

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

14 DECEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

ADDITIONAL ONE-OFF PAYMENT TO BRIDGEND FOSTER AND ADULT PLACEMENT CARERS

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide cabinet with details of a proposed one-off payment to Bridgend Foster Carers and Adult Placement Carers in recognition of the hard work they have undertaken throughout the Covid Pandemic.

1.2 Seek approval of Cabinet to make the proposed payment.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective/objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

- **Better health and well-being** – Improve the physical, mental and emotional well-being of children and young people and vulnerable citizens, to ensure they can thrive and fulfil their potential.

3. Background

3.1 In March 2020 the whole of the UK went into Lockdown as a result of the global Covid-19 pandemic. This resulted in schools being closed and children and young people remaining at home throughout the day, with very limited opportunity to socialise with peers outside of this environment and their lives effectively being turned upside down.

3.2 In addition to the above, care experienced children had the additional impact of not being able to meet with their family for face to face contact.

3.3 During this period foster carers were asked to step in to facilitate contact with these children via the phone or using Facetime, a role they were often taking on for the first time with little preparation, training or easy access to support.

3.4 During this time our foster carers and supported lodgings hosts demonstrated high levels of resilience, offering the highest standards of care to the children who they were looking after, many of whom displayed challenging behaviours linked to their experiences of trauma.

3.5 Another impact of the pandemic was the effect on adults with a learning disability living with adult placement families. This group of people were no longer able to

engage in their normal day time activities, because of restrictions in the operation of day services, or to have face to face contact with their friends and relatives.

- 3.6 At the same time that carers, young people and adults with a learning disability were experiencing these significant changes in their lives, the way that we were able to offer support changed with visits to the home, from all agencies, reducing to all but the most necessary and moving to the use of telephone/Facetime communication.
- 3.7 It is worthy of note that there have been two payments made to the social care workforce, as part of a national initiative funded by Welsh Government, to recognise and reward the hard work and commitment of staff who have provided essential care to our most vulnerable citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic, but foster carers, supported lodgings hosts, and adult placement families were not rewarded in this way despite their commitment to and playing such a significant role in safeguarding vulnerable children, young people and adults with a learning disability who they look after during a period of exceptional difficulty.
- 3.8 Across Wales the response to carers has been varied with 14 Local Authorities (June 2020) making no additional payment. Of the seven Local Authorities who had made a payment this included one-off payments, individual responses and additional allowances for an agreed period.
- 3.9 From our discussions with Independent Fostering Agencies it would appear that a number have made a one-off payment to their carers (although some have not made any payment and we have not received a response from all).
- 3.10 In relation to the adults with a learning disability the Vale of Glamorgan Council provides the Adult Placement Scheme on behalf of the Vale and Bridgend. The Vale of Glamorgan Adult Placement carers received a one off payment of £500 in May 2020, the Bridgend carers did not.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 Across Wales there is a shortage of people who are willing/able to provide foster care and supported lodgings placements to children and young people who cannot live at home with their birth families. Bridgend County Borough do not have sufficient numbers of in-house foster carers and supported lodgings hosts and therefore, alongside our recruitment of new carers, it is essential that we demonstrate to our current carers how valuable and highly thought of they are in order to retain them.
- 4.2 There is a similar position in relation to the recruitment of adult placement families which has proved to be problematic, although there are a small number of families who are being assessed to come onto the scheme. Adult placement families provide a homely and supportive environment for people with a learning disability and at the current time demand for the service is growing and plans are being made to expand the scheme to other groups such as people with mental health difficulties.
- 4.3 As highlighted above during the pandemic social care staff have received two payments, funded by Welsh Government, in recognition of the role they play supporting vulnerable people, but foster carers and supported lodgings hosts have not received any additional payment.

- 4.4 It is proposed that all of our adult placement families and in-house foster carers, which will include both general and connected persons and our supported lodgings hosts, who have had a child placed with them, will receive a one-off payment of £500 in recognition of the additional costs of caring, their resilience and their determination to provide the highest quality of care to children, young people and adults with a learning disability through such a challenging period.
- 4.5 Careful consideration was given to whether Independent Fostering Agencies should also be eligible for this payment, but as noted above many of the agencies who have responded have indicated that they have taken their own measures for their carers during this unprecedented period.
- 4.6 This proposal does not include Special Guardians as the children living under these arrangements are not looked after by the local authority, with the Special Guardian holding Parental Responsibility for them once an Order has been granted.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 The above is a proposal for a one off payment which is directly linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and to support recovery as restrictions relax and as such there is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions.
- 6.2 An initial EIA screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- **Long Term** – Central to Children’s Social Care’s strategy to reduce the number of children who need to be looked after, is being able to place children with foster carers who live within the County Borough allowing continuity in terms of education, health care, peers and contact with birth family. This proposal will deliver a message to our carers about how valued their contribution is, encouraging them to continue being foster carers for BCBC. In relation to adults it is the intention to grow and expand the adult placement

scheme to provide a service to an increasing number of adults with a learning disability and other groups such as people with a mental health difficulty.

- **Prevention and Integration** – As noted within this report having a sufficient number of foster care placements available for children who cannot continue to live at home with their family is a significant challenge across Wales. There is significant work taking place as part of Maethu Cymru/Foster Wales around both recruitment and retention in recognition of the size of the challenge. The proposal in this report would support BCBC's attempts to retain the Foster Carers we currently have, thereby preventing further reduction in the number of placements that are available, by acknowledging the resilience and dedication shown by our foster carers throughout the pandemic and demonstrating that they are a valued part of the wider social care team. The adult placement scheme provides a very cost effective way of supporting adults avoiding much more costly residential or supported living placements. The scheme is designed to enable people to live in a local community and participate in community life.
- **Collaboration and Involvement** – Regular consultation events (ICE meetings) are ordinarily undertaken by Bridgend Fostering that support consultation and collaboration with carers regarding matters that are going well and issues/concerns. In addition to this the service has 5 liaison carers who regularly support foster carers and provide further opportunity for consultation and feedback. From this feedback it is acknowledged that the Foster Carers appreciated the gesture of a voucher provided in March 2021. However, they have also provided an opportunity for some feedback regarding how carers felt devalued when comparing this with the payment made to social care workers. The adult placement scheme is a collaboration with a neighbouring local authority and plans are being made to expand the scheme and discussions with another neighbouring local authority have been arranged.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 Social Services and Well-being have received two allocations of finance to support social care recovery from the Welsh Government. It is proposed that funds will be allocated from the second allocation of £1.139 million to make these payments.
- 8.2 The cost of the above proposal would amount to £82,000.
- 8.3 By demonstrating commitment and support to our foster carers, this may help retention, which will have a positive budget implication as there will be more placements available for children when needed. This would reduce the need to make placements with higher cost Independent Fostering Agencies, often outside of Bridgend County Borough Council.
- 8.4 The same applies to the adult placement scheme which provides a very cost effective service in comparison to residential and supported living services.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 Cabinet is requested to approve the proposal to make a one-off payment to all approved foster carers, supported lodgings hosts and adult placement families as set out within the report.

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Background documents: Equality Impact Screening document