

SUBJECT: FEE INCREASESE FOR FOSTER PANEL MEMBERS

MEETING: Individual Cabinet Member

DATE: 9th November 2018

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

- To propose a fee increase for foster panel members
- To provide a context and case for why this proposal is made.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Individual member approval is sought to bring Monmouthshire's Panel Member fees in line with other Local Authority areas in Gwent by increasing fees/expenses to Foster Panel members as follows:

- Panel Chair (& Vice Chair if deputising) - £300 per session (increase of £25 per session)
- Vice Chair - £150.00 per session (increase of £120.00 per session)
- Independent members £75 per session plus mileage.

3. KEY ISSUES:

Monmouthshire Fostering Panel is the mechanism via which recommendations are made for the approval of foster carers, both kinship carers and generic foster carers. The panel is set up under Fostering Regulations and currently comprises:

- 1 x Panel Chair
- 1x Vice Chair
- 5 x Independent members
- 2x Social Work staff
- 1x elected member

Currently Panel Members receive the following expenses for attendance at Fostering Panel

- Panel Chair (Vice Chair if deputising) - £275.00 per half day session
- Vice Chair & Independent Panel members - £30.00 per half day session

These payments appear to be out of line with payments made to panel members, not only by Independent Fostering Agencies, but also with other Local Authorities within Gwent as illustrated below.

- Torfaen Payments – £300 Panel chair & £100 Independent per session
- Caerphilly payments - £300 panel chair & £150.00 vice chair & £50 Independents per attendance
- Blaenau Gwent - £300 Panel Chair & £50 Independent members, per half day

- Newport City Council - £300 Panel Chair & £100 Independent members, per half day

Recruiting to panel members is not an easy task and there is competition between agencies. Panel members are well aware of the fees and expenses offered by other agencies and have raised this as an issue.

The number of panels required and the number of cases presented at each panel correlates to the number of cases within a legal framework. In some cases there will be a number of potential carers that might need to be approved 'just in case' they prove to be the best permanency option for a child. The increased numbers of child protection and court work within the service has placed additional pressure on the Foster Panel.

The success of the fostering project in attracting generic carers to look after Monmouthshire children, whilst welcomed, also adds to the numbers of cases needing to go to panel.

Having sufficient panel members to ensure that panels are quorate and can operate effectively is, therefore, critical to Children's Services to ensure that:

- The service can meet court deadlines in respect of the approval of potential carers
- Any delay in the approval of generic carers is minimised.

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The option to leave the fees and expenses as they are include:

- Loss of Foster Panel Members who move to other panels for greater reward
- Loss of experienced Panel Members, affecting level of expertise which is brought to bear in decision making
- Delay in approval of Foster Carers, due to delay in recruiting new membership to Panel
- Inability to recruit new Panel Members
- Failure to reach our recruitment targets of 6 additional Generic Households approved during 2018-2019.

This option is therefore not recommended.

Some options regarding the level of fee increase was considered, however, the recommendation was made to bring us into line with other Local Authorities.

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The proposal will be evaluated through the level of turnover of panel members and / or the number of vacancies and our ability to recruit.

Individual panel members receive an annual appraisal.

6. REASONS:

Increasing Foster Panel Member fees will help mitigate the risks of the service having an insufficient pool of panel members.

Sufficiency of panel members is critical to core business in respect of our ability to meet court imposed deadlines and meet our own targets regarding the Fostering Project (increasing the pool of generic carers).

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Based on the assumption of a maximum of 18 half day panels per year and the same level of Panel Members as current, the proposal represents an increase in costs to the authority as follows:.

- Current costs of **18** fostering panels per year = £8,190.00.
- Estimated costs of proposed new fees for 18 Panels a year = £18,100.00

As it is unlikely that we will ever reach 18 fostering panels a year (as evidenced by current spend on panel), this figure very much represents a maximum spend and in reality is likely to be much reduced (ie less panels per year and not all Independent panel members attend all panels).

In setting the 2018/19 Children's Services budget, this cost increase of £9,910 was anticipated and as such an allowance has been made to fund this proposal.

8. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

This proposals accords with the intentions of the Corporate Parenting strategy regarding local sufficiency of foster carers and in support kinship arrangements for children where this is safe to do so.

9. CONSULTEES:

Fostering Team Manager

Fostering Panel Members

DMT

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

11. AUTHOR:

Jane Rodgers

12. CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: 01633 644054

E-mail: janerodgers@monmouthshire.gov.uk

