

From: Matt Dunkley, CBE, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

Subject: Proposed Revision of Rates Payable and Charges Levied for Children's Services In 2020-21

Decision No: 20/00020

Classification: Unrestricted

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet Member decision

Electoral Division: All

Summary:

This paper sets out the proposed revision to the rates payable and charges levied for children's services within Kent for the 2020-21 financial year, in line with recommended changes to the Kent Fostering Policy.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services is asked to:

- (i) **AGREE** the proposed changes to the rates payable and charges levied for Children's Services in 2020-21 as detailed in section 2 of this report;
- (ii) **AGREE** the proposed changes to the Kent Fostering Payment Policy in 202-21 as detailed in section 3 of this report including changes to the Parent & Child Payment Policy;
- (iii) **NOTE** both the changes to the rates that are set by the Government/external agencies: Inter-agency charges and Essential Living Allowance and; any charges to other Local Authorities for use of in-house respite residential beds are to be calculated on a full cost recovery basis; and
- (iv) **DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, or other nominated officer, to undertake the necessary actions to implement the decision.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report is produced annually and seeks approval for the Council's proposed rates and charges levied for the forthcoming financial year.

- 1.2 The report distinguishes between these rates and charges over which Members can exercise their discretion and those which are set by the Government/external agencies.
- 1.3 In relation to those rates and charges where Members can exercise their discretion, we have traditionally increased these annually in line with either the annual CPI increase or more recently, when CPI has been so low, the average percentage increase for KCC pay performance. For 2020-21, we are proposing an inflationary increase of 2% (except in the case of the skills-based payment where CPI has historically been used), along with some targeted changes to individual rates, annual leave and criteria within the Fostering Payment Policy. The inflationary increase of 2% is slightly higher than the CPI increase between September 2018 and September 2019 of +1.7%, and we believe represents a fair and responsible percentage uplift when taken alongside the other changes in the Fostering Payment Policy, as set out in this paper. These changes form part of Kent Fostering's approach to improving the recruitment and retention of foster carers by enabling the service to provide a more competitive package in the carer's marketplace, along with expanding the service's ability to support a greater range of more complex fostering placements and avoiding more costly externally purchased placements.
- 1.3 In addition to updating the current payment structure, the Kent Fostering Service have also created an overarching payment policy document (Appendix 3) to sit alongside more detailed fostering policies. The plan would be to publish this alongside the annual Children's Rates and Charges Booklet. The aim is to have a clear and transparent fostering payments policy, to ensure that experienced foster carers that make enquiries to transfer to the Local Authority, have clear information to assist their decision and for Kent to attract more applications from Kent families.
- 1.4 The effective date for these proposed rate changes is 1 April 2020 and they will apply until 31 March 2021 or until a decision is taken to revise these rates further, whichever is sooner.
- 1.5 In relation to the proposed increases to the rates we pay, additional funding has been included within the Directorate's 2020-21 budget proposals, under the heading "Inflation - Children's Social Care" at just over £2.0m. This calculation includes an assumed uplift for all in-house fostering and associated payments.

2. Rates payable and charges levied for Children's Services

- 2.1 Appendix 1 provides a full list of all rates and charges proposed for 2020-21 compared to the approved 2019-20 rates and charges. The methodology for each proposed rate increase is outlined in Appendix 2. The remainder of this report summarises the additional changes to the Fostering Payment Policy.

3. Proposed Changes to the Fostering Payment Policy

- 3.1 There are three additional changes being proposed outside the normal inflationary increases and are summarised below:

- a) Parent & child policy and a new financial package for Foster Carers providing Parent and Child Fostering arrangements.
- b) Changes to the skills-based payment policy and changes to amount of annual leave received by Skilled and Advanced levels.
- c) Expansion of the single placement supplement to include both solo and complex placements.

3.2 Parent & Child Policy

The current policy for Parent and Child Placements has been updated (Appendix 4). This relates to those children where Kent County Council are directed by the court, to be placed in a Parent and Child fostering arrangement for a time limited period of assessment. This is primarily mothers and their child but occasionally a placement for a father and child is requested.

3.2.1 The key recommendations include the introduction of:

- a) An enhanced payment for complex parent and child fostering placements (equivalent to receiving an additional reward payment) where the child's care is being considered within the court arena and parents are presenting with additional needs such as mental health difficulty or substance misuse problems. This reflects the living costs of parent and child living as part of the fostering household, the additional complexities and assessment required in these types of arrangements and the knowledge, skills and expertise required of the carer(s), usually where a child's welfare and safety are being considered by the court.
- b) Two weeks holiday allowance at the end of each 12-week enhanced fostering arrangement over the standard two weeks that all KCC foster carers receive. This is to reflect the intensity and work of a 12-week placement and to enable foster carers to have a break, prior to their next planned Parent and Child placement.
- c) Increase the current offer of 6 hours day care per week, with an additional 2 hours, to provide 8 hours per week. This is to enable a foster carer to have a break or for their professional development to attend training and support groups. This reflects that Parent and Child placements usually require a very high level of supervision by the foster carer.

3.2.2 The policy has also been changed to more fairly recognise when a foster carers maintenance fee should be reduced when the parent receives benefits and lives with a foster carer. This has been limited to those foster carers receiving the enhanced rate. The reduction had historically been £70.00 per week but this has been increased to £73.10 equivalent to Income Support for a lone parent over the age of 18 years old.

3.3 Skills Based Payment Policy

Since 2003, Kent have paid foster carers an additional weekly payment known as Payment for Skills which was designed to recognise foster carers skills and experience through qualifications and a competency framework. The framework was implemented over 10 years ago and a review has recently been completed by Kent Fostering in conjunction with Kent Foster Carer Ambassadors, Fostering and Child in Care Team Managers, Service Managers and the Foster Carer Training Coordinator.

3.3.1 The current policy for Skills Based Payments has been updated (Appendix 5) and the key recommendations are:

- Retain the current structure of three skills level but change the name of the three levels from 1, 2, and 3 to Foundation, Skilled and Advanced Level. Payment amounts remain unchanged (except for the annual inflationary increase).
- Change the minimum requirement to recognise both the length of service of carers and experience of the carer rather than just their qualification status.
- Change the eligibility criteria so foster carers can start at any of the levels (dependent on eligibility) rather than having to start at level 1 (now called Foundation).
- Increase the number of annual leave days for skilled and advanced levels from 14 to 16 days annual leave.
- Simplify the evidence requirement for meeting wider contribution and practice.

3.3.2 The changes in criteria will enable Kent Fostering to be more competitive in the market and is designed to attract experienced foster carers to foster for the Local Authority. Currently, the framework does not allow experienced foster carers to transfer into the Local Authority at Level 2 or 3, and so they are often deterred from joining Kent Fostering. The proposed changes will reward carers with additional annual leave to reflect their years of service, skills and expertise; aiming to increase foster carer satisfaction, retention and recruitment. This would be in line with Kent County Councils policy of rewarding staff's length of service with additional days of annual leave.

3.4 Complex Placements

The single placement supplement (equivalent to receiving double the reward element plus the maintenance amount) is used in exceptional circumstances for our children and young people with the highest levels of need and/or risk-taking behaviours who require a placement on their own due to the risk they pose. The proposal is to expand the criteria to include young people on remand or stepping down from residential care and strengthen the current process to include the review of payments every 3 months. It is expected these changes will help to support the transition of children currently placed in residential care, back into a family.

4. Recommendation(s):

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(iii) **NOTE** both the changes to the rates that are set by the Government/external agencies: Inter-agency charges and Essential Living Allowance and; any charges to other Local Authorities for use of in-house respite residential beds are to be calculated on a full cost recovery basis; and

(iv) **DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, or other nominated officer, to undertake the necessary actions to implement the decision.

5. Background Documents

None

6. Contact details

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