

ANGUS COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE
5 June 2003

INTRODUCTION OF ADDITIONAL ALLOWANCES FOR FOSTER CARERS
REPORT BY THE ACTING DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

ABSTRACT

This report sets out proposals to introduce two new allowances for foster carers and to remove their remaining entitlement to enhanced payments.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work and Health Committee:-

- i) notes the contents of this report;
- ii) agrees to the introduction of the additional allowances specified, with effect from 16 June 2003
- iii) agrees that the remaining entitlement to enhanced allowances will cease on the same date.

2. INTRODUCTION

The great majority of children in Angus who require care away from their own family are placed with foster carers. Angus Council currently has 54 foster carers. Five of these carers are relatives of the children, twelve are permanent foster carers providing long term care to children who will not be returning home and the remainder offer periods of foster care ranging from a few days to a year or more. At any one time approximately 100 children are in foster placements in Angus.

All foster carers receive a fostering allowance to cover the costs of caring for the children they have in placement. The allowances are set annually, based on rates recommended by COSLA, and dependent on the age of the child. For some years foster carers of teenagers were referred to as Mainstay carers and paid a fee to reflect the demands and the difficulty of the task they were undertaking. Foster carers of younger children could receive additional payments, under the enhanced allowance scheme, if they were looking after particularly challenging children. This scheme allowed for the fostering allowance to be enhanced, by up to 100%, following a standardised assessment of the child's needs and behaviour.

A new fostering scheme was introduced by Angus Council in December 2001 (committee report 637/01). The new scheme largely replaced the Mainstay and Temporary foster carers schemes that previously operated. This change was in line with national trends towards increased professionalisation of fostering services and in recognition of the greater demands and expectations being placed on carers. All foster carers on the new scheme continue to receive a fostering allowance to cover the costs of looking after a child but are also paid a carer's allowance to recognised the time and effort they put into the task. The carer's allowance replaced the fee paid to mainstay carers. Given that on the new scheme carers receive a carer's allowance eligibility for enhancements under the old scheme was removed. In place of enhancements a system of additional allowances was introduced to provide further financial support to carers who had children with specified additional needs which incurred additional expenditure by the carers. Replacing enhanced allowances with this range of additional payments was designed to make the process more objective and to increase the clarity about when carers would be entitled to additional financial support.

The new scheme has now been in operation for 15 months. The current proposals are based on a review of the way the additional allowances are working in practice and an attempt to rationalise the position in relation to the payment of enhanced and additional allowances.

The first proposal is for a 'Disability/ Medical Needs' allowance. It had been hoped that foster carers would be able to apply for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to cover the additional costs associated with the care of these children. In reality it has sometimes proved difficult for carers to get these payments.

The second proposal relates to the payment of enhanced and additional allowances. Since the new scheme was introduced it has become evident that operating two sets of criteria for additional allowances is confusing and difficult to understand for carers, social workers and the finance section. To rationalise the position it is proposed to remove the remaining entitlement to enhanced allowances and introduce an additional allowance to be paid to this second group of carers where they are caring for a child who presents exceptional demands.

3. PROPOSAL

It is proposed that the system of enhanced allowances for foster carers should cease to operate. It is further proposed that two new discretionary allowances are introduced:

- i) Disability/ medical needs allowance**
Carers should be entitled to an allowance of up to £50 per week to cover additional costs associated with the care of a child who has a disability or has a medical condition. Before this allowance is agreed, carers must apply for Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Any DLA awarded will be deducted from the amount of the discretionary allowance that is paid.
- ii) Exceptional demands allowance – for carers not receiving a carer's allowance**
Occasionally there are circumstances where children place significant additional demands on carers that are not covered by the existing categories of additional allowance. Dealing with these demands is part of the expectation placed on carers who receive a carer's allowance. Under the current proposals, carers who do not receive an allowance will no longer be entitled to enhancements. In order to assist this group of carers it is proposed to introduce an exceptional demands allowance of up to £50 per week.

It is anticipated that carers will be at least as well off under the new arrangements as they are under the existing system. However, to exclude the possibility that foster carers are financially disadvantaged by these changes, it is proposed that carers should continue to receive a minimum additional payment equal to the enhanced allowance they are currently receiving.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The replacement of the existing enhancements with the allowances proposed in this report will be cost neutral, therefore the financial implications arising from this report will be contained within the social work department's revenue budget.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

6. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration, and the Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

7. CONCLUSION

This report proposes an amendment to Angus Council's fostering scheme giving the flexibility to provide foster cares with additional financial support when they are caring for children with additional or exceptional needs.

R Peat
Acting Director of Social Work

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