

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT

Social Work Committee :	Subject : Proposed Review of Fostering Allowance Payments
From : Jim Dickie, Director of Social Work Prepared by : Cheryl Moran, Senior Child Care Officer	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to advise Committee of the outcome of the review of the Fostering Allowance Scheme in operation in North Lanarkshire and to request approval of the revised scheme which will rationalise the payment of allowances for all children being looked after and accommodated in foster care by North Lanarkshire Council.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 There are currently 120 children, aged between 0 - 18 years, accommodated in foster care in North Lanarkshire.

2.2 There are 30 current temporary foster carers and 8 permanent foster carers. 15 permanent foster carers who have children placed from North Lanarkshire are resident in other authorities.

2.3 There are 20 children from North Lanarkshire placed with community foster carers. 16 of these children are placed outwith North Lanarkshire.

2.4 Fostering payments currently paid in North Lanarkshire follow the pattern of the previous authority's schemes.

- Standard Fostering Allowance (COSLA agreed rates)
- Standard Fostering Allowance plus a fee (currently £119.00 per week per child) paid to community foster carers for children aged over twelve years.
- Enhanced allowances of up to 100% of the standard fostering rate can be paid where additional costs are incurred because of the difficulties in caring for an individual child or where a sibling group of three or more children are accommodated by the same carer. The criteria for the payment of enhanced allowances is complicated and difficult to understand for both carers and professional staff and has resulted in an inequitable system of payment throughout the authority.

2.5 Discretionary payments are currently used to meet additional financial costs such as the provision of equipment, replacement clothing due to heavy wear and tear and transport costs related to the child's placement.

- 2.6 The current scheme is complex to administer and enhancements are subject to review. It is also difficult to ensure consistency of response to individual needs across the whole area of the authority.
- 2.7 The system for the approval of enhancements can lead to the stigmatisation of certain children whose particular circumstances are the known factor in the application and review of enhanced allowances. (For example children who are enuretic).
- 2.8 The National Foster Care Association have recently issued a consultation paper which looked both at National Standards for foster care and the different methods of paying carers for the tasks which they undertake.

A draft report to ADSW Children & Families Committee emphasizes as two of its principles that foster carers should receive realistic allowances which reflect what it costs to care for a foster child and that foster carers should be properly rewarded for the job which they do and the skills which they possess as part of a paid skills based service.

- 2.9 Every local authority in Scotland is being asked to consider the draft consultation document and most local authorities have already been reviewing the services and the allowances paid. Some already have introduced new practices with South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire, West Lothian, Fife and South Lanarkshire all now giving greater standardised financial remuneration to foster carers as a matter of course based on these same principles.

3. THE PROPOSED FOSTERING ALLOWANCE SCHEME

- 3.1 In the last few months extensive consultation has taken place with foster carers and staff on both the NFCA proposals and North Lanarkshire's proposals. Both carers and staff wanted a standardised allowance scheme which recognised the skills now needed by carers to care for needy children in complex child care cases.
- 3.2 The majority of carers and staff have opted at present to have a scheme which increases the allowance rather than be paid a fee. This would ensure that those on income support or other benefits would not lose out in terms of their remuneration but would achieve the same aims in attracting carers for children over 12 years.
- 3.3 The proposed scheme would increase the fostering allowance payable to foster carers for children up to the age of 12 years by 50% and for children over the age of 12 years by 100% and would almost entirely eliminate the payment of discretionary enhancements.
- 3.4 The scheme recognises that the current system of payments to foster carers which includes enhancements of the standard rate based on an assessment of the needs of particular children is no longer an appropriate model. It further recognises that all children who are accommodated have special needs due to background factors, current circumstances and removal from their family environment.
- 3.5 The scheme would replace the existing scheme by providing an equitable system of the payment of allowances for all children in North Lanarkshire.
- 3.6 The scheme will encourage more potential carers to come forward through the recruitment campaigns and in particular, those who might not be in a financial position to consider fostering, e.g. single parents and low income families.

- 3.7 Foster carers will be expected to attend certain specified training events to develop their skills in caring for children. Such training will be mandatory and will be part of the Foster Carers Agreement.
- 3.8 It is anticipated that the scheme will increase the number of foster carers for teenagers, large sibling groups and children with physical and learning disability where there are currently gaps identified in the resources available.
- 3.9 The scheme will make provision for the payment of discretionary allowances only in the following circumstances -
- Where a child requires certain items of clothing on being accommodated.
 - Annual payment of £50.00 for each foster carer towards the cost of telephone expenses.
 - Essential traveling expenses in relation to the child in placement and to training events.
 - Babysitting/childminding fees where the foster carer is required to attend meetings and training events.
 - Any situation which demands the carers are required to have specific skills or training to meet the exceptional needs of a child with severe disability.

3.10 **Special One Off Payments Over £5,000**

In special circumstances the scheme may give consideration to assisting with special one off payments to foster carers. Examples of where this might be considered would include:

- A contribution to a large family vehicle where a sibling group is placed together or where the placement of an additional child or children with the carers means that safety standards are not being met
- Assistance with moving to suitable accommodation or extending existing property to provide suitable accommodation for foster children. This may be required in cases where the existing accommodation is not large enough to accommodate children placed or where the accommodation does not meet the needs of a child with disability
- Where the costs of these individual payments exceeds £5,000 it is proposed that a Committee report be prepared and presented to Committee for their consideration on the individual circumstances of the case. Below this amount it is proposed the Director of Social Work be responsible for the approval of such payments.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The increased costs will be met from the £100,000 set aside in the 1999/2000 service enhancements budget. The Revenue estimates 1999/2000 report was presented to committee by the Director of Finance and was approved by Committee on 24th February, 1999.

5. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant staffing implications for the implementation of this scheme.

6. SUMMARY

- 6.1 The proposed scheme will rationalise and standardise the payment of fostering allowances and special one off payments throughout North Lanarkshire Council.
- 6.2 The removal of criteria for the payment of enhanced allowances will simplify the payment of fostering allowances to all children accommodated away from home who by definition will require high levels of support to meet their needs.
- 6.3 The proposed scheme will potentially increase the number of carers who otherwise might not be in a financial position to consider fostering, e.g.
- single parents
 - low income families.
- 6.4 Teenagers and large sibling groups will benefit from the resources which it is anticipated the scheme will attract.
- 6.5 The implementation of the new scheme would take effect from 1st April, 1999.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee -

- (i) Approve the proposed new fostering allowances scheme for all children and young people in North Lanarkshire.
- (ii) Agree that requests for special one off payments of over £5,000 to meet exceptional needs are presented to Committee for their consideration


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 DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK
 7TH JULY, 1998.

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