

## **DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE 19 March 2001**

**REPORT ON: FOSTER CARE STRATEGY AND FAMILY PLACEMENT FINANCIAL ALLOWANCES**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK**

**REPORT NO: 192-2001**

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

This report provides members with:

- a) details of summary information on a foster care strategy for the City (fuller details are provided in Appendix 1 "Dundee City Council Social Work Department Foster Care Strategy 2001 - Executive Summary). Copies of the Foster Care Strategy are available in the member's lounge; and
- b) proposals for the annual increase in Fostering Allowances (see Appendix 2 – Family Placement Financial Allowances)

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:

2.1.1 Acknowledge the work undertaken by foster carers in their complex task of looking after children in need.

2.1.2 Approve the content of Dundee City Council Social Work Department Foster Care Strategy 2001.

2.1.3 Instruct the Director of Social Work to develop an action plan to ensure the implementation of the strategy.

2.1.4 Instruct the Director of Social Work to formally review the progress of the strategy within three years.

2.1.5 Approve the annual increase of family placement financial allowances.

2.1.6 Instruct the Director of Social Work to implement the revised allowances.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 In a full year the Foster Care Strategy will cost £2,301,000 at 2001/02 prices. Full provision has been made for this sum in the Social Work Department revenue budget in 2001/02. This has been met from existing resources and the Children's Services Development Fund.

### **4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Foster Care Strategy is in line with the principles of Agenda 21 in that efforts are made wherever possible to meet the needs of children locally and for their social, education and health needs to be promoted within a family setting.

### **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Foster Care Strategy recognises and values diversity and promotes the principles of equal opportunities.

## 6.0 MAIN TEXT

### Foster Care Strategy

- 6.1 Since the 1940's research has consistently shown that most children and young people do better emotionally, physically and psychologically when looked after in a family setting.
- 6.2 Some children and young people may not be able to be looked after safely at home, and for a variety of reasons they may have to be "looked after away from home". In Dundee City 66% of those children who have to be looked after away from home will be looked after by foster carers.
- 6.3 In recent years research has indicated that foster carers have not been fully recognised for the crucial role they play in caring for the most vulnerable children. Foster carers are expected to be able to respond to a range of assessed needs of children. Such needs are diverse and include those experienced by children with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, mild to severe behavioural problems and children who have suffered from serious abuse and neglect. The diversity of the need experienced by these children means that a wide range of foster carers is essential to provide the variety of care that these children require. In order to continue to meet the needs of these children, it is crucial to recruit and retain foster carers. They need professional support and financial recognition of the complex work they undertake.
- 6.4 Currently foster care is provided through four separate schemes, each with its own financial support mechanism. Mainstay carers and Alternative Community Experience (ACE) carers receive a fee, however temporary and permanent foster carers receive only the recommended National Foster Care Association (NFCA) recommended rate of fostering allowance.
- 6.5 The fostering task is changing nationally. To better meet the needs of children requiring family placement, Dundee City Council Social Work Department in partnership with local foster carers, has developed a foster care strategy. This endeavours to recognise the vital role that foster carers play in looking after children who have to be cared for away from their own home. It also acknowledges the increasing expectations of the tasks foster carers have to undertake.
- 6.6 By developing and implementing a foster care strategy, the local authority will ensure that necessary changes to the existing foster care service happen. These changes will enable the Social Work Department:
- To have foster carers approved in a unified service and paid on a more equitable basis.
  - To have clearer expectations of carers.
  - To recruit and to retain existing carers.
  - To provide a service in line with that provided by others.
  - To better match the needs of children with the skills of carers.
  - To recognise carers with specific skills and experience.
  - To place more emphasis on working in partnership.
  - To acknowledge the messages from research.
  - To attract future applicants as part of the job market; and
  - To offer more emergency placements.
- 6.7 In order to achieve these objectives, changes in the payment structure to foster carers will have to take place by the introduction of a **unified skills based fostering scheme**. Apart from the specialist ACE carers there will be one category of "fee carer" for any age of children from April 2001. The key principles of such a scheme are that:
- At the point a child becomes looked after, there needs to be an assessment of the tasks required of the carer.
  - This assessment should indicate the type of placement required.

- In recognising the range of tasks required, there will be three different types of carer available to offer placements.
- Payments are made to carers based on their ability to undertake specific tasks.

6.8 Through the implementation of the foster care strategy Dundee City Council will be able to achieve its vision of fostering in Dundee. The vision is for a unified fostering service which provides children and young people with :

- a safe, nurturing environment;
- positive experiences of family life;
- well equipped, skilled and confident carers who offer high quality care; and
- a positive option alongside other forms of care.

### **Family Placement Financial Allowances**

6.9 Allowances are paid to carers for each child fostered with them and are normally reviewed on an annual basis in line with the rates recommended by the National Foster Care Association (NFCA).

6.10 This year it is recommended that:

- a) Foster Care Allowances and Adoption Allowances are increased in line with NFCA recommendations.
- b) Allowances to Link Carers and those in receipt of Residence Allowances are increased in line with Income Support rates as previously agreed by Social Work Committee (Report No 302/1998).
- c) The mileage rate paid to foster carers, which has remained static for a number of years, is increased to better reflect the cost of fuel.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Foster Care Strategy has been written in partnership with foster carers who have been fully involved in its development. The Directors of Support Services, Education, Personnel and Management Services, Neighbourhood Resources and Development Services, and Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

## **9.0 SIGNATURE**

Director of Social Work

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dundee City Council has a clear duty to care for children they are looking after in a safe, nurturing environment and one where children and young people develop to their potential. The shared aim in Dundee City Council's Children's Services Plan 1998-2001, stated that *"Dundee City Council values children as unique individuals. It recognises their important place in society and aims to ensure a child-friendly, secure and healthy environment for them."* This aim forms the basis upon which all children's services are developed, including foster care.

### ***The vision of fostering In Dundee***

The vision is for a unified fostering service which provides children and young people with :

- ✓ a safe, nurturing environment;
- ✓ positive experiences of family life;
- ✓ well equipped, skilled and confident carers who offer high quality care; and
- ✓ a positive option alongside other forms of care.

Since the 1940's research has consistently shown that most children and young people do better emotionally, physically and psychologically when looked after in a family setting.

In recent years much research has been undertaken, and reports written, which highlight the changing task of fostering. Building on this research National Foster Care Standards were launched in Scotland in 1999. The standards encourage local authorities to think seriously about the changes required to move fostering services into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They recommend that local authorities strengthen their fostering services in aspects of partnership, training, and choice and diversity of placements.

Having heard the messages from research, some agencies, including voluntary organisations, are developing services which provide payment for skills. In order for Dundee City Council to be able to continue to recruit and retain carers, any review of services has to consider a strategy which develops a fee-based scheme

This way forward was identified in the Best Value Report presented to the Policies and Resources Best Value Sub Committee in November 1999 (Committee Report 806/99). The conclusion of this report was that *' there was evidence that Dundee City Council needed to consider the introduction of a paid skill - based service for foster care.'* The Committee accepted this conclusion.

A fostering service should be able to respond to a range of assessed needs of children. Such needs are diverse and include those experienced by children with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, mild to severe behavioural problems and children who have suffered from serious abuse and neglect. The needs of such children are complex and therefore they require a foster care service which provides a range of placement types including respite care, long term care and foster care as an alternative to secure care.

In order to meet the diverse needs of children requiring family placement, a foster care strategy has been developed. This endeavours to meet the needs of children by recognising the key role that foster carers play. It also acknowledges the increasing expectations in relation to the tasks foster carers are expected to undertake.

By developing and implementing a foster care strategy, the local authority will ensure that necessary changes to the existing foster carers service happen. These changes will enable the social work department :

- To have foster carers approved in a unified service and paid on a more equal basis
- To have clearer expectations of carers;
- To recruit and to retain existing carers;

- To provide a service in line with that provided by others;
- To better match the needs of children with the skills of carers;
- To recognise carers with specific skills and experience;
- To place more emphasis on working in partnership;
- To acknowledge the messages from research;
- To attract future applicants as part of the job market; and
- To offer more emergency placements

In order to achieve these objectives, changes in the payment structure to foster carers will have to take place.

Dundee City Council currently pays all foster carers a fostering allowance which reflects the National Foster Care recommendations. This allowance is specifically for the child and is paid at different amounts dependent on the age of the child. Currently fees are paid to Mainstay and Alternative Community Experience (ACE) Carers only.

A skill based fostering scheme needs to place children looked after away from home with carers who have the appropriate skills, experience and training. The key principles are that :

- At the point a child becomes looked after, there needs to be an assessment of the tasks required of the carer;
- This assessment should indicate the type of placement required;
- In recognising the range of tasks required, there will be three different types of carer available to offer placements;
- Payments are made to carers based on their ability to undertake specific tasks.

In order to offer a realistic payment for tasks undertaken, fees are linked to a point on the Administration, Professional, Technical and Clerical (APT & C ) scale. Some carers will retain allowances only, as they will not wish to be part of a fee- based scheme. New carers will be eligible to join either the allowance only, or fee- based schemes, depending on their skills and experience. Existing carers will be eligible to either retain allowances only or join the fee based scheme, providing they can undertake the tasks required.

To enable foster carers to develop their skills, each foster carer has a training profile which helps to identify their future training needs.

This strategy acknowledges the demands on foster carers in caring for the most vulnerable group of children and young people.

### **Summary of Aims**

In summary the main aims of the foster care strategy are :

- To ensure that messages from research are heard and acted upon.
- To recognise the diverse needs of children and young people and to provide services better designed to meet those needs.
- To enable Dundee City Council to continue to recruit and retain carers.
- To ensure that Dundee City Council has a fostering service which reflects national priorities and developments.
- To provide a more unified fostering service where carers are paid on a more equal basis.

In order to achieve these aims Dundee City Council Social Work Department will fully implement this strategy and formally review it's progress within three years.

## APPENDIX 2

### Proposed Weekly Carer Fees

Weekly Carer Fees	2001/02 (£)	2000/01 (£)
ACE Carer	£331.38	£311.49
Mainstay	████████	£100.94
Fee Carers	£116.00	████████

### Proposed Weekly Foster Care Allowances and Adoption Allowances

Age	2001/02 (£) (All Carers)	2000/01 (£) (Adoption & Custody)	2000/01 (£) (ACE, Temporary Fostering & Mainstay)
0-4 years	£61.88	£57.61	£59.85
5-10 years	£76.86	£71.47	£74.34
11-15 years	£95.62	£88.97	£92.47
16-18 years	£123.83	£115.15	£119.77

### Proposed Weekly Allowances: Link and Residence Carers

Weekly Allowances	2001/02 (£)	2000/01 (£)
0-4 years	£30.95	£20.20
5-10 years	£30.95	£20.20
11-15 years	£30.95	£25.90
16-18 years	£30.95	£30.95
Family Premium	£14.25	£14.25

### Other Allowances

Allowance	2001/02 (£)	2000/01 (£)
Mileage	34p per mile	26.2p per mile
Nappies	£3.13 per week	£3.13 per week
Bus Pass (Under 16)	£4.75 per week	£4.75 per week
Bus Pass (16 and over)	£9.50 per week	£9.50 per week
Telephone (Allowance, Fee and ACE Carers)	£100 per year	£100 per year
Multi Placement (Allowance Carers)	£8 per child per week	£8 per child per week
Multi Placement (Fee Carers)	75% of carer fee	