

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

21 JUNE 2012

SUBJECT:	FEES PAID TO CONNECTED FOSTER CARERS
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR TONY SMITH
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report provides Elected Members with information about the statutory requirement to pay connected foster carers, formally know as family and friends foster carers, a skills band fee in addition to the fostering allowance. This is a new requirement from 1 April 2012 and for which Council agreed an increase of £450,000 in the Children and Young People Department's revenue budget from 2012-13.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 Wirral Council approved foster carers receive two types of payments:

(a) Fostering allowances

These are remuneration and reimbursement payments. They are paid to cover the daily costs of caring for a child or young person and other payments made to cover specific costs they incur. The fostering allowance is upgraded annually according to the national minimum fostering allowance set by government.

(b) Fees

Fees are reward payments, paid to carers recognising their skills in caring for children and young people. The fee scheme allows carers to progress through 3 levels, and on achieving each level, receive a higher rate of payment. Each level is referred to as a band.

- 2.2 The current payment of skills based fees does not apply to those approved as 'Friends and Family' foster carers. However all newly approved mainstream foster carers and foster carers who through choice do not wish to progress up the structure receive a band1 skill fee of £55.23 per week in addition to the fostering allowance. Before receiving the band 1 fee the carers will have completed pre-approval training, been assessed and approved via the Fostering Panel. They will also have agreed to complete core training within two years of the initial approval.

- 2.3 According to the new Statutory Guidance for Family and Friends Care, the allowance paid to connected carers must be calculated in the same way as mainstream foster carers, and any variation must relate to the child's needs, the skills of the carer or some other relevant factor that is used as a criterion for all of the service's foster carers. It states that "*where a fee is paid, it must be payable to those foster carers who meet the criteria set out for the scheme, including foster carers who are family and friends*". Currently connected carers receive the fostering allowance without any skills based fee unless they in addition foster children that are not known to them.
- 2.4 It is therefore proposed that connected foster carers are eligible to receive the band 1 fee in the same way as all other foster carers once they have completed the skills for foster carer training, are assessed and approved by the Fostering Panel and have agreed to complete the core-training within two years of initial approval as required for all other foster carers. The Guide to Payment of foster carers will be further reviewed to clarify the payment of skills fees to connected carers.
- 2.5 In order to apply the policy equally to all foster carers it is proposed that the new eligibility to the skills Band scheme is implemented from 1st April 2012.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 The Family and Friends Statutory Guidance is issued under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which requires local authorities in exercising their social services functions to act under the guidance of the Secretary of State. The guidance should therefore be complied with unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons that justify a variation. This change in policy relating to connected foster carers is required to ensure that the local authority is not open to legal challenge from connected foster carers. Payment of a skills fee to connected carers and the consequent requirement to attend training will provide benefits to children in the local authority's care by improving the quality of care provided.
- 3.2 The level of demand for foster care placements continues to be a challenge adding to the financial pressures on the Children and Young People's Budget. Added to this is the new requirement to pay connected carers (family and friends carers) the skills band fee in addition to the fostering allowance. Promotion of Special Guardianship and Residence Orders to secure permanency for children being cared for by connected carers is taking place within the service and this will reduce the numbers of family and friends who are approved foster carers.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Council has to comply with statutory guidance so there are no other options available.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Before the publication of the Family and Friends Care Statutory Guidance there was extensive consultation undertaken nationally.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 6.1 No implications in relation to this report.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 7.1 The cost for all connected carers to be paid an additional skills fee for each child in their care is estimated to be in the region £450,000 and the Council have increased the revenue budget from 2012-13 to meet this cost. This will be sufficient to pay an addition band 1 skills fee for 157 children in the care of foster carers (the number children in the care or connected carers continually changes and was 145 on 16th April 2012) .
- 7.2 There is a revenue budget of £6,658,800 for foster care payments (including connected carers) in 2012-13. There are significant cost pressures in this area which are in excess of £1.4 million and there are plans to safely reduce costs through the Looked After Children Strategic Change Programme Project.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The recommendations in the report will ensure compliance with statutory guidance.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?
- (a) Yes and impact review can be found via the link below:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010-0>

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no implications in relation to this report.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Fostering Service ensures that children that are unable to live with their birth families are able to be looked after in a safe and supportive home environment which provides stability to children and young people.

12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 That:
- i) Elected members agree to implement an increase in the payments to connected foster carers by allowing them to be eligible to receive Band skills fee, from 1st April 2012 subject to them receiving training.
 - ii) It be noted that these payments are being met from the £450,000 increase in the revenue budget agreed by Council from 2012-13.
 - iii) “The Guide to the Payment of Foster Carers” is amended to remove the section that states “the payment of Skills Based Fees does not apply to those approved as ‘Friends and Family’ foster carers”.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 13.1 The scheme for the payment of foster carers needs to be amended to allow connected foster carers to be eligible to receive skills band fees according to the same criteria as mainstream foster carers.
- 3.2 Elected Members have previously approved the implementation of the National Minimum Fostering Allowances.

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APPENDICES

None

REFERENCE MATERIAL

[Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance](#)
[Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards](#)
[Guide to the payment of foster carers](#) April 2011

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	21 st January 2010
Cabinet	18 th March 2010
Cabinet	15 th April 2010
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	16 th November 2011