
REPORT OF THE SOCIAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TO THE CABINET
ON
1st MAY, 2001

TITLE: PAYMENTS TO FOSTER CARERS

RECOMMENDATIONS: THAT the report be noted

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The report identifies concerns of the Social Scrutiny Committee in regard to the current system of payment to foster carers and sets out its support for an alternative approach

BACK GROUND DOCUMENTS

(Available for public inspection)

Reports to Social Scrutiny Committee at their meetings held on
11th October, 2000 – Minute No 23
13th December, 2000 – Minute No 37
14th March, 2001 – Minute No 71

CONTACT OFFICER: Joe Giblin – 793 2560

WARD(S) TO WHICH REPORT RELATE(S) ALL WARDS

KEY COUNCIL POLICIES:

ALLOWANCES PAID TO FOSTER CARERS

REPORT DETAILS

Cabinet last week agreed to an above inflation increase in foster carer allowances which was in part fulfilment of the intention (within the funding available) to increase foster care rates towards the National Foster Care Association rates. That proposal followed a series of three Lead Member reports requested by Social Scrutiny Committee on foster carer allowances. These were discussed between October 2000 and February 2001 and highlighted some concerns in relation to the system currently used to calculate those allowances including that:

The system of discretionary contract payments used in Salford was cumbersome to administer and no longer fulfilled its original purpose.

As foster care was now recognised as the best option for caring for young people who were not able to live with their family, foster carers could no longer be regarded as volunteers.

Although any change to the current system of allowances would give rise to additional expenditure, the cost of foster care remained low in comparison to residential payments.

Following a request from the Committee, tables were prepared (see appendix) that showed actual payments paid to each of twelve foster carers by Salford together with National Foster Care Association (NFCA) minimum and recommended rates and the allowances currently paid by Manchester City Council. Those tables clearly illustrated a number of difficulties including:

Some foster carers received basic fostering allowances only and never requested additional contract payments. Some concern was expressed that not all foster carers might be aware of their entitlement to further contract payments.

Additional contract payments were made as an incentive for the foster carers to agree further placements.

There was no clear pattern of payments made by Salford in comparison with NFCA or Manchester rates.

Most importantly, the table showed that moving away from a discretionary system of contract payments towards one which includes in the basic allowance an additional standard sum to cover fostering expenses is less of a financial hurdle than was previously thought. As a consequence, the timescale for that preferred approach to be implemented has been potentially accelerated.

Cabinet will be aware that Community & Social Services Directorate (CSSD) have already agreed to the proposals set out in the recommendations below to revise the system of payments to foster carers and intend to bring forward details of those revisions later this year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet be advised of Social Scrutiny Committee's support for the following proposals to revise the system of payments to foster carers:

To raise the basic allowances paid to foster carers to a level which reflect the real cost of looking after a foster child.

To reduce the number of discretionary payments to foster carers and establish a reward system that is based upon paying carers for the skills they bring to fostering.

Examples of allowance payments

Foster carer 1

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 0	52.71	--	59.85	89.76	84.42
	Total payment 52.71		Total payment 59.85	Total payment 89.76	Total payment 84.42

This foster carer receives basic fostering allowance only.

Foster carer 2

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 8	57.75	68.88	74.34	111.48	104.86
Child 2 aged 7	52.71	--	74.34	111.48	104.86
Child 3 aged 5	52.71	68.88	74.34	111.48	84.82
Child 4 aged 4	52.71	--	59.85	89.76	84.82
Child 5 aged 2	52.71	103.32	59.85	89.76	84.42
Total	268.59	221.08	342.72	513.96	463.78
	Total payment 509.67		Total payment 342.72	Total payment 513.96	Total payment 463.78

Contract payment for child 5 is made to enable the foster carers to pay for domestic help due to the demands of caring for so many young children. Contract payments for child 1 and child 3 were agreed when these children returned to the placement after an unsuccessful return home in recognition of the difficulties this caused, and the fact that the foster carers would be looking after 5 children.

Foster carer 3

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 5	52.71	--	74.34	111.48	84.42
Child 2 aged 4	52.71	--	59.85	89.76	84.42
Child 3 aged 2	52.71	34.44	59.85	89.76	84.82
Total	158.13	34.44	194.04	291.00	253.66
	Total payment 192.57		Total payment 194.04	Total payment 291.00	Total payment 253.66

Contract payment for child 3 is made due to her difficult and demanding behaviour including excessive aggression towards other children.

Foster carer 4

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 13	68.04	68.88	92.47	138.68	181.72
Child 2 aged 11	63.00	68.88	92.47	138.68	133.35
Child 3 aged 5	52.71	103.32	74.34	111.48	84.82
Total	183.75	241.08	259.28	388.84	399.89
	Total payment 424.83		Total payment 259.28	Total payment 388.84	Total payment 399.89

Contract payment is made for child 1 as the result of her difficult family circumstances and behaviour. Contract payment for child 2 is made due to her behaviour resulting from sexual abuse. Contract payment for child 3 was made because the foster carers agreed to take him as an additional placement above the number of children they were approved for, necessitating their own son sharing his bedroom. This allowed us to avoid using an Independent Fostering Agency placement costing £600 per week.

Foster carer 5

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 13	68.04	--	92.47	138.68	181.72
Child 2 aged 8	63.00	34.44	74.34	111.48	104.86
Total	183.75	34.44	166.81	250.16	286.58
	Total payment 160.23		Total payment 166.81	Total payment 250.16	Total payment 286.58

Contract payment was agreed when child 2 was placed outside the foster carers' approval remit as long term carers for one child, and they had to reorganise their bedrooms.

Foster carer 6

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 17	90.51	--	119.77	179.64	202.93
	Total payment 90.51		Total payment 119.77	Total payment 179.64	Total payment 202.93

This foster carer receives basic allowances only. This is a long term placement but the young person has presented substantial difficulties including drug abuse and identity problems.

Foster carer 7

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 13	68.04	--	92.47	138.68	181.72
Child 2 aged 7	52.71	103.32	74.34	111.48	84.82
Child 3 aged 6	52.71	103.32	74.34	111.48	84.82
Child 4 aged 2	52.71	34.44	59.85	89.76	84.82
Total	226.17	241.08	301.00	451.40	436.18
	Total payment 467.25		Total payment 301.00	Total payment 451.40	Total payment 436.18

Contract payment for child 2 and child 3 was agreed as an incentive for the foster carer to agree to the placement and avoid using an Independent Fostering Agency or residential placement at higher cost. Contract payment for child 4 is paid as the result of recent concerns about her health, which require continued monitoring.

Foster carer 8

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 8	57.75	--	74.34	111.48	104.86
Child 2 aged 5	52.71	--	59.85	111.48	84.82
Child 3 aged 4	52.71	--	59.85	89.76	84.82
Child 4 aged 2	52.71	--	59.85	89.76	84.82
Total	215.88	--	253.89	402.48	359.32
	Total payment 215.88		Total payment 253.89	Total payment 402.48	Total payment 359.32

This foster carer receives basic allowances only despite taking children outside their approval remit as long term foster carers for 2 children, as contract payments have never been requested.

Foster carer 9

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 16	90.51	103.32	119.77	179.64	202.93
Child 2 aged 14	68.04	34.44	92.47	138.68	181.72
Total	158.55	137.76	212.24	318.32	384.65
	Total payment 296.31		Total payment 212.24	Total payment 318.32	Total payment 384.65

Contract payments for both young people are made due to their difficult behaviour. However, at the present time child 2 presents the greatest degree of difficulty despite the lower level of payment.

Foster carer 10

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 14	68.04	103.32	92.47	138.68	181.72
	Total payment 171.36		Total payment 92.47	Total payment 138.68	Total payment 181.72

Child 1 presented behavioural difficulties when first placed some years ago. He now presents few problems but the foster carer has made it clear that she would not feel able to keep him if the contract payment does not continue, as she would be unable to provide for him on an equal basis with her own family, given the family lifestyle.

Foster carer 11

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 7	52.71	--	74.34	111.48	84.82
Child 2 aged 1	52.71	--	59.85	89.76	84.42
Total	105.42	--	134.19	201.24	169.24
	Total payment 105.42		Total payment 134.19	Total payment 201.24	Total payment 169.24

This foster carer receives basic allowances only. Child 1 has attachment problems and is extremely difficult to care for. She was identified as in need of adoption some years ago but because of the problems she presents and her difficult background, despite extensive efforts, no adoptive placement was found. Contract payments are not made because the foster carer is a single parent and a childminder and the receipt of any reward payments would affect her benefits.

Foster carer 12

	Salford 2000		NFCA Minimum 2000	NFCA Recommended 2000	Manchester 2000
	Basic Allowance	Contract Payment			
Child 1 aged 13	68.04	103.32	92.47	138.68	181.72
Child 2 aged 8	57.75	103.32	74.34	111.48	104.86
Child 3 aged 2	52.71	--	59.85	89.76	84.42
Total	178.50	206.64	226.66	339.92	412.58
	Total payment 385.14		Total payment 226.66	Total payment 339.92	Total payment 412.58

Contract payment for child 1 is made because of the skilled care she needs due to her difficult behaviour, including sexualised behaviour. Contract payment for child 2 is made because he has learning difficulties. The foster carer also needs the skill and sensitivity to deal with child 2's racial needs, as this is a trans-racial placement.