

Financial Support to Carers Offering Legal Permanency to Children Policy

Cllr Val Gibson, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, introduced the report.

The Cabinet Member explained the reasons behind the need to review the current policy towards the amount of financial support to LAC children who become subject of adoption order, special guardianship orders or child arrangement orders.

The Cabinet Member advised the panel a review in the policy was needed to comply with current legislation and in response to a judicial review application. A benchmark review exercise was also undertaken with neighbouring authorities to check that the level of proposed allowance for permanence orders was consistent.

Alison Hinds, Head of Service, Looked After Children, gave an overview of the main report and added that the proposed changes would include a more stringent means test. The Head of Service advised that this work had been based on guidance provided the Welfare Rights Team in determining the eligibility criteria for financial support.

The panel queried if option c as listed in para 8 of the report was the preferred option. The Head of Service confirmed that this proposal was the recommendation based on the legal advice from legal counsel to avoid the risk of legal challenge. The panel queried how the plans for payment of allowances will take account of any Universal Credit allowances paid to carers with reference to the proposed assessment for calculating financial support detailed in the report. The Head of Service explained the impact of the changes on applicant receiving either a means tested benefit or those with incomes above the current threshold for eligibility for Universal Credit.

The panel welcomed the recognition of the proposals to support families willing to care for family members. The panel queried the financial support that would be available to people aged 18-21 who decided that not to go onto university and the concern that this would put at risk or worse outcomes. The panel wanted reassurance that young people in this situation would be given every opportunity to progress.

The Head of Service advised the panel that young people in this situation would be able to access additional financial support, which is updated annually.

Minutes

The panel queried the risks to the Council if the current policy was not revised. Emma Bennett, Service Director, Children and Young People, advised the panel that there was a risk that the policy could be subject to challenge, however changes were needed to make the policy much clearer and consistent with the legal requirements as regards the payment of allowances to carers currently in the receipt of a fostering allowance.

The Service Director advised the panel the impact of the policy changes will be

monitored and progress reported.

Resolved:

1. The panel supported the proposed changes to the financial allowances paid to carers of children subject to adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement orders.
2. The panel comments on the proposed changes to be included in the report to Cabinet meeting on 26 April 2017.