

Fostering Review – Scrutiny



Who is affected and how?

Q - 75% of foster carers are Level 5 carers and all will lose money if the changes were made right now?

- ❖ Currently we have 270 Level 5 fostering households, this equates to 73% of fostering households
- ❖ Of those carers, 75 fostering households do not have any children in their care, this equates to 28% of all level 5 carers
- ❖ 67 Level 5 carers with children in their care will receive the same or more than they do now – this equates to 25% of all level 5 carers
- ❖ 34 Level 5 carers (13%) have young people in placement who will reach 18 in the next 18 months, allowing for new placements
- ❖ 11 Level 5 carers are on special financial packages – this is 4% of all level 5 fostering households
- ❖ As such, based on figures at the end of Jan 2022, and current placements which may change for others not discussed above, we believe that 30% of Level 5 foster carers, or 81 fostering households, will receive less than they do now **if** nothing changes
- ❖ Special packages will remain available for all those who require it – either due to the needs of the child or the situation of the foster carer

Key Questions answered

Q - The new way of determining fees will be detrimental to children as they will be classified as Standard, Enhanced or Complex children?

- ❖ The terms Standard, Enhanced and Complex will never be seen on a child's record, as categories are a tool solely to determine payments to be made.
- ❖ The Valuing Care assessment is a widely used, embedded in practice, assessment tool, not just used in Norfolk, but in many Local Authorities and is DFE recognised.
- ❖ Young people are fully aware of the Valuing Care assessment and value it's focus on their needs rather than on risk or behaviour.

Q - No other fostering services pay their foster carers according to the needs of the child?

- ❖ A number of Local Authorities and the majority of Independent Fostering Agencies do pay their carers according to level of need. Norfolk has always tied need to allowances for carers, we are expanding what we have always done
- ❖ LAs and IFAs will utilise assessments commonly completed by social workers to determine level of need

Key questions answered

Q - We did not consider co-production of this proposal?

- ❖ The matter of a new structure for fostering allowances was discussed at the Fostering Task and Finish group however their view was that they wanted the LA to provide a proposal for foster carers to consider as the work was too vast for the T&F group.
- ❖ The Task and Finish group is a subgroup of the Fostering Advisory Partnership, who has delegated the service development work the Task and Finish group on their behalf.
- ❖ All members of the task and finish group are also members of FAP

Q - We did not provide sufficient consultation?

- ❖ Whilst there is clear guidance regarding consultation with employees and also for consultation with residents, there is no specific process set out for consultation with foster carers
- ❖ As such, we started with a two week formal consultation, but extended this to a month due to the level of engagement from foster carers. Whilst carers from outside Norfolk were unable to ask questions of Cabinet, they were able to provide their views via the consultation process as this was available to all carers.
- ❖ Feedback to the consultation was shared within a few days of the end of the consultation

Key questions answered

Q - We did not consult with children on this proposal?

- ❖ Looked After children struggle with a sense of self esteem and self worth, they are particularly upset that those who look after them are paid to do so. As such, it was deemed to be harmful to children to consult with them on this matter.

Q - NCC will pay lots more for IFA placements for children due to Level 5 carers leaving Norfolk Fostering Service?

- ❖ The re-tendering of contracts will ensure that IFA placements remain available and affordable, whilst also addressing issues of quality and expectations.
- ❖ Payments to IFA foster carers will be based on needs of the children as they will be for in house carers. This has always been the case for IFA placements

Q - The Risk implications/ Impact do not address the issue of existing foster carers withdrawing the additional duties they currently undertake for the Council to support the recruitment and training of new foster carers?

- ❖ This risk can be mitigated by the strengthen training offer we have developed as part of the transformation of the fostering service
- ❖ We are developing a new market strategy to support increased recruitment
- ❖ The new proposal for fostering allowances will also support recruitment

Key questions answered

Q - Foster carers do not have choice in respect of additional placements, social workers prevent them from making this choice?

- ❖ Carer feedback on this issue has been helpful as it has identified the need for senior oversight in respect of any placements that are restricted.
- ❖ This is both in respect of the child's social worker for children in placement and how placements are sought.
- ❖ As a result of this feedback we have a new policy addressing both issues

Q - Social Workers will write the valuing care assessment in a way that reduces the payments to foster carers?

- ❖ Social workers are skilled in completing the valuing care assessment tool and their focus is, and always will be, the needs of the child, whether that child is protected and the impact of care for that child.
- ❖ We expect SWs to work together to ensure that the assessment is accurate. The assessment will then be overseen and authorised by a manager to ensure it is accurate.
- ❖ At no point will social workers know what the payment will be for foster carers when they complete the assessment of need; social workers should never consider cost when ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children

Key questions answered

Q – How will you progress given current feeling amongst carers?

- ❖ Letters will be sent to each carer who may see a reduction in 18 months' time should nothing change
- ❖ Appointments will be made with those carers to talk through the impact with managers from the Fostering service and what support/opportunities are available
- ❖ Engagement event held 16th March 2022, engagement events will continue throughout the next 18 months to plan and develop services moving forward

Q – We will see a large number of resignations as a result of the new proposal?

- ❖ We have received a small number of resignations, these are from carers who do not currently have children in their care
- ❖ Recruitment remains on track with no reduction in approvals
- ❖ We remain committed to working hard to re-engage carers, with a focus on reforming the Fostering Advisory Partnership

Key questions answered

Q - Payments will decrease if we provide good care to children?

- ❖ The assessment of need for the vast majority of children evidences that need either remains the same, or increases as they grow. Therefore fostering allowances will remain the same or increase
- ❖ There are a small number of children that have experienced a reduction in need over the past year that may indicate a reduction in payments.
- ❖ Special financial packages will be available when indicated by the child's needs, additional financial support will be available, just as it is now.

Q - We would not pay less to employees dependent on the complexity of their work?

- ❖ Foster carers are not employees – theirs is a special relationship with LAs which is enshrined in law and which incurs special tax relief
- ❖ We do not and should not allocate work to foster carers – it is their right to choose who they look after
- ❖ Payments to foster carers are enshrined in legislation, Care Planning regulation 28 is clear that the payments made are to cover the expenses of caring for a child, it is not a salary

Key questions answered - opportunities for children – Right Care, right place

We want this to be an opportunity for foster carers to broaden their development and skill base and to consider caring for children and young people in a number of different ways. These include:

- ❖ Emergency placements
- ❖ PACE Beds
- ❖ UASC young people, particularly those arriving aged under 16
- ❖ Parent/child placements, including UASC who arrive with young children and care leavers needing parental-type support to care for their children – we made 77 parent/child placements from April 2021 – Feb 2022
- ❖ Children with disabilities
- ❖ Adolescents, particularly those aged over 14
- ❖ Young people placed with New Roads
- ❖ As of end of February 2022, we had 373 children and young people with valuing care scores indicating additional or complex needs that would fall into the enhanced or complex categories (attracting the same fee as Level 5 Accreditation or more)

We remain committed to providing the training, support and development opportunities to carers to enable them to consider caring for children and young people with different levels of need

Key questions answered - benefits of the proposed changes

- ❖ Supports foster carers in taking on children according to their approvals – no more reductions in fees for second and subsequent children
- ❖ Ensures that carers who are looking after children with additional and complex needs are recognised and rewarded accordingly
- ❖ Supports Norfolk's commitment that all children are 'fosterable' – we know the best outcomes for children are achieved through family-based care, not children's homes
- ❖ Supporting more children into foster placements also provides more opportunities for Staying Put arrangements post 18
- ❖ Additional support, training and development opportunities to enable carers to consider looking after children they would not have considered previously