KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY:	DECISION NO:
Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services	22/00038

For publication *[Do not include information which is exempt from publication under schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972]*

Key decision: YES

Key decision criteria. The decision will:

a) be significant in terms of its effects on a significant proportion of the community living or working within two or more electoral divisions – which will include those decisions that involve:
- *the adoption or significant amendment of major strategies or frameworks;*
- *significant service developments, significant service reductions, or significant changes in the way that services are delivered, whether County-wide or in a particular locality.*

Subject Matter / Title of Decision
Pocket Money and Savings Policy for Children and young people in care – ensuring all children in care have a financial "Nest Egg" investment as part of their transition to adulthood.

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for, I agree to:

i) the proposal and process to take the £10 per week savings at source from the foster carers/providers maintenance payment, from the period of time from the child/young person's 14th week in care and ongoing until they leave care. This is to achieve a financial "Nest Egg" investment for all children in care.

Reason(s) for decision:

1.1 Since a challenge in 2018 from our children and young people in care to give minimum amounts of pocket money and savings, it is an expectation that all foster carers /providers follow the KCC Savings and Pocket Money policy. This is to enable our young people to leave care at aged 18 years with some financial savings to use to support them moving into independence.

1.2 KCC have not previously been able to take children's savings at source due to the capabilities of the different technical systems being able to communicate with each other. Foster carers have consistently asked for the savings to be taken at source, as the current system is complicated and the review of the process, has included working with our Foster Carer Ambassadors so that they are fully informed of the proposed change.

2 Background

2.1 For the past year, there has been a working group exploring whether we can use information from Controc, Oracle and Liberi systems to take the £10 savings at source, pay it into a central KCC bank account and then have it transferred over to either the child's bank account if they leave care before the 12-month period or transferred to their Child Trust Fund or Junior ISA if they remain in care. The Child Trust Fund and Junior ISAs are managed by The Share Foundation and all children in local authority care for over a 12 month period, receive a £200 payment from the government into either their Child Trust Fund or Junior ISA.

2.2 The current process is that foster carers and providers who receive a maintenance payment for the care of the child, make savings on an individual basis which often results in children's savings being kept in a variety of different bank accounts. This process needs to be changed to simplify it and remove the risk of our children and young people's savings going astray or it being spent before they reach 18 years old. We therefore would like to manage the savings 'at source' and reduce the number of accounts that children/young people have. Each area has managed a number of complaints from young people who have moved between carers/providers and savings have not been made available to them. If foster carers are no longer fostering for KCC, it makes it almost impossible to get them to pass on any savings, if these have not been passed on, whilst the child is in their care.

2.3 In some cases, carers/providers do not always open the child's bank account quickly enough, they may then be reluctant to 'backpay' the £10 per week and this is challenging for social workers to have oversight of, there have been instances where children/young people have moved to alternative carers or left care and not had their savings paid, leaving them with no money to support their transition to independence and the directorate has had to cover these funds as a resolution to the complaint from the young person.

2.4 There are also income tax implications for foster carers, who must pay the £10 per week from the maintenance fee already received and if we could eradicate this it will have a small benefit on carers payments, which may positively impact recruitment and retention of foster carers and reduce resistance to introducing this change.

2.5 The first phase of this proposed change of process will apply to all children and young people placed in "in house" foster care, Independent Fostering Agencies and Residential care home provision.

2.6 The second phase will review the savings provision for young people aged 16 – 18 years living in supported accommodation, following a challenge and a number of complaints from this age group of young people, who feel they are not treated equally to those in foster care. This will be a separate workstream and a review undertaken with a timescale for completion and recommendations delivered by September 2022.

3. Pocket Money and Savings Policy

3.1 0-13 weeks in care - carers/providers receive as part of the maintenance payment, £10 per week settling in fee per child/young person to account for initial costs and set up Bank Account in child/young person's name to encourage them to put aside a small amount of their pocket money, that they can access at any time. The child's social worker will complete the CIC Review Pre-Meeting Report to confirm this has been done, record Bank Account details on Liberi 'Record of child/young person's Bank Account, CTF/JISA' and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will check at Review (No change in policy).

3.2 From the child/young person's 14th week in care, £10 per week will be taken at source from the maintenance payment and be held in a Kent County Council Account, until either a Child Trust Fund or Junior ISA is identified by The Share Foundation, following a child/young person's 52 weeks in care.

3.3 Should the child/young person leave care before 52 weeks, the amount of savings held in the KCC Account will be paid into the Bank Account set up in the first 13 weeks by the carer/provider.

3.4 At 52 weeks, Management Information Team contact The Share Foundation to request that either a Junior ISA is set up, or the details of the Child Trust Fund are located (depending on the age of the child, as to whether they were eligible for the Child Trust Fund). The current government funded policy, pays £200 into their account with The Share Foundation, once the child has been in care for over 12 months.

3.5 The monies accrued in the KCC Account for those children/young people who have remained in care for 52 weeks will be paid into their JISA/CTF and £10 per week will continue to be paid into the JISA/CTF from the KCC Account every month for the period up until the care period ends.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 Cost benefit to KCC as the Directorate will not need to resolve complaints, by having to pay savings shortfall where carers/providers have not met the expectation of the policy.

5 Legal implications

5.1 None foreseen. The working group have taken advice from Internal Audit to ensure compliance around the holding of children's savings within a central KCC bank account. The sign off for the monthly transfer of money will be at Integrated Children's Services Director level.

6 Equalities implications and DPIA

6.1 An EQIA and DPIA have been completed.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:
This decision was considered at the meeting of the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 10 May 2022.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:
The alternative would be to continue with the current process and make no changes.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer: None

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signed date