

Cabinet Meeting

30 November 2016

Report title	Extensions/Alterations to Foster Carers' own Properties	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Children and Young People	
Key decision	No	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Service Director Children & Young People	
Originating service	Children & Young People	
Accountable employee(s)	Alison Hinds Tel Email	Head of Service Looked After Children 01902 55 Alison.hinds@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	People Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board Cabinet	16.9.16 8.11.16 30.11.16

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Delegate authority to the Service Director for Children and Young People to approve extensions and adaptations to foster carers own properties up to the value of £50,000; to the Strategic Director for People for between £50,000 to £100,000; and over £100,000 to Cabinet Resources Panel in line with the review of the Constitution.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Securing permanence options for Looked after Children (LAC) is a key priority for the Children and Young People's Service.
- 1.2 Research and evidence supports the fact that Looked after Children who can live in secure settled permanent family environments will experience better outcomes not only in childhood but also in their adult life. Schofield and Beck (2005) evidence that placement instability impacts on a child's ability to develop secure attachments and this exacerbates behavioural and emotional difficulties. Additionally, Ward (2009) found that children with a high number of placement changes fared worse in psychological, social and academic outcomes. The Care Enquiry 2013 concluded that high quality lasting relationships are imperative as a child, to support the capacity to form relationships as an adult.
- 1.3 To secure permanence for Looked after Children through to adulthood, can occasionally require additional support from the local authority. On occasions, foster carers may require financial support to extend or adapt their own home in order to offer placements, particularly in the case of sibling groups and more often when children are being placed with extended family (connected persons) foster carers.
- 1.4 There have been two occasions recently where by the City of Wolverhampton Council has been asked to financially support the cost of extensions to foster carers' homes. On both of these occasions this has enabled children to be placed within their own birth family network on a permanent basis. Without the financial support for an extension to the home environment, the children would not have been able to experience the opportunity of living within their extended family on a permanent basis.

2.0 Progress

- 2.1 In order to formally support these opportunities going forward, the City of Wolverhampton Council requires a clear policy and procedure detailing the appropriate response to requests for financial support for extensions or alterations to foster carers' homes.
- 2.2 Consultation has taken place with colleagues within the City of Wolverhampton Council to ensure the policy meets planning, procurement, legal and financial regulations.
- 2.3 The proposed policy provides a clear criteria and pathway for decision making relating to the suitability of the requirement for the extension and/or alteration, and the decision making process regarding authorisation for the financial support. The procedure also addresses the requirement for this arrangement to be underpinned by a legal contract.
- 2.4 Foster carers who receive this level of support will be encouraged and supported to secure the placement of the children permanently through an appropriate order, such as a Special Guardianship Order, Adoption Order or Child Arrangement Order. This would enable the child/children to cease to be looked after and instead be brought up without

the intervention of social care services. When giving consideration to requests for financial support for extensions the age of the child and sustainability of the placement until adulthood will be given due consideration.

- 2.5 The proposal is seeking approval for Cabinet Resources Panel (CRP) to delegate authority for amounts up to £50,000 to the Service Director for Children and Young People for extensions/alterations to foster carers' own properties.
- 2.6 For amounts between £50,000 and £100,000 it is proposed that authority will be delegated to the Strategic Director for People. Approval from CRP will be required for amounts over £100,000 in line with the review of the constitution.
- 2.7 The cost of preparing and approving plans for foster carers' own properties will be covered as part of the City of Wolverhampton's Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- 2.8 The Children and Young Person's Service area has developed a procedure to support the implementation of this policy, outlining the key steps that needs to be taken in order to seek approval for funding an extension/alteration to a foster carer's property.

3.0 Financial implications

- 3.1 The annual approved budget for 2016/17 for extensions/alterations to Foster Carers' own properties is £136,000 and is held within the Fostering Service. Any work approved will need to be contained within this budget.
- 3.2 The levels of delegation requested are set out in the table below:

Delegation Level	Amount
Service Director for Children and Young People	Up to £50,000
Strategic Director for People	Between £50,000 and £100,000
Cabinet Resources Panel	Over £100,000

[NM/17102016/T]

4.0 Legal implications

- 4.1 The legal implications are contained in the body of the policy .
- 4.2 In addition agreements of this nature are made in accordance with the provisions of Section 17(6) and Schedule 2 of the Children Act 1989. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 imposes a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need. Where a child is assessed as having certain needs, the local authority should meet those needs through the provision of services to secure the welfare of the child. The range of services that the local authority can provide

are not prescribed or limited to any list and essentially local authorities can provide anything which they consider necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area.

- 4.3 Under section 17(6) the services provided by a local authority in the exercise of function conferred on them by this section may include providing accommodation and giving assistance in kind or in cash.
[TC/08092016/K]

5.0 Equalities implications

- 5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

6.0 Environmental implications

- 6.1 There are no environmental implications.

7.0 Human resources implications

- 7.1 There are no human resource implications.

8.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 8.1 There are no corporate landlord implications. Property Services have been consulted with, and contributed to the proposed new policy and procedure.

9.0 Schedule of background papers

- 9.1 There are no background papers.