

## **Appendix 1**

### **Proposals to implement the recommendations from the Fostering Recruitment Strategy**

The Fostering Recruitment Strategy and the progress update to the Looked After Children's Strategy highlighted the key issues that are needed to make changes which will increase the number of placements available for children aged 11 plus.

Amongst the key issues highlighted were:

- **The need to increase the number of NPT foster placements for children over the age of 11.**
- **The need to provide placements which can meet the needs of children with complex needs and challenging behaviour and to review the support available to maintain these placements to prevent children moving to Independent Fostering placements or to residential placements out of county.**
- **The need to increase the financial payments for carers of children aged 11 plus in order to offer a competitive and comparative payment rate to recruit new carers.**
- **The need to provide an incentive for new applicants to foster with NPT rather than with another fostering agency or Local Authority**
- **The need to develop support services for foster carers who are looking after young people with complex behaviour and challenging needs.**

In order to address these issues proposals are being made in relation to the finance and support for foster placements.

#### **Context to the financial proposals**

Of the children who are looked after 43% of the children who are aged 11 plus are placed with Independent Foster carers (IFA).

The number of children under the age of 10 placed with IFA carers has nearly halved over the past 2 years.

There are currently 46 vacancies in foster placements within NPT foster carers. 31 of these are for under 10's and only 15 are for children over the age of 11. Of these 15, only 4 placements are actually available due to matching constraints of the other vacancies alongside other children already placed.

Nationally it is recognised that there is a shortage of foster placements – significantly for teenagers. While NPT continues to be able to successfully recruit carers for younger children, there are fewer enquiries made for children who are over the age of 11.

NPT fostering payment rates for children who are 0-5, 5-10 and 16 plus are competitive within the local market. NPT fostering service shows a significant margin in the payments for the 11-15 age group. This is a factor which is significantly impacting on the ability to recruit foster carers to this age range.

### **Comparative Foster carer payments 2015/16**

The figures below show the payments made for children aged 11-15 based on information made available to NPT fostering service in December 2015:

<b>Name of Local Authority or Fostering Agency</b>	<b>Max fee paid for 11 – 15 year olds per week</b>
<b>Neath Port Talbot</b>	£298.12
<b>Swansea</b>	£339.99
<b>Bridgend</b>	£366.99
<b>Cardiff</b>	£357.64
<b>TACT fostering *</b>	£378.00
<b>NFA*</b>	£366
<b>Fostering Outcomes *</b>	£433

In addition to these costs that are paid to the carer per child, there is an agency fee payable.

### **Proposal 1: Increase the Foster Carer payments for the 11+ age range by £50 per week**

It is proposed that the financial payments made to carers looking after children ages 11-15 is increased in order to be able to compete in the local market. This would see an increase in their weekly payments of £50, which will raise the total payment from a maximum of £298.12 to a maximum of £348.12. This increase is based on the current local market figures.

As well as encouraging new carers to apply to NPT, it is hoped that this will encourage existing foster carers to consider a change in their approval status and offer placements for older children.

As at 16/11/15 there were 61 looked after children aged 11 plus placed with Neath Port Talbot carers. Based on the current children who are looked after, this figure will rise in 2016-17 and 2017-18 to 70 children in the 11 plus category.

If we choose to increase the foster carer payment by £50 per week for this category this will result in an additional cost of £182,000 per annum (based on 70 children).

Working on the premise that each in-house placement costs the Council approximately £20,000 and an external placement costs £40,000, each Looked After Child in an external placement brought back in house will save the Authority £20,000.

Number of children who return to NPT carers from IFA carers	Approximate saving to the Local Authority
10	£200,000
15	£300,000
20	£400,000

Therefore, we would need to bring the equivalent of 9 looked after children currently in external placements back in house to offset the additional cost of the new foster carer fee.

Proposal	Maximum Additional Cost (per annum)
Increase the foster carer fee for 11 plus age range by £50 per week	£182,000 (Based on 70 lac)

### **Proposal 2: Introduce a retainer payment for all 11 plus carers**

Currently 98% of people who make an enquiry about fostering go on to have an initial visit, however the dropout rate following on from this is high, with only 44% of enquirers going on to undertake training. Those carers who withdraw from the process following their initial enquiry site finance and support as of the key reasons.

New applicants who are choosing to apply to foster will often advise that they require financial security in order to pursue their application and the issue of having a retainer during times when they do not have a child in their care is one of importance when considering whether to foster for NPT or another agency.

It is proposed that a retainer should be offered as this would give NPT fostering a marketing initiative which will attract applicants who may otherwise approach an independent agency or neighbouring Local Authority.

It is proposed that a retainer would be introduced that would only be paid to the 11 plus foster carers for a maximum of 6 weeks during any given financial year. The amount paid would be the equivalent of the weekly fee element of the carer payment and would not include the payments for the child.

The payment would be subject to the following criteria being met:

- Retainers are only applicable for carers who are approved for children over the age of 11.
- It would not be applicable to carers who only provide respite.
- There would be an expectation that in order to receive a retainer carers are able to offer a placement to any child within their matching criteria.
- Unreasonable refusal to accept a placement would result in no payment being made.

- A retainer will only be paid when there is no child in placement. i.e. if a carer is approved for 2 children and they have 1 child in placement they will not be paid for the other vacancy.
- Carers in receipt of a retainer would be required to be available to take placements in an emergency.

As at 01.02.16 there were 136 Approved Foster Carers within NPT. Of these 60 carers were providing a placement for children over the age of 11. Of the 60, 34 carers are providing placements for children aged 11 plus on a long term basis and their plan is for those children to remain with the carers, they would therefore not be expected to have a vacancy.

9 of the 60 carers are only able to provide respite care to young people over the age of 11 so would not be eligible to receive a retainer. The remaining 17 foster carers provide short term placements to young people over the age of 11. There are currently only 3 foster carers who are approved for children over the age of 11 who have no children placed and are available to provide a placement.

Based on the current vacancies the retainer cost would be:

Weekly Rate (calculated on the new payment)	Annual Cost based on 4 carers having no placements
£193	£3,474

<b>Proposal</b>	
Introduce a 6 week retainer for all 11 plus carers at £193 per week	This figure will be subject to variation depending on the vacancy levels, but based on the current vacancy level it would be £3, 474. If all of the short term carers for children over the age of 11 plus were vacant the cost would be £19,686, but this is not a scenario that is feasible.

We would need to bring the equivalent of 1 Looked After Child currently in external placements back in house to offset the additional cost of the new retainer fee.

### **Funding the proposals**

The £201k required to implement the strategy would be funded from within existing budgets.

The reduction of the numbers of Looked after children and associated costs has resulted in a £700,000 reduction in expenditure in 2015/16. In 2016/17 the required saving is nearly £1,000,000.

Further savings can be made by reducing the overall numbers of Looked after Children and importantly by increasing the number of in-house placements and reducing the number of children placed in Independent foster placements.

Working on the premise that each in-house placement costs us £20,000 and an external costs us £40,000 then each LAC in an external placement brought back in house will save the Authority £20,000 per annum.

We would therefore need to bring the equivalent of 10 looked after children currently in external placements back in house to offset the additional costs included in the table below.

Funding the proposals will not require an up-front investment but costs will be incurred over the year.

The proposals will support the ability to recruit foster carers. The fostering service will aim to increase the number of foster placements for children aged 11 plus by 15 by the end of 2016/17. This increase will cover the numbers required to recuperate an invest to save input, as well as start to deliver further savings within the placement budget.

<b>Proposals</b>	<b>Maximum Additional Cost (per annum)</b>
1. Increase the foster carer fee for 11 plus carers by £50 per week	£182,000 (Based on 70 looked after children)
2. Introduce a 6 week retainer for all 11 plus carers at £193 per week	Variable cost. Based on the existing numbers the cost would be £3,474 with a worst case scenario of £19,686
<b>Total</b>	<b>£201,686</b>

### **Proposal for Support Services**

By reconfiguring the current support arrangements, Children and Young People Services propose to develop a service in collaboration with Hillside Secure Unit to enable access to support from a clinical team of psychologists, psychology assistants, play therapists, and speech therapists. This service would support children with disabilities and children who are looked after who are unable to access support through CAMHS, as they do not fit the criteria for the service.

It is proposed that the clinical team would be able to provide an agreed level of:

- Assessments for children (not within Court proceedings)
- Support for children who are on the edge of care
- Play therapy for Looked After Children

- Clinical psychology support for carers of young people with complex needs

Work is currently being undertaken to consider the resources required for this proposal to be progressed and will be presented to Members for consideration along with detailed reports.

### **Recommendations**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Approval is sought to increase payments by £50 per week for children over the age of 11.	£182,000 Costs to be met from within existing budgets and from the reduction of children in IFA's.
Approval is sought to introduce a retainer for foster carers who are approved for children over the age of 11 for a maximum of 6 weeks in a year where they have no children placed with them.	£19,686 Costs to be met from within existing budgets and from the reduction of children in IFA's.
Establish support from a clinical team for foster carers for children on the edge of care, children with disabilities and children who are looked after who have complex needs.	Cost to be met from the reconfiguration of support services within Children & Young People Services.
<b>Total</b>	<b>£201,686</b>