

Decision maker:	Director for children's wellbeing
Decision date:	Friday, 4 May 2018
Title of report:	Increase in basic foster carers allowances 2018
Report by:	Fostering team manager, Head of looked after children

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

All Wards

Purpose and summary

To approve an increase in the foster carers basic fostering allowance in accordance with the recommended guidelines for foster carers published by the Department for Education.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) An increase for 0-10 year olds to the recommended DFE published minimum rate and a 1% increase for all other Herefordshire foster placements with effect from 1st April 2018

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 2- 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.

Key considerations

3. In April each year the DfE issues recommendations on new guidelines for foster carers allowances. Without increasing our allowances Herefordshire will fall significantly behind these national guidelines.
4. The 2018 recommended DfE increase is 1.6% (1.014% in 2017) detailed below (inclusive of clothing, holiday and festival allowances) and is made across all age ranges and loosely linked to inflation:

Babies/toddlers	£130
Primary	£143
Secondary	£164
16-17 yrs	£191

5. The impact of these increases in Herefordshire is illustrated below and is also inclusive of clothing, festival and holiday allowances:

With increases:		Current rate without increases:
Babies/toddlers	£130.00	£125.56
Primary aged	£143.00	£140.17
Secondary aged	£204.42	£202.34
16 – 17 year olds	£243.76	£241.35

6. 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.
7. Herefordshire's fostering allowances are broken into a basic fostering allowance (to cover living costs of a child – food, bills, activities etc) and is supplemented by a basic clothing allowance, festival and holiday allowances. 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).

8. The fees have enabled us to become more competitive and we are less reliant on agency placements. 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

9. 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.
10. Allowances are continued for the older age range able to Stay Put post 18 with carers within the county and have smoother transitions on to independence and independent accommodation when ready.

Equality duty

11. We 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."

12. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. 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. We do not believe that it will have an impact on our equality duty

Resource implications

13. The cost has been calculated to be an additional £20k. £18k for general foster carers and £2k for kinship carers. This uplift has already been factored into the 2018/19 budgets.

Legal implications

14. The Department of Education Guidelines state that all foster carers should receive at least the national minimum allowance. The council is not bound by the guidance but must have regard to it and consider what it reasonably should do.

Risk management

15. If the fostering allowances are not increased this financial year then there is likely to be a higher increase required in subsequent years to ensure the council adheres to the Department of Education guidelines.
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. The proposed 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 over the last year: consultation work was undertaken following the 2016/17 annual foster carer forum with further work planned for 2018 to consider other aspects of allowances such as clothing and holiday allowances being amalgamated. 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.