

Report of the Strategic Director Children's Services to the meeting of Executive to be held on 7 June 2022

Subject:

A

Fostering Fees for Bradford Foster Carers

Summary statement:

This report outlines proposals regarding fostering fees paid to foster carers. The report details proposals for changes to the schedule of allowances for foster carers approved by City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council. These revisions will ensure equality and fairness across all approved foster carers, competitive rates of remuneration for recruitment and retention of carers and a clear process for progression through the skill levels. We have ensured that no existing foster carer will experience financial loss as a result of these proposals. A draft Policy is annexed to this Report.

Recommendations

The Executive is invited to:

- (1) Note this Report and to approve the implementation of the scheme, set out in the annexed Foster Carer Payments Policy, with immediate effect; and
- (2) Authorise the Strategic Director of Children's Services to receive and, in consultation with the Foster Carer Association, consider feedback on the Policy quarterly during the first 12 months of its operation, and to decide in the light thereof, together with any other considerations including equality impact assessment, whether to continue operation of the Policy in its current form or refer it back to the Executive for further consideration and modification.

Marium Haque
Strategic Director Children's Services

Portfolio:

Children and Families

Report Contact: John Heron
Phone: (01274) 43
E-mail: john.heron@bradford.gov.uk

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This paper makes five proposals regarding the professional fees paid to foster carers.
- 1.2 The first regards the payment of 'Professional Fees' to Family and Friend foster carers.
- 1.3 The second concerns the introduction of an 'Entry Level' foster carers professional fee payment to be paid to all newly approved foster carers.
- 1.4 The third proposal is to introduce a standard process for foster carers wishing to progress through the professional fee levels.
- 1.5 The fourth proposal is to recommend the development of a 'specialist fostering' skills level 4 in order to provide robust and tenacious foster homes for children with complex needs.
- 1.6 The fifth proposal regards the application of a 'no financial detriment' policy for foster carers wishing to provide care under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Staying Put arrangement.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 One of the most important jobs any local authority does is to look after children and young people who are not able to be cared for safely within their immediate birth family. For many children and young people in this situation this will mean that they will live with a foster family who they did not know before they were cared for by the local authority. For others, this will mean that arrangements are made by the local authority for them to live with extended family members, friends or other people they do already know. In these circumstances these people will be approved as local authority 'family and friends' foster carers.
- 2.2 Of the 1389 children and young people that were in care on the 30th November 2021, 916 were living with foster carers. Of these, 370 were living with mainstream in-house foster carers, 371 were living with family and friends (connected Person's) foster carers and 175 were living with foster families commissioned from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's).

Foster Carer Type	Number of Children Placed
Mainstream	370
Family or Friends	371
IFA	175
Total	916

Number of children and young people living with foster carers (Nov 2021)

- 2.3 In order to provide foster care that is safe, secure and robust, foster carers require support. This report considers the financial support given to Bradford Council Foster Carers and makes recommendations to improve this support while remaining competitive in the market.
- 2.4 In line with most other local authority fostering services Bradford Council foster carer payments are made up of two separate elements, the 'maintenance allowance' and a 'professional fee' (also known as a 'payment for skills fee').

2.5 Maintenance Allowance

- 2.5.1 The maintenance allowance is the amount paid to all foster carers to cover the day-to-day expense of looking after a child in care. The amount paid by fostering agencies for this element of the foster carer's payment package is guided by the DfE who annually publish guidance on what the 'minimum weekly maintenance allowance' should be. DfE rates take in to account the cost of living in three different areas of the country, London, the South East and the rest of the country. Bradford identifies with 'the rest of the country'. Maintenance allowance payments are graduated depending on the age of the child. Please see the table below.

Bradford Council/DfE recommended weekly allowance	Age 0 -4	Age 5 - 10	Age 11 -15	Age 16 -17
	£138	£152	£173	£202

Weekly Maintenance Allowances 2021/22

2.6 Professional Fees

- 2.6.1 The second element to make up the foster carer's payment package is the professional fee. This is often referred to as the 'skills payment' and is paid to recognise the foster carers time, skills, training and experience.
- 2.6.2 In Bradford professional fees are paid in three main 'skills levels'. Unlike the DfE recommended maintenance allowance rates, skills payments are not paid dependent on the age of the child. They are paid across the age bands. The full fee is paid for the first child and an extra 50% is paid for subsequent children. Please see the table below for the current fees paid by Bradford.

Weekly Fostering Carer Fee Rates			
Level	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Level 1	£144.16	£216.24	£288.32
Level 2	£204.20	£306.30	£408.40
Level 3	£290.72	£436.08	£581.44
Level 4	£468.47	Complex and Specialist Placements	

- 2.6.3 A fourth skill level currently exists and is paid only to a very small number of foster carers, (5). These payments are being paid to Mockingbird Hub carers, a PACE Carer, carers from a previous scheme and to carers where these payments have been negotiated for specific children.
- 2.6.4 Although all mainstream foster carers receive a professional fee, these payments have not routinely been made to Bradford's Family and Friend foster carers. The table below shows the number and type of foster carers paid at each level.

Skills Level	Mainstream Foster Carers	Family and Friend Foster Carers
Level 0	0	176 (including temporary approved - reg 24)
Level 1	40	53
Level 2	34	8
Level 3	172	3
Level 4	5	0

Number of Foster Carers within each skills level at November 2021.

2.7 Additional Allowances

2.7.4 Foster carers receive additional financial support. This includes;

- Birthday, holiday and religious festival payments equal to 4 x the weekly fostering maintenance allowance per annum. The amount paid is dependent on the age of the child.
- Up to 4 weeks per annum skills payments for respite.
- Up to 12 weeks paid retainer set at the foster carers skills fee level once a child has left the fostering household. However, if no children are placed within the first 6-week period the retainer is reduced by 50%. If no child is placed within a further 6-week period, the retainer payment is ceased.
- Exceptional travel expenses
- Discretionary payments i.e., school uniform and initial clothing allowances. School trips etc.

2.8 Regional Comparisons

2.8.1 Compared to our regional neighbours of Leeds, Kirklees, Calderdale and Wakefield, Bradford has the most generous financial support offer for foster carers. Please see the tables below showing the skills payments paid by these local authorities.

Leeds					Kirklees				
Level	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	4 Children	Level	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	4 Children
1	No Fee				1	£100	£160	£220	£280
2	£122.41	£122.41	£183.61	£244.81	2	£125	£185	£245	£305
3	£173.42	£173.42	£260.12	£346.83	3	£175	£235	£295	£355
4	£224.42	£224.42	£336.63	£448.84	4	£225	£285	£345	£405

Wakefield					Calderdale				
Level	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	4 Children	Level	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	4 Children
1	£50 entry level				1	No Fee Payment for the first 6 months for a new carer			
2	£125	£175	£200	£225	2	£138.74			
3	£225	£300	£350	£400	3	£227.76			
4	By Application & Assessment				4	£386.54			

2.9 Areas for Improvement

2.9.1 Notwithstanding the above, there are some areas regarding Bradford Councils financial support offer to foster carers which need further attention. In particular, this report considers:

- a) Financial support offered to Family and Friend foster carers.
- b) The payment of a new Entry Level professional fee for all newly approved foster carers.
- c) The process by which foster carers can progress through the skills levels
- d) The development of the Specialist Foster Carers level 4.
- e) Payment to Special Guardianship Carers

2.9.2 We need a foster Carer Financial Support Package that is:

- Compliant with Legislation and Guidance
- Fair and equitable for all Bradford foster carers
- Easy to understand and explain
- Attractive and competitive within the fostering market place in order to attract new carers and retain existing carers

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 A) Payment of Professional Fees to Family and Friend Foster Carers

- 3.1.1 The “professional” expectations in respect of foster carers applies equally to all, irrespective of the type of foster care being provided, i.e., mainstream, long-term, short-term, short breaks family and friends etc. Foster carers are expected to work closely with the Child’s Social Worker to ensure the care plan for the child is being delivered. This will involve the child’s social worker making regular visits to the foster home. The foster carers are required to attend care planning and review meetings, statutory medical assessments, liaise with school, Personal Education Planning (PEP) meetings etc. and where appropriate facilitate ‘family time’ (contact). In addition, all the foster carers are allocated their own Supervising Social Worker and this entails attendance at a range of other professional meetings, e.g., supervision meetings, training and development meetings, support groups etc. All foster carers, including those temporarily approved under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 are expected to undertake the same level of daily recording and reporting.
- 3.1.2 This being the case, Fostering National Minimum Standards (England) 2011, the Statutory Guidance, Volume 4 Children Act 1989 (5.57) and Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, state that foster carers should be treated on an equitable basis specifically in terms of fostering payments. This is further underlined by various court judgements, e.g. R (L) v Manchester City Council [2002] 1 FLR 43, and R (X) v London Borough of Tower Hamlets [2013] EWHC 480; [2013] EWCA Civ 904).
- 3.1.3 Bradford’s foster carers current payment system is not consistently applied and to date there has been a lack of clarity regarding the payment of professional fees to Family or Friend foster carers, and this lack of consistency has led to dissatisfaction amongst some foster carers.
- 3.1.4 It is not the case that no family and friend foster carers are paid a professional skills based fee. As at December 2021, there were 80 Family and Friend fostering households who did receive a professional fee.
- 3.1.5 Of the 80 households mentioned, there are: 61 family and friend fostering households (caring for 99 children) that are being paid level 1 fees; 7 family and friends foster carers (caring for 11 children) being paid level 2 fees; and 5 Family and friend foster carers (caring for 8 children) being paid level 3 fees. The current annual budget for family and friends foster carers professional fees is set at £242,800.00. However, the current cost of the 80 family and friends fostering skills fee is £793,534.56, a budget pressure of £550,733.68pa. If the remaining Family

and Friends fostering households were also paid level 1 fees, that budget pressure would rise by a further £1,682,923.84 per annum.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

Finance aspects as covered in the report.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

The current position places the Council in at a level of risk in relation to both foster carer dissatisfaction, and legal action. The proposed course of action will operate to significantly reduce that level of risk for the future.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

It is clear that the Council must operate within the legal framework of legislation, guidance and established case law. The proposed policy changes would ensure that the Council's future legal risk is minimised, and will provide a sound policy footing for future work, whilst also ensuring the Council remains both fair and competitive in relation to foster care payments. Legal advice, including advice from Counsel, has been given to officers in the preparation of this Report and the accompanying draft Policy.

7.5 TRADE UNION

Consultation with Trade Unions will take place as appropriate.

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific ward implications arising from this report.

7.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

These proposals are of critical importance from the perspective of our responsibilities as a corporate parent. We need to be able to provide a breadth and depth of local placement options for our looked after children and this is best served by developing our in-house fostering capacity.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

8.1 None.

9. OPTIONS

9.1 This report details proposals for changes to the schedule of allowances for foster carers approved by City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council. These revisions will ensure compliance with legislation and guidance, equity across all approved foster carers, competitive rates of remuneration for recruitment and retention of carers and a clear process for progression through the skill levels. The proposals also provide encouragement and support to foster carers wishing to provide care through an SGO. We have ensured that no existing foster carer will experience

financial loss as a result of these proposals.

9.2 Proposal 1: Payment of Professional Fees to Family and Friend Foster Carers

It is Proposed that;

9.2.3 Bradford Council puts in place a foster carer payments policy which is compliant with Legislation and Guidance and does not discriminate between non-related and related foster carers.

9.2.4 Bradford Council immediately commences making the appropriate level of professional fee payments to all existing Family and Friend foster carers who do not receive such payments and 'Entry Level Fees' (please see proposal B below) to all newly approved foster carers approved after the implementation date of the policy in line with Mainstream fostering going forward. This will ensure Bradford is fully compliant with Legislation and Guidance.

9.3 **B). £100.00 'Entry Level' skills fee payment for all new Foster Carers.**

9.3.1 Bradford currently pays considerably higher professional fees to Mainstream and some Family and Friends foster carers than other LAs in the sub-region. For example, the comparative fee for Level 1 foster carers is as follows:

Comparative table showing Level 1 payments by authority

Authority	One Child	Two Children	Three Children
Bradford	£144.16	£211.98	£282.64
Calderdale	No Fee Payment for first 6 month for a new carer		
Kirklees	£100	£160	£220
Leeds	No Fee Payment for Level 1 Carer		
Wakefield	£50 Fee Payment for Level 1 Carer		

9.3.2 In order to mitigate some of the cost of paying professional fees to all foster carers, a new 'Entry Level' fee should be introduced. Under this scheme new foster carers would be recruited at an Entry Level professional fee of £100 per week, saving £44.16 (31%) against the current Level 1 payment.

9.3.3 Even with the introduction of a £100.00 'Entry Level' payment in Bradford we will remain the highest payer in the region in relation to initial skills fee payments. Only Kirklees will match our initial skills payment. Our payments at all other levels would remain significantly higher than our local authority peers. Our Level 1 payment will remain higher than our neighbouring authorities Level 2 payments. The impact on our ability to recruit and retain foster carers should be unaffected. (Please see the table below and the regional comparison table on page 3 above).

Bradford			
Level	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Entry Level	£100.00	£150.00	£200.00
1	£144.16	£216.24	£288.32
2	£204.20	£306.30	£408.40

3	£290.72	£436.08	£581.44
4	£468.47	Complex & Specialist Placements	

9.3.4 The entry level fee of £100.00 per week will be applied to all newly approved foster carers from the date of implementation of the policy. However, if the prospective foster carer is able to demonstrate additional skills and/or related experience against certain criteria as set out in the skills progression process below they would be eligible to be appointed at a higher skills level. Such applicants may include Children’s Residential Workers, Teachers, Therapists or foster carers transferring from an Independent Fostering Agency.

9.3.5 The introduction of a new fees level and calling it ‘Entry Level’ differentiates the new payment and avoids two different payment rates being called level 1. It also maintains and protects the current fee for those family and friend’s carers who are already in receipt of level 1 fees.

9.3.6 All Bradford foster carers who are not currently in receipt of a weekly skills payment would start to receive it. These foster carers would experience an increase in their weekly household income of at least £144.16 per week.

9.3.7 No foster carers will experience a reduction in their household income.

9.3.8 The routine introduction of the £100pw skills payment is likely to encourage more family members and friends to become carers for children within their family or friends network thus reducing pressure on mainstream foster placements and carrying an obvious benefit for the children concerned.

9.3.9 Foster carers will be encouraged to take up training and development opportunities in order to enhance their knowledge and fostering skills in order to move up through the skills levels.

9.4 Proposal 2: Introduction of Entry Level Professional Fee Payments

9.4.1 It is proposed that a new Entry Level Professional Fee is introduced as described above. This will be set at £100 per week for all new foster carers including Mainstream and Family and Friend foster carers. This represents a 31% per week saving against the current Level 1 payment. Set at this level, Bradford’s Fostering Service remains highly competitive within the West Yorkshire region. It is also compliant with the Legislation and Government Guidance.

9.5 **C). Foster carers Skills Progression Procedure.**

9.5.1 Like most local authorities Bradford has a fostering payment for skills scheme, (otherwise known as professional fee payments). The advantages of such schemes are that foster carers are incentivised to undertake training and develop their experience, which enables the fostering service to match children and young people with differing levels of need with well trained, high quality foster homes. Children and young people with more complex needs are placed with foster carers with the higher skills levels. The emphasis is upon the foster carer’s skills and experience rather than on the child, thus avoiding labelling the child.

9.5.2 Bradford's current Foster Carers Payment for Skill fees are set out in the table below:

Bradford Skills Level Fees 2021/22			
Level	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
1	£144.16	£216.24	£288.32
2	£204.20	£306.30	£408.40
3	£290.72	£436.08	£581.44
4	£468.47	Complex & Specialist Placements	

The table below shows the number of fostering households in each skills level:

No of Foster Carers in each skills level December 2021	
Family and Friend Foster Carers who do not currently receive a fee payment	176
Level 1	93
Level 2	42
Level 3	175
Level 4	5

9.5.3 Bradford's current fostering payment for skills scheme has 4 levels. 176 Family and Friend fostering households do not receive a skills level payment, (Please see section A above).

9.5.4 Five foster carers receive level 4 skills fees. These foster carers are being paid this level include Mockingbird Hub Carers, PACE (Alternative to custody/remand), legacy payments from a previous scheme or they have been negotiated for specific placements.

9.5.5 There is currently no agreed or clear process by which foster carers can progress through the skills levels. A number of carers have requested progression but decision making has often been significantly delayed. Where decisions have been made they have often been ad hoc or made in an effort to secure foster placements at risk of disruption. This is inequitable and unfair.

9.5.6 The Fostering National Minimum Standards requires that the fostering agency provides a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments and distinguishes between the maintenance allowance and any fee paid.

9.5.7 Principles for a Skills Fee Progression Scheme

Any process that is put in to place should apply equally to all foster carers and be clearly defined and easily understood. Each level needs to have identified criteria which must be evidenced before progression can take place. Once evidenced the process for decision making should be responsive and as simple as possible.

The progression scheme should provide foster carers with encouragement to develop their knowledge and skills in relation to providing high quality foster care. It should provide a 'career pathway' for foster carers to progress through the levels if they wish to do so. Foster carers skills, experience and training should be

recognised and properly regarded and this should be reflected in their fees as they progress.

Approval for progression will depend on;

- The carer's assessed core skills
- The experience the foster carer brings to Fostering
- The training that has been undertaken

The fostering service should work closely with foster carers to ensure that they are well supported to achieve and maintain progression to the next level. This will include the provision of supervision, support groups and working with foster carers to develop a personal development training plan.

Foster carers, particularly those at levels 3 and 4, should have a responsibility to demonstrate continuous development through training and taking placements that reflect the skills level achieved by the carer. Should a foster carer wish to return to a previous skills level this can be agreed with their Supervising Social Worker. However, should they persistently fail to attend necessary support groups and/or training, or consistently refuse to provide care for children and young people within their skills set they may be returned to the previous skills level following assessment by the Supervising Social Worker and agreement from the Service Manager.

The new Fostering Payment for Skills scheme would consist of 5 levels. This would include the introduction of a new 'Entry Level' for new foster carers as described above in section A. It would also increase and develop the use of level 4 to include a range of specialist foster placement types. These include, the PACE placements (Police and Criminal Evidence, remand/alternative to custody), Parent and Child assessments, Mockingbird Hub Carers and Carers for children with complex needs.

9.5.8 Payment Rates

With the exception of the introduction of the new Entry Level fee all skills fee will remain the same as they are now.

Proposed fostering Payment for Skills Levels			
Level	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Entry Level	£100.00	£112.50	£150.00
1	£144.16	£216.24	£288.32
2	£204.20	£306.30	£408.40
3	£290.72	£436.08	£581.44
4	£468.47	£702.70	£936.94

Entry Level:

Entry Level carers would receive a skills fee set at amount of £100.00 per week plus an additional £50.00 for each additional child.

This level is our entry level to foster care. Most carers will join the Service at this level before they are able to demonstrate the competencies needed to progress through to a higher level.

Level 1:

Level 1 foster carers will receive £144.16 per week plus £72.08 per additional child.

Level 2:

Level 2 foster carers will receive £204.20 per week plus £102.10 per additional child.

Level 3:

Level 3 foster carers will receive £290.72 per week plus £145.36 per additional child

Level 4:

Level 4 foster carers will receive £468.47 per week plus £234.24 per additional child. The number of children placed with level 4 foster carers will require very careful matching and would not usually exceed 2 placements.

9.5.9 Competency Guide

All foster carers will be assessed against an Accreditation Framework relevant to their skills level. Evidence can be drawn from foster carers annual reviews, training record and other feedback received. As Foster Carers progress through the Framework, they are expected to have met the attributes of the previous skill level and they must have begun to address the requirements of the new skill level.

9.5.10 Route for Progression

Most new foster carers will be approved at level 'Entry Level'. Sufficient evidence for approval at this level will be provided through the process of the prospective foster carer's application, assessment and subsequent Agency approval.

Some prospective foster carers may have significant experience of providing child care or possess other transferable skills from other settings and have relevant qualifications. In these circumstances it may be possible for a new foster carer to be approved at a higher skills level provided they are able to provide evidence that they can meet the criteria for that level.

Foster carers who are seeking an initial approval at level 4 must be able to evidence considerable experience and skills within a related field. For example, foster carer transferring to the local authority from an IFA, Residential Worker, Youth Justice Worker etc. In addition to this the prospective level 4 foster carer must attend an interview with the fostering service manager and residential fostering manager.

Any agreement for a prospective/newly approved carer to start at a higher skills level will be agreed by a fostering Service Manager.

The fostering service will be responsible for ensuring that foster carers are given sufficient support and encouragement towards professional development through the provision of training opportunities commensurate with the skills level required. Supervising Social Workers will also work with their foster carers to produce a personal development plan.

Foster carers can request that they are progressed to the next skills level at any point in the year and does not have to wait for the foster carers annual review. However, foster carers are required to have completed the Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) workbook at least within a year (18 months in respect of Family and Friends Foster Carers) of initial approval before progression and any other mandatory training courses relevant their current skills level.

In order to progress for each of the skills payment levels, foster carers will need to demonstrate that they have met the competencies for the level they are on and have begun to address the requirements of the next skills level. This will be done by the foster carers completing a self-assessment evidencing how they have met the relevant competences. This should be discussed with the Supervising Social Worker in supervision and signed and dated as each competency is completed.

The supervising social worker should also request testimonials from other professionals regarding the care given or training received. Testimonials can be provided by the Childs Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer, School, other foster carers etc. Feedback documents produced by these professionals for the purpose of the foster carers annual review can be used for this purpose rather than duplicating work.

The completed form should then be returned to the Supervising Social Worker who will comment on the outcomes of any allegations or complaints against the foster carer in the last year. They will also note any compliments or commendations received by the carer and summarise the testimonials received. The Supervising Social Worker will then make their recommendations and give their reason for their recommendation and pass the assessment to the Team Manager for quality assurance.

The Team Manager will in turn make a recommendation and pass the assessment to the Fostering Service Manager for the final decision

The Service Manger will record their decision and their reason for it on the assessment form. This will then be communicated to the Supervising Social Worker and Foster Carer Payments team. The Supervising Social Worker will inform the Foster Carer.

In the case of a foster carer wishing to progress to level 4, they must additionally attend an interview with the Fostering Service Manager and Residential Service Manager.

Should the Service Manager decide not to progress a foster carer to the next skills level the foster carer can make representations within 28 days of the decision to the Head of Service responsible for the fostering service. The decision will then be reviewed by the Head of Service and a final decision made.

In the case where the service is considering stepping down a foster carer from a skill level to a lower level, the supervising social worker should discuss this with the foster carer in the first instance. Where there is no improvement the supervising social worker should complete the payment for skills level self-assessment form

with the foster carer for the level the foster carer is currently on. This should then be presented to the Team Manager for QA and recommendation and passed to the Service Manager for the decision.

Should the foster carer disagree with the decision they can make representations to the service within 28 days of the decision being made. The decision will then be reviewed by the Head of Service and a final decision made.

This system will provide a clear process and 'career pathway' for foster carers wishing to progress and develop their skills.

The process puts the onus on the foster carer to demonstrate the skills they have developed. It is a straightforward process with decision making held within the service. It is also compliant with the National Minimum Standards. It does not rely on either the fostering panel or a progression panel. This process should therefore make it a responsive system.

This scheme has a process to allow foster carers to step down if they wish. It also provides a process to return a foster carer to a previous level if they are not operating at the skills level they are currently on.

The process should reduce the number of complaints from foster carers wishing to progress and will be compliant with the Legislation and Guidance.

9.6 Proposal 3: Implementation of the Foster Carers Skills Progression System

9.6.1 The scheme as described above presents foster carers who want career progression with a clear career pathway. It provides a simple process for decision making and does not make additional demands on business support. The process is clear and complies with the Fostering National Minimum Standards.

9.6.2 It is proposed that this scheme is implemented within the fostering service.

9.7 **D) The development of the Specialist Foster Carers level 4.**

9.7.1 As mentioned elsewhere in this report, Bradford Fostering Service does already have a level 4 skills payment level. Currently there are just 5 fostering households that are paid at this level. One is providing an emergency PACE bed, one is a Mockingbird Hub Carer, the others are either legacy payments from a previous fostering scheme or are the result of negotiations to secure specific placements for young people with complex and additional needs.

9.7.2 The proposal is to extend level 4 payments to a range of foster carers to include PACE placements (Police and Criminal Evidence, remand/alternative to custody), Parent and Child parenting and family assessment placements, Mockingbird Hub Carers and a small group of specialist foster carers for children and young people with complex needs who would otherwise be placed within therapeutic residential placements. This would enable the fostering service to develop these services and achieve

9.7.3 If the number of level 4 foster carers was extended from the current 5 to 20 the

additional cost would be £365,406.60. However, savings could be realised against spend on expensive residential placements. The average external residential placement costs Bradford £4,246.00 per week or £220,792.00 per year. The cost of providing an in-house level 4 foster placement for a 16-year-old (including the maintenance allowance) would be £670.47 per week or £34,864.44 per year, a potential saving of £185,927.56 per placement per year.

9.7.4 Foster Carer Support

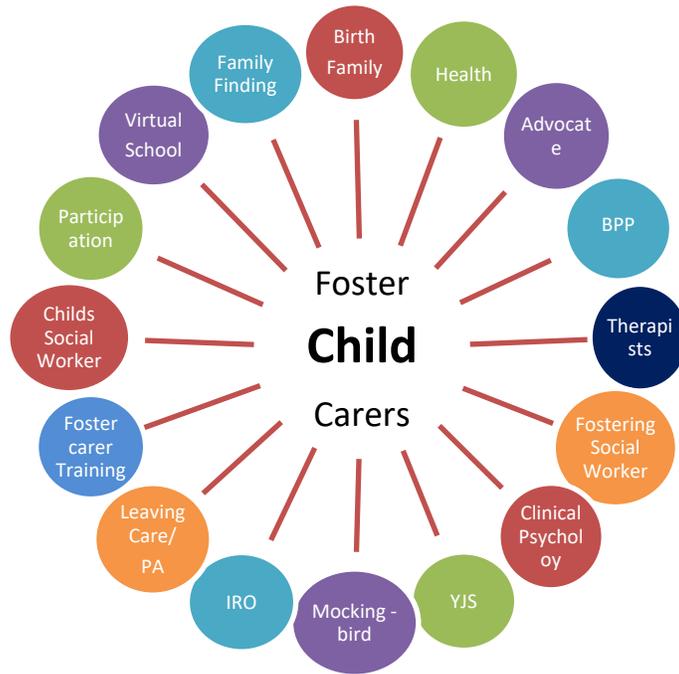
However, increasing the skills levels payments to foster carers will not in itself increase placement stability and foster carers ability to provide safe, warm, loving, robust and tenacious foster families for those children who desperately need them. Foster carers need additional training and support.

At the current time training and development opportunities for foster carers is limited. There is no identified or dedicated budget for foster carer training. Foster carers are accessing free on-line training through the Training Hub. This is not satisfactory. The Fostering National Minimum Standards require fostering services to ensure that a clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as a basis for assessing foster carers performance and identifying their training and development needs.

Like other local authorities Bradford has previously invested in and implemented a trauma informed practice approach which includes Dyadic Development Practice (DDP - including PACE Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) and relationship based practice as the model of delivery. Although Bradford adopted this systemic practice approach, it is currently not clearly defined or understood. Many staff who have been trained in this approach have left the council.

DDP works well as a therapeutic approach for families who care for fostered children who had experienced neglect and abuse in their birth families and suffered from significant developmental trauma. As the preferred approach, it recognises the importance of the relationships between the foster child and their foster carers and is based on attachment theory, the impact of developmental trauma and child development. It is recommended that Bradford reinvigorates this approach.

Additionally, research evidences the significant benefit of collaboration between partner agencies who provide a range of interlocking services. If support and intervention to foster carers and children is provided in a timely cohesive manner, placement and school stability is greatly improved. It is therefore important to establish a 'Team around the Child' approach.



The 'Team around the Child' is a virtual team. Not every child or young person will need every part of the service all at once. When a child or young person moves to a foster carer home, the 'Team around the Child' approach ensures that the appropriate people and services are available as and when required. This will be identified through the placement referral and planning stages for each child.

The fostering service should work to further develop these relationships with partner agencies to strengthen foster carer support. This will benefit foster children and provide for greater placement stability. It will also help to make Bradford the fostering agency of choice for prospective foster carers.

9.8 Proposal 4: Expansion of Skills Level 4

9.8.1 Bradford Fostering Service proposes to further develop and extend the use of level 4 payments in order to provide a pool of experienced and highly skilled foster carers able to provide foster families for children with additional and complex needs who may otherwise be accommodated within residential care. In addition to the 5 fostering households already in receipt skills scheme is extended initially for up to a further 20 households and that the range of specialist foster placement to include 2 x Pace Carers, 2 x Mockingbird Hub Carers, 2 x Parent and Child Assessment Cares and 14 x Complex Needs Carers.

9.8.2 It is also proposed that Bradford council should set aside a specific training budget and a training officer for the fostering service. This would include a training officer post which would collate foster carers training needs, develop or source appropriate training courses or material, publish an annual training calender and deliver foster carer training as required. The cost of a PO3 Training Officer would be £52,000 pa. This figure includes all on costs.

9.8.3 Bradford fostering service should reinvigorate the DDP therapeutic approach, particularly with level 4 foster carers in the first instance.

9.8.4 The service should also work to establish closer working relationships with partner agencies to develop the team around the child approach.

9.9 **E) Financial Support for Special Guardians**

9.9.1 A special Guardianship order (SGO) can offer a child greater security without the absolute severance from the birth family as in adoption. Special Guardians play a positive role in providing nurture and care to a child who is unable to reside with their birth parents. Special Guardianship provides children with security throughout their childhood and beyond and can be a successful and more realistic option for a child who requires permanence and stability but for whom severance of ties from birth family is not an option. In these circumstances a SGO can be a positive alternative to long term fostering for children in care. For this reason, all foster carers considering offering long-term care are encouraged to consider offering Special Guardianship to the child(ren) they are looking after.

9.9.2 Once a Special Guardianship Order is made it discharges the Care Order in respect of the child and the child is no longer 'in care'. Special Guardians acquire Parental Responsibility at the point of the SGO being made. This is shared with the child's parents, however, the Special Guardian has the ability to exercise this responsibility without seeking permissions from the parents.

9.9.3 As such, the involvement of social workers and fostering services is reduced to a minimum. This represents financial saving to the local authority in terms of Social Work, Independent Reviewing Officer and Fostering Social Worker resources.

9.9.4 Government Guidance states that Special Guardianship arrangements should not fail just because of financial problems. Financial support should be paid to help secure a suitable arrangement where this would otherwise not be possible because of a financial obstacle.

9.9.5 Many foster carers may wish to apply for a SGO in respect of the children they are caring for but would be financially prevented from doing so if this meant that they would lose the support of the fostering allowances. For these reasons, Bradford Council proposes to align the SGO Financial Support policy with our West Yorkshire neighbouring authorities in implementing a 'no detriment financial policy' for foster carers who wish to provide Special Guardianship for the children they care for. Under this policy, former foster carers providing care to these children would continue to receive payments in line with the fostering allowances minus any benefits which they become entitled to. This would usually include child benefit and tax credits.

9.10 **Proposal 5: No Detriment SGO Payments for Former Foster Carers**

9.10.1 It is proposed that Bradford Council introduces a 'No Financial Detriment SGO' policy to support foster families wishing to provide care under an SGO. This will allow such foster families to claim these children and provide permanent, stable and caring homes with minimal involvement of children's services. Whilst providing a more normal childhood experience for the child and family this will represent savings for the local authority. This will also align Bradford's policy with our neighbouring West Yorkshires authorities.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The following recommendations are made:

10.2 Regarding Proposal 1 above.

That the proposal to put in place a Foster Carers Payments Policy which is compliant with all current Legislation and Guidance is approved.

That the proposal to commence immediately making an appropriate level of Professional Fee Payments to all existing Family and Friend foster carers who do not receive such payments and 'Entry Level Fees' of £100.00 per week to all newly approved foster carers approved after the implementation of the policy in line with Mainstream foster carers going forward is approved.

10.3 Regarding Proposal 2 above

That a new 'Entry Level' skills payment of £100.00 per week is introduced and applied to newly approved foster carers in line with the Foster Carers Payments Policy is approved.

10.4 Regarding Proposal 3 above

That the foster carers Payment for Skills Progression Scheme is approved.

10.5 Regarding Proposal 4 above

That the use of level 4 payments is extended in order to provide a pool of experienced and highly skilled foster carers able to provide foster families for children with additional and complex needs who may otherwise be accommodated within residential care is approved.

That a budget is identified to provide foster carers training and appoint a training officer to collate foster carers training needs, develop or source appropriate training courses or material, publish an annual training calendar and deliver foster carer training as required is approved.

10.6 Regarding Proposal 5 above

That the proposal that Bradford Council introduces a 'No Financial Detriment' Special Guardian Order policy to encourage, support and financially enable foster families wishing to provide care under a SGO to do so is approved.

10.7 The formal recommendations to the Executive are set out at the beginning of this Report.

CONSULTATION AND PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

The Council intends to invite feedback from foster carers, directly and/or through their Supervising Social Workers, and from any other interested parties, during the

first twelve months of its operation. Contact details are contained in the Policy document and will be available to all service users. Whilst the Policy will be considered to be at a formative stage throughout this twelve-month period, in that the Strategic Director of Children's Services could seek to refer the policy back to Executive for further consideration, modification, or even discontinuance, operational experience during this period is expected to provide sufficient information to foster carers and others to enable them to give intelligent consideration to the Policy and to make their views known. Twelve months is considered to be adequate time for this. Consideration, in consultation with the Foster Carers Association, will be given to the consultation responses on a quarterly basis before a decision is made as to whether to continue with the Policy or to refer it back to the Executive.

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to— (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Protected characteristics include age, disability and sex.

At this stage it is considered unlikely that there will be any adverse impacts on the protected groups (including children, single parents and disabled persons) of the proposed changes since the present rates are being maintained for all those who currently receive them and those rates will be extended to Family and Friends Foster Carers. There is some potential for negative impact on protected groups due to the proposed introduction of the Entry Level tier of professional fees and the criteria for progressing through the various tiers and this will be monitored carefully during the initial twelve-month period together with any other actual or potential impacts. A fuller impact assessment will be carried out at the six-month review stage based upon all the information before the Council at that time including feedback from foster carers and others.

BACKPAYMENTS

This Report makes no proposal for the making of back payments of professional fees to Family & Friends Foster Carers. The legal advice received is that there is no statutory duty to make such payments and any common law entitlement to restitution rests on what a court would consider to be "just".

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Payments to Foster Carers Policy.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

12.1 None.