible citizens.

(ii) Healthy, Caring Communities

The increased recruitment of carers within Perth and Kinross shows that we are developing communities who care for the children of Perth and Kinross and recent recruitment campaigns have shown that there is a desire to look after the most vulnerable. However, the needs of young people are often more complex and require carers who are prepared for the challenge. Level 4 will allow Perth and Kinross to financially compete in a limited market.

(iii) Confident, Active and Inclusive Communities

With increasing numbers of carers within Perth and Kinross there will also be the ability to keep young people within their own community.

6.2 The report also links to the Education & Children's Services Policy Framework in respect of the following key policy area:

- Maximising Resources

There are limited numbers of people who would wish to care for young people because of their complex and challenging behaviour. The introduction of a competitive financial rate for these people will allow easier recruitment and retention of these carers and in turn will have financial savings as detailed above.

7 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EqIA)

An equality impact assessment needs to be carried out for functions, policies, procedures or strategies in relation to race, gender and disability and other relevant protected characteristics. This supports the Council's legal requirement to comply with the duty to assess and consult on relevant new and existing policies.

The function, policy, procedure or strategy presented in this report was considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (Eq1A) with the following outcome:

i) Assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of Eq1A

8 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The matters presented in this report were considered under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 and no further action is required as it does not qualify as a PPS as defined by the Act and is therefore exempt.

9 CONCLUSION

The Fostering Network has recommended an increase in fees and allowances of 2.3% for the year 2012/2013 and Perth and Kinross have applied increases in previous years in line with these recommendations. This has allowed the Council to retain our current carer population whilst also being able to recruit new carers. For those children who are placed within Kinship placements this has allowed many families to purchase support which allows the children to be maintained within their family.

Foster care is a competitive market with the growth of Independent Fostering Providers who are able to pay considerably more to their carers than local authorities.

At present we have 56 sets of registered foster carers in Perth and Kinross with another 12 currently being assessed. This is the highest number we have ever had and recent recruitment campaigns have proved successful. Our focus is now on those carers who wish to offer either permanent care or care for young people over 12 years of age.

The Care4 scheme did not increase the number of carers recruited to provide placements for young people aged 12 and over and as such requires to end.

The introduction of the Level 4 scheme with increased rates will improve Perth and Kinross's competitiveness in recruiting carers as well as rewarding current carers who are caring for our most complex and challenging group of young people.

It is recommended that Committee approve the recommended increase in Carer fees from 01 April 2012 and the introduction of the Level 4 scheme.

JOHN FYFFE
Executive Director (Education and Children's Services)

Note: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

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Education & Children's Services - Annual Increase and Revision of Foster Care Fees

<u>If Carers registered with Independent Foster care Provider (IFP):</u>	<u>£</u>
Average cost of weekly IFP placement = £1,390	
Full year = 52 weeks x £1,390	72,280

If Carers registered with Perth & Kinross Council:

£390 fee + £170.17 allowance = £560.17 per week

Full year = 52 weeks x £560.17 29,129

Annual saving per placement 43,151

Total saving (i.e. 3 placements) 129,453

	<u>£</u>
2011/12 Projected Carer Fees Expenditure	1,777,310
2.3% increase on above	<u><u>40,878</u></u>

