



**FOSTER CARE FEE RATES**

Report by Head of Children's Services/Chief Social Work Officer

**PURPOSE**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to seek approval for an increase in the fostering fee rate.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 In 2016 Children's Services introduced a 3 tier/level fostering service with separate fees for each level, with each level being dependent on carers skills, experiences, qualifications and the expectations the Service has in terms of type and level of care required for a particular child.
- 2.2 When the scheme was introduced, there was no agreement on the frequency and level of future increases to the rate fees were paid at.
- 2.3 When the scheme was introduced there was a lack of clarity surrounding foster carers offering short-breaks and respite care and continuing care where the young person comes and goes from the placement i.e. the young person is studying on the mainland and returns home for holiday periods.
- 2.4 When the scheme was introduced, it was intended that Level 3 carers could continue to offer their services to Children's Services i.e. working within one of Children's Services various projects i.e. ELR or Children and Families. There was a lack of clarity in terms of what the exact ask could be of foster carers in terms of time commitment. We have calculated this, based on the salary of a Children's Services Support Worker to be 22 hours per week.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle agree that:
  - (a) given the length of time without any increase to the fee, increase the fostering fee rate by 10%;
  - (b) the rate of fee paid would be reviewed every 2 years;
  - (c) the retention fee would not apply to foster carers offering short breaks/respite and for continuing care where the young person resides in the placement intermittently; and
  - (d) Level 3 carers, should they wish to continue to receive the fee beyond the 6-week retention period, to provide on average 22 hours per week to supporting Children's Services.

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Appendix:

Background Papers:

## IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	The cost will vary depending on the number of fees paid foster carers at any given time and where foster carers are placed in terms of level of fee. With the current foster carers we have, the additional cost would be in the region of £5,000 and the cost can be met from with the existing fostering budget.
Legal	n/a
Staffing	n/a
Assets and Property	n/a
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	By not retaining foster carers, more children could potentially find themselves living in placements that are not assessed as suitable for their needs i.e. residential placements, which also brings with it the risk of far greater financial costs.
Equalities	n/a
Corporate Strategy	The Promise & Integrated Children's Services Plan
Environmental Impact	n/a
Consultation	Foster carers have raised concerns about the lack on an increase to the fostering fees and have been informed of the proposed plan. Discussions continue in terms of what the Service could expect from carers when they do not have a placement but wish to be retained.

## BACKGROUND

5.1 Following a review and consultation with the foster carers in 2016, the following framework of fees was agreed and introduced:

**Level 1** – all carers will receive this fee. They do not need to work towards a qualification as such although they will be expected to attend 4 support groups per year and have met with their link worker as per their support plan. Fee paid will be £100 per week when they have a placement. Carers will continue to receive the fee for the first 6 weeks of not having a placement as a retainer.

**Level 2** – all carers with 2 years fostering experience plus having attained the SVQ 3 qualification. The opportunity to study towards this qualification will be available to all carers from the moment of first approval. Carers should also attend most support groups each year. The fee will be £150 per week. Carers will continue to receive the fee for the first 6 weeks of not having a placement as a retainer.

**Level 3** – all carers with 2 years fostering experience plus having attained the SVQ 3 qualification. One carer, if a couple must be at home for the child. It will effectively be their employment. The fee will be £442 per week. Carers should also attend most support groups per year and have input into the delivery of the group. Carers will continue to receive the fee for the first 6 weeks of not having a placement as a retainer.

5.2 Children's Services are currently undertaking a review of how it delivers services to vulnerable children throughout the Western Isles and as part of this review, the Service is looking to enhance its fostering service in order to be less reliant on both local and out of region residential and residential placements. Further enhancing our fostering service will form part of this review but until such time as this piece of work is concluded, it is imperative that existing foster carers are retained, and additional foster carers are recruited.

- 5.3 A number of foster carers have not unreasonably raised concerns about the fact the fee has not had an increase in 8 years. Irrespective of whether there are some or no changes made to our fostering scheme as a result of the review of services, the fee should be increased and a decision taken on regularity of reviews of the fostering fee.

#### **DETAIL**

- 6.1 Foster caring is a vital part of the suite of services and resources Children's Services use to support our most vulnerable children in the community. Most children in the Western Isles who can no longer live with their biological parents are placed within their wider kinship network and Social Work, following the national guidance, will always explore kinship care options before that of foster care. For a small number of children, there are no suitable kinship options and for most of these children, a foster placement is the type of placement that best matches their needs.
- 6.2 Foster Care offers so much as an intervention for children: care delivered in the home, within a family system, in the spirit of a societal 'norm' within which children are raised generally. As a service provision it needs to be valued and supported as well as being encouraged and developed. Increasing the fees in line with the suggested 10% would reflect how valuable and vital Foster Carer's are in the helping and healing interventions necessary for children cared for and supported out with their family home.

#### **CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 Increasing the fostering fee will support the recruitment and retention of foster carers. Having an agreed reviewing timetable for future increases will offer greater certainty to both foster carers and staff working within the service. Level 3 carers continuing to receive the fostering fee beyond the 6 weeks retention period, helps with retention but should also support Children's Services in meeting one of the Promise commitments, that of supporting children in their own home, helping prevent them coming into care.