

Decision maker:	Director for children's wellbeing
Decision date:	29 June 2017
Title of report:	Increase in basic foster carers allowance 2017
Report by:	Fostering team manager

Classification

Open

Key decision

This is not a key decision

Wards affected

Countywide

Purpose

To approve an increase in the foster carers basic fostering allowance of 1%.

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) an increase of 1% is made across the age ranges for all Herefordshire foster placements with effect from 1st April 2017**

Alternative options

1. Not to increase allowances. This is not recommended as it would mean that the council does not meet with the Department of Education guidelines (DfE).
2. Increase the allowance to the youngest age bands only at a higher level of 3%. This is not recommended because it would adversely affect the care placement strategy which aims to attract and retain carers for the older and more challenging placements. This helps to reduce dependence on independent fostering agencies for this cohort. The council does not have as much difficulty in recruiting foster carers for the younger children under 11

years.

Reasons for recommendations

3. In April each year the DfE issues recommended guidelines for foster carers. The council did not fully implement these recommendations for four years following the implementation of the fee payment scheme which has led to some of our foster care allowances falling behind recommended rates.
4. The 2017 recommended DfE increase is 1.014% detailed below (inclusive of clothing, holiday and festival allowances) and is made across all age ranges and loosely linked to inflation:

Babies/toddlers	£128
Primary	£141
Secondary	£161
16-17 yrs	£188

5. The impact of the 1% increase in Herefordshire is illustrated below and is also inclusive of clothing, festival and holiday allowances:

With 1% increase:	Current rate without increase:
Babies/toddlers £127	£123.48
Primary aged £144	£138.05
Secondary aged £202	£199.21
16 – 17 year olds £241	£237.67

6. The increase in allowances will allow the youngest age bands to gradually catch up as no increase was recommended by the DfE last year.

Key considerations

7. In 2009 a fee payment scheme was introduced to increase payments to carers with the aim of being more competitive with local independent fostering agencies (IFA's) and retain foster carers. These payments range from £100 – £175 per child per week and are dependent on foster carers' skill set, complex behaviours or needs of placement and foster carers training record.
8. Herefordshire's fostering allowances are broken into a basic fostering allowance (to cover living costs of a child – food, bills, activities etc) and has historically been supplemented by a basic clothing allowance, festival and holidays allowance. Carers also receive mileage at 45p per mile for any journey undertaken to care for a child eg school runs (this can be quite high in Herefordshire due to rural locations and a commitment to maintaining existing education for looked after children).
9. The fees have enabled us to become more competitive and we are less reliant

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on agency placements. However, the basic fostering allowance, particularly for the younger age ranges will fall below national guidelines recommended by the DfE. The rates for older placements are higher than the guidelines. This is because of the competition we face from independent agencies in the county (who charge much higher rates), a small population pool to attract foster carers from and challenges in finding suitable placements for aggressive, abusive or complex young people who might need a solo placement.

Community impact

10. One of the key council priorities is to give children a great start in life and being able to place within a community which meets their needs to be placed near family, friends and schools. If the council has to use independent fostering agencies children may have to be placed outside of Herefordshire county.

Equality duty

11. Increasing the allowances will enable the council to maintain in house foster carers who support vulnerable children to remain in their local community and have regular contact with family. This will pay due regard to our public sector equality duty which will:

eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under this Act;

advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it."

Financial implications

12. The cost has been calculated to be an additional £12k for general foster carers and £3,700 for kinship carers totalling £15,700. This uplift has already been factored into financial forecasts for 2017/18.

Legal implications

13. The Department of Education Guidelines state that all foster carers should receive at least the national minimum allowance.
14. Currently Herefordshire Council is not paying the minimum rate for Babies / toddlers and Primary. If the 1% increase is agreed then this will remedy the Primary aged but not the Babies / toddlers which will fall short of £1. This may be subject of challenge.

Risk management

15. If the fostering allowances are not increased by 1% this financial year then

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there is likely to be a higher increase required in subsequent years to ensure the council adheres to the DfE guidelines. In order to mitigate against this the budget will be increased in 2017/18 to ensure that this financial increase can be met.

16. If the proposal is declined Herefordshire foster carers may consider transferring back to independent agencies or request increases in other more expensive areas such as the fee payment scheme. This would require prolonged consultation. A 1% increase is a fairer way to ensure carers meet nationally set guidelines for looked after children.

Consultees

17. The foster carer representative group have been consulted and mileage claims have been scrutinised: consultation work was undertaken following the 2016 annual foster carer forum with further work planned for 2017/18 to consider other aspects of allowances such as clothing and holiday later in the year. Foster carers understand the financial pressures within council budgets but are also managing household finance pressures arising from inflation and so would appreciate this being recognised by a small uplift in their allowances.

Appendices

- None

Background papers

- None.