

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE – 10 JANUARY 2017**

**REVIEW OF RESPITE PROVISION FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE**

**REPORT BY MARGO WILLIAMSON, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR – CHILDREN AND LEARNING**

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this report is to allow members to consider a revised respite provision for foster carers.

**1. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Children and Learning Committee;

- (i) Agree the implementation of the revised respite provision for foster carers detailed in section five below from April 2017.

**2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/ CORPORATE PLAN**

2.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement:

- Our children and young people are confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens
- Individuals and families are involved in decisions which affect them

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 Since 2009, Foster Carers have been able to take up to 28 days paid respite per year as part of their contractual agreement with Angus Council. Direct feedback from children and young people is that this level of respite is disruptive and does not promote their sense of wellbeing and belonging. The Family Placement Service has also experienced significant practical difficulties arranging and resourcing this level of respite over recent years.

**4. CURRENT POSITION**

4.1 Paid respite means that Foster Carers can take paid leave from fostering but it also means that children placed with them need to live in another place for up to 28 days every year. Although we try to make as few changes as possible for children, we cannot guarantee that a child will go to the same place every time their Foster Carer takes respite. This lack of consistency can be very difficult for children. They have told us that it makes them anxious about periods of respite and can leave them feeling like they don't really belong in their foster placement. Sometimes, because planning respite is difficult, children (and carers) may not know what arrangements are being made well enough in advance.

4.2 Not all Foster Carers take respite, but the level of respite being requested across the service has made it difficult to find suitable placements for children we have been unable to provide the level of respite being asked for in a way that meets children's needs. Overall, 1681 respite nights were used last year with some carers taking the 28 days of paid respite and some taking significantly less than 28 days. This has meant that some children have poor experiences and multiple respite placements over their time in foster care.

## **5. PROPOSALS**

- 5.1 Foster Carers will be entitled to receive 14 days of paid respite per calendar year and will continue to be paid their fee for this period. This proposed level of paid respite is consistent with the scheme operated in our neighbouring authority, although respite entitlements vary significantly across Scotland.
- 5.2 Foster Carers will give the Family Placement Service 6 weeks advance notice of a request for paid respite. Additional time-off from the fostering role will continue to be available but will be unfunded.
- 5.3 Respite Carers will continue to be paid the full fostering allowance for a child during the respite period.
- 5.4 If respite is specifically included as part of an individual child's plan, in order to maintain their foster placement, (usually for children who present with significant challenging behaviour) this will be treated as separate to the Foster Carers' 14 days paid respite entitlement.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The proposed changes are likely to reduce the amount we spend on providing paid respite. The actual cost of providing respite varies according to the fees we pay to those Foster Carers delivering respite. Using an average fee amount and assuming that all Foster Carers take their full paid respite entitlement, it is estimated that the proposals could generate savings of up to £27,000. In practice, the maximum saving will not be realised because not all Foster Carers currently take paid respite.

## **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and no issues were arising.

## **8. CONSULTATION (IF APPLICABLE)**

- 8.1 There has been extensive consultation with Foster Carers and a range of key stakeholders. The views of children and young people have also directly influenced this proposal. Feedback from our children and young people is that they do not like going to respite on a regular basis, particularly if it means multiple placements.

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

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List of Appendices: None