

Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: N/A

Decision Date – 12 December 2023

Key Decision – No



Children's Social Care allowances, fees, and charges for 2023/24

Executive Member: Lead Member for Children, Families and Education

Local Member(s) and Division: Not applicable

Lead Officer: Jayne Shelbourn-Barrow, Service Director

Author: Jayne Shelbourn-Barrow & Emma Dermody (Finance Manager)

Contact Details: Jayne.shelbournbarrow@somerset.gov.uk,

emma.dermody@somerset.gov.uk

Summary / Background

1. Somerset Council reviews its allowances, fees, and charges for children in care and in lodgings on an annual basis to ensure they are sufficient to meet the needs of a child in placement.
2. Several years ago, the council gave a commitment to pay the national minimum rate recommended by the National Fostering Network, a national body advising on foster care. In subsequent years the allowances have been increased by an inflationary sum in line with the recommendations of the Network. Whilst the National Fostering Network has ceased publishing these rates, we are recommending that a similar method of calculating this increase is adopted this year. Details of the proposed rates for 2023/24 are set out within Appendix A to this Report.

Recommendations

3. The Lead Member for Children, Families and Education
 - agrees the Children's Social Care allowances, fees, and charges for 2023/24 (as set out in Appendix A), based on the current formulae for calculating allowances; a 5% increase on all fees and allowances from 1st April 2023.

- agrees that Appendix A should be treated as exempt information and to be treated in confidence on the ground that it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of the tenderers and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Reasons for recommendations

4. Foster carers payments for the maintenance and care of children in their care are reviewed on an annual basis and take note of the national recommendation of increases to reflect inflation and rising costs of caring for a child.

Other options considered.

5. The aim of the proposed increases is to maintain and improve the current level of support to Somerset foster carers, to assist in the recruitment and retention of foster carers. If the rates were not increased the impact could be instability for our children in care, as it will impact on the number of foster carers we have. There could be increased costs to the authority as external fostering agencies rates are higher than those of the authority.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

6. The proposed changes would have the following impact,
 - To provide sufficient placements to protect most vulnerable children.
 - To maintain placement stability of children
 - To recruit more foster carers and increase sufficiency in the service.
7. The financial impact of a 5% increase for these rates is built into the MTFP for 2023/2024 onwards, with the remaining financial impact being funded via the current fees and allowances underspend across the service.
8. The aim of the proposed increases is to maintain and improve the current level of support to Somerset foster carers and to assist in the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Financial and Risk Implications

9. The financial impact of these rate revisions is an additional £625,700 per annum. An increased budget of this amount was built into the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2023/24.
10. The main risk if the recommendation is rejected, is that there is a likelihood of a reduction of in-house foster carers, increasing dependency on external agencies at an enhanced rate. We have assessed the risk score as follows:

Likelihood	High	Impact	High	Risk score	
------------	------	--------	------	------------	--

Legal Implications

11. There are no legal or HR implications as foster carers are not employees.

HR Implications

12. There are no legal or HR implications as foster carers are not employees.

Other Implications:

Equalities Implications

13. Fees and allowances - no equalities impact as allowances will be increased for all foster carers.

Charges - no equalities impact as financial assessment is undertaken to ensure families can afford to contribute to cost of foster care.

We risk losing foster carers if we do not make these increases – which means our Children Looked After will lose their home and cost more money if we have to look for an external placement.

Community Safety Implications

14. No safety implications.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

15. No sustainability implications.

Health and Safety Implications

16. If these recommendations are not approved

- foster carers may move to other fostering agencies
- Somerset children therefore cannot be placed with Somerset foster carers
- children may have to live outside the county and
- there is likely to be a detrimental impact on their emotional well-being.

Social Value

17. Not applicable.

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

The proposed decision has not been considered by a Scrutiny committee.

Background

18 Background information is provided within paragraph 1.

Appendices

Confidential Appendix A – description of allowance, fees, and charges, detailing 2021/2022, 2022/23 rates rates, and the proposed 2023/2024 rates.

Report Sign-Off

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	10.11.23
Communications	Peter Elliott	29.11.23
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	29.11.23
Workforce	Alyn Jones	29.11.23
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	N/A
Executive Director / Senior Manager	Claire Winter	29.11.23
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones	29.11.23
Executive Lead Member		
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	All	On publication
Opposition Spokesperson	Frances Nicholson	5.12.23
Scrutiny Chair	Leigh Redman	5.12.23