

ANGUS COUNCIL

FAMILY, EDUCATION AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE - 20 FEBRUARY 2024

REVIEW OF ALLOWANCES FOR FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARERS AND ADOPTERS, AND ANNUAL FEE UPLIFT FOR FOSTER CARERS

REPORT BY KIRSTY LEE, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND JUSTICE

1. ABSTRACT

Further to report 257/23 approved at Angus Council Children and Learning Committee on 19 September 2023, this report provides an update for members on the Angus implementation of the Scottish Recommended Allowance for eligible foster, adoptive and kinship carers and the backdated pay in respect of same. Recommendations are also outlined for the annual uplift of fees payable to Angus Council foster carers.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

2.1 This report contributes to outcomes across a range of strategic plans:

The Angus Community Plan 2022-30:

- Provide the best start in life for children
- Improve physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Create more opportunities for people to live well and achieve their personal goals

The Council Plan 2023-2028:

- When children cannot safely live at home, keep our children local in Angus, providing for their education and family needs.

The Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families 2021-23

- Our children having the best start in life in a nurturing environment
- Our children growing up healthy, confident, and resilient with improving physical and mental health and strengthened emotional wellbeing

Angus Promise Plan (Corporate Parenting Strategy):

- Keeping children and young people 'within their local communities where that meets their needs.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Family, Education and Justice Committee:

- (i) Implement the revised allowances to eligible foster, adoption and kinship carers and take assurance that Angus Council are compliant with the Scottish Recommended Allowance;
- (ii) Have due regard that eligible carers (ii) will receive the payment backdated to 1st April 2023 as previously agreed by Committee;
- (iii) Approve a 3% uplift of fees for foster carers for 2024/25; and
- (iv) Have due regard that the respective costs can be met from the SRA funding received for 2023/24 and assured for 2024/25.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Following the National Review of Care Allowances in September 2018, work was undertaken between COSLA officers and Scottish Government to determine a Scottish Recommended Allowance for kinship and foster carers, which is in line with 'Keeping the Promise' for Scotland's care experienced young people.
- 4.2 Further to this work, COSLA considered and approved a report in August 2023 supporting the introduction of a Scottish Recommended Allowance for kinship and foster carers across all local authority areas.
- 4.3 Allowances are currently provided by all local authorities. However, this is decided at a local level and varies across Scotland. The introduction of the Scottish Recommended Allowance provides a recommended allowance that all local authorities must pay as a minimum, although they can also choose to pay more. This minimum level will be kept under review by Scottish Government.
- 4.4 Where local authorities are already paying above the Scottish Recommended Allowance, it is expected that this will continue so that kinship, adoptive or foster carers currently in receipt of the allowance will not be worse off because of this commitment.
- 4.5 A report outlining the details of the Scottish Recommended Allowance was presented to the Children and Learning Committee on 19 September 2023, which outlined how Angus Council compares against the Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA):

	Current Angus Rates (weekly)	Proposed SRA (weekly)	
Age 0-4	£166.37	Age 0-4	£168.31
Age 5-10	£189.50	Age 5-10	£195.81
Age 11-15	£235.91	Age 11-15	£195.81
Age 16+	£287.00	Age 16+	£268.41

- 4.6 The decision of the Committee was subject to sufficient funding being received from Scottish Government, to implement the Scottish Recommended Allowance for eligible carers in Angus, to backdate the payment to the 1 April 2023 and to review the current Angus Council structure of allowances payable to kinship and foster carers to improve alignment with the national allowance structure with the outcome of that review being reported back to elected members for approval.

5. CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 As outlined to the Children and Learning Committee on 19 September 2023, the Scottish Government has identified £16m funding to fund the introduction of the Scottish Recommended Allowance from 2023/24. We have since received notice that the allocation for Angus Council is £325,809.65.
- 5.2 The additional cost of backdating allowances for those age groups where our local rate is currently lower than the Scottish Recommended Allowance is calculated to be £24,506 for the full year 2023/24.
- 5.3 All approved foster carers and kinship carers receive a weekly allowance to meet the needs and costs of looking after a child in their care. Carers receive an additional four weeks of allowance each year; one-week extra allowance is paid on the child's birthday, one week extra is paid in December, and two extra weeks are paid in the summer holidays.
- 5.4 From consultation undertaken, this arrangement and separation of allowances appears to be in place across most local authorities. If these extra payments are included as part of the total sum we pay carers, allowances for all age ranges in Angus may be viewed to be at a higher rate than the Scottish Recommended Allowance levels of payment.
- 5.5 However, our current, published, weekly allowances are clearly described as 'additional'. The additional payments are not intended to count towards weekly costs but are in recognition of the increased needs of children at specific times and so carers can meet their needs accordingly. The Children, Families and Justice service consider these necessary to meet the needs of children in our care.

- 5.6 The Carers Support Service have been considering the merits of a full review of our age-based allowance scheme as directed by Committee in September. In scoping the timing of a review, advice has been sought from Social Work Scotland and consultation has taken place with the Social Work Scotland Community Placement Subgroup. The assessment of the Carers Support Service is that it is prudent to retain our allowance structure with four age-based levels.
- 5.7 The published 2023/24 Scottish Recommended Allowance retains the four levels, albeit two levels (5-10 and 11-15) are identical. It is not known if these amounts will vary in the next financial year, resulting in four distinct levels of allowance but in benchmarking with other authorities. Therefore, it is recommended that there is no revision to the current scheme but that the service keep this under regular review in line with the current national position.

6. PROPOSAL FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SCOTTISH RECOMMENDED ALLOWANCE

- 6.1 It is recommended that all approved kinship carers, foster carers and some adopters who receive an allowance, will have the weekly allowance uplifted from our current published rates to the new Scottish Recommended rate. This rate will also apply to the 'additional' 4 weeks allowance paid to carers. The cost of applying the Scottish Recommended Allowance to this element of the allowance is £4,808 and will be met from the funding allocation.
- 6.2 Those caring for children aged 11 and over, will continue to receive the Angus Council rate, as this is more than the Scottish Recommended Allowance.
- 6.3 This will uplift fees, where indicated, to the Scottish Recommended Allowance, and where the allowance paid is already greater, no change would be made. Changes to the allowance will be backdated to 01 April 2023, as previously directed:

	Current Angus Rates (Paid weekly)		SRA Revised Rates (Paid weekly)	Difference in weekly payment
Age 0-4	£166.37	Age 0-4	£168.31	+ £1.94
Age 5-10	£189.50	Age 5-10	£195.81	+£6.31
Age 11-15	£235.91	Age 11-15	£195.81	Angus Council Rate
Age 16+	£287.00	Age 16+	£268.41	Angus Council Rate

7. PROPOSALS FOR ANNUAL FEE UPLIFT

- 7.1 All foster carers are paid a fee in addition to the allowance paid for the care of each child. In Angus, this weekly fee ranges from £254.09 for a Level 1 carer, caring for a single child, to £652.97 for a Level 3 carer, caring for three children. The uplift for 2023/24 was set at 6% to take account of inflation and the cost-of-living implications on children and families.
- 7.2 In the context of the uplift provided for 2023/24 and considering the ongoing pressures on families to meet the needs of children, it is proposed that Committee implement a fee uplift of 3% for 2024/25, which would benefit foster carers exclusively.
- 7.3 This would impact fees as follows:
- At 3% the lowest paid carer would see a fee increase from £254.09 to £261.71 (+£7.62)
 - At 3% Our highest paid carers would see an increase from £652.91 to £672.56 (+£19.65)

Based on payments made in November 2023, this uplift would cost in the region of £25,788.

As noted, the funding allocated by Scottish Government to Angus for the uplift of allowances to meet the Scottish Recommended Allowance for 2023/24 is £325,809.65.

The cost of implementing the Scottish Recommended Allowance is £24,506 with additional costs associated with a 3% uplift in fees.

Description	Indicative cost per annum (based on current number of carers)
Implement SRA backlog payments/applying changes to future payments	£24,506
Implement SRA amounts to the additional 4 week allowance	£4,808
Apply 3% uplift to fees (2024/25)	£25,788
TOTAL COST	£55,102

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The allocation received from the Scottish Government provides additional funding, with a minimum projected surplus of circa £270,706, this surplus on the additional funding provided by government arises because Angus Council already pay above the Scottish Recommended Allowance for children aged 11 – 18 and have done for many years. This means the Council was incurring and budgeting for higher costs prior to the additional funding being provided.
- 8.2 Our local allocation is sufficient to meet the in-year costs of the SRA. Furthermore, in light of the allocation received, the proposal for an uplift in fees in addition to this is cost neutral for the Council and the Children, Families and Justice 2024/25 revenue budget.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

The risk is mitigated by allocation received from the Scottish Government and is therefore assessed as low.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached.

12. CONSULTATION

The relevant members of the Council's Leadership Team have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

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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