

The Highland Council
Education, Children and Adult Services Committee
11 February 2015

Agenda Item	15.
Report No	ECAS 30/15

Fees for Foster and Adoptive Carers

Report by Director of Care and Learning

Summary

This report sets out the need to review the current payment structure for fees and allowances for foster carers.

1. Foster Carer Allowances

- 1.1 An age related allowance is paid to foster carers to meet the day to day cost of caring for each child placed with them.
- 1.2 It is expected that the Scottish Government will be implementing a national minimum allowance for foster carers in 2015/16 following the recommendations from the National Foster Care Review which concluded in 2013. It is believed that this national minimum rate will have various benefits, promoting consistency between local authorities which in turn would ensure equality across Scotland for fostered children.
- 1.3 The rates paid for Foster Carers allowance are also linked to the amount paid in Adoption, Residence and Kinship Allowances. As Highland pay lower allowances in comparison to some other local authorities, the national minimum rate when set, is likely to mean an increase will be required in the budget allocation.
- 1.4 It is not yet clear if additional funding will be made available to Local Authorities in order to implement this and as these minimum rates have not yet been set, it is intended that (for now) allowances paid to Highland Carers should remain the same for 2015/16.

2. Fees paid to Foster carers

- 2.1 In addition to the allowances paid for each child, foster care households get a weekly fee in recognition of the work they do.
- 2.2 Fees were introduced several years ago, in order to attract more carers and retain our current carers in response to the increasing number of independent fostering providers who were establishing a presence in the Highland area. There is increasing evidence of effective and active recruitment by these agencies, and this is a significant and growing challenge faced by the Service. This is standard practice in Councils across the country.
- 2.3 These fees have not been uplifted for inflation since April 2012
- 2.4 Foster carers are critical to the successful care of looked after children, and an increase in the fee level would encourage the recruitment and retention of carers,

particularly for older children and sibling groups. This is important, as foster care achieve better outcomes for looked after children, and represent best value for the Council. Many foster carers are finding it harder to fund the service they provide, and are leaving or reducing their availability, in order to seek employment elsewhere.

2.5 **Table 1** shows the current fees and the four categories of carers household that are paid in Highland.

- a) Where the eldest child placed is under 13 years of age
- b) Where the eldest child placed is over 13 years of age
- c) Positive partnership (where up to four children are matched for respite)
- d) Specialist Carers

Table 1

Category of carer	Eldest child placed <13 years	Eldest child placed >13 years	Positive Partners	Specialist Carers
Amount per household per week	£129.00	£172.00	62.00 (per child)	412.40

2.6 Table 2 shows that the increase in cost of applying a 4% uplift to foster care fees is £36,075.17.

Table 2

	Over 13	Under13	Positive Partner	Specialist Carer	Cost Per Week	Cost Per Year	Increase in Cost per Year
current fee per week	172.00	129.00	62.00	412.40			
currently paid to household per year	8,944.00	6,708.00	3,224.00	21,444.80			
average cost per week to service	6,158.92	6,688.15	310.00	4,187.45	17,344.52	901,915.20	
increase 4%	178.88	134.16	64.48	428.90			
increase per week to household	6.88	5.16	2.48	16.50			
increase per year to household	357.76	268.32	128.96	857.79			
paid to household per year	9,301.76	6,976.32	3,352.96	22,302.59			
average cost per week to service	6,405.69	6,956.20	322.40	4,353.29	18,037.58	937,954.33	36,075.17

3. Implications

3.1 **Resources:** A 4% increase in fees would cost an additional £36,075.17, and could be funded from the 2015/16 budget pressures allocation to children's services.

3.2 There are no legal, equalities, climate change/carbon clever, risk, rural or Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4. Recommendation

4.1 Members are asked to agree:

- No increase in allowances at this time, as it is expected this matter will be addressed in an imminent announcement by the Scottish Government;
- An increase of 2% in fees for carers, funded from the allocated 2015/16 budget pressure for looked after children.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Author: Alison Gordon, Resource Manager, Fostering and Adoption

Date: 2 February 2015