

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel – 16th January 2019
SUBJECT:	Fostering Allowances Review
LEAD OFFICER:	Robert Henderson, Executive Director for Children, Families and Education Executive Director Nick Pendry, Director of Early Help and Children’s Social Care / Wendy Tomlinson, Head of Corporate Parenting
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming, Lead Member for Children
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:	
<p>In accordance with the Corporate Plan that: Our children and young people thrive and reach their full potential, the council stated that we will ‘champion the interests of children and young people in our care and support care leavers into successful young adulthood’. In order to support our children in care, we must support our foster carers and have clear expectations of them, coupled with remuneration that is competitive and recognises the value of the work they do.</p>	
FINANCIAL IMPACT:	
<p>Local benchmarking has been undertaken which has examined the foster carer payment schedules of 7 other London Boroughs. Financial mapping of current payments to Croydon carers and the options going forward will require significant growth in order to meet market changes and to become competitive.</p>	
KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.:	
1. RECOMMENDATIONS	
<p>A review of current Fostering Allowances is underway. Panel are requested to agree that a proposal document be brought to the next meeting.</p>	

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Fostering Allowances have not been increased in Croydon since 2014. It is common practice in most London Boroughs and Independent Fostering Agencies to agree an annual uplift in line with inflation. In order to align Croydon Fostering Allowances to respected competitors, a review is necessary. The Panel will be aware that a new provider is currently recruiting foster carers for Croydon, with an expectation that allowances will be reviewed before those carers are approved. The Corporate Parenting Panel have had sight of the Sufficiency Plan, set out to understand and meet Croydon’s duties to our Looked After Children under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. We recognise there is a need for developing carers who can care for children and young people who have some of the most challenging needs.

3. DETAIL

- 3.1 Given that Croydon's Fostering Allowances have not been reviewed or uplifted since 2014, it has been deemed necessary to undertake some benchmarking and consultation in order to develop a new payments schedule. Most Local Authority's make differential payments based on the age of the child. Croydon is similar in this respect. Additionally there are payments for carers who are available to take children in an emergency, usually out of business hours, and these are paid a small retainer for the service. Other specialist payments exist, such as for foster carers who take care of Looked After Children who are parents themselves.
- 3.2 Where Croydon differs from more common practice is in the payments to carers who are required to care for children who have additional needs or present additional challenges. In Croydon, those payments are paid based on the needs of the child and have often been agreed as a way of compensating the carer for the additional challenges that exist in taking care of Looked After Children with greater than average needs.
- 3.3 More common practice, is to pay those carers based on the skills of the carer, regardless of the needs of the child. This of course requires careful matching by placing social workers to ensure that these carers do in fact take care of children who require their level of expertise. Examples abound but include older children who are at risk from a number of 'contextual' safeguarding issues, such as exploitation, including sexual exploitation, involvement in dealing illegal drugs, gang affiliation and carrying and using weapons or other violence.
- 3.4 Paying carers based on skills, requires careful definition of required skills and other expectations, plus assessment and tracking of those skills as well as regular input to ensure such skills stay current. This is being considered as part of the review and to inform the new provider about expectations. While difficult to measure at this stage, it is also hoped that one outcome will be that more of Croydon's Looked After Children can live with Croydon Foster Carers, inevitably closer to home and overall, at better value for money.
- 3.5 Changes have already been made and are being finalised to remove the responsibility for children and young people's savings from individual foster carers, and return it to the Council so that tracking entitlements for young people is simpler and financially safer. This will have an impact on what carers are paid.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 A working group is exploring options. Included are Fostering Service staff, colleagues from Commissioning and Improvement and accountancy staff from the Council's finance department. Very importantly, two foster carers from the Croydon Foster Carers Association have contributed thus far to the review.

5 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 To be confirmed in forthcoming report.

6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

6.1 None at this stage.

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

7.1 None likely, given that Foster Carers are not council employees.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1 It is intended that changes will align Croydon's foster carers to their counterparts in other South London Boroughs and will afford clarity to the allowance schedule and expectations.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

9.1 Not applicable

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

10.1 Not applicable.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

11.1 That the Panel agree to consider a report at the next meeting.

The Fostering Handbook will be appended to the review and recommendations report for next Panel.

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APPENDICES: None