

# Cabinet Member Decision Note.

## Specialist Fostering Scheme

Date Issued: 11<sup>th</sup> November 2011

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To: Cabinet Member for Children's Services  
From: Director Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting

Parish / Wards Affected: All

### Purpose

- To obtain agreement to the implementation of a proposal to further develop our Foster Care Payments Scheme by creating a 'specialist carer' category specifically to cater for children who would otherwise be placed in Residential Care.

### Recommended Decision to be taken by the Cabinet Member Under Delegated Powers

- The Director, Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting be authorised to deploy funding from within existing Care budgets to develop specialist fostering provision as an alternative to residential care for children.

### 1. Reasons

- 1.1 Swindon's Fostering Service is built on the belief that all children are best cared for and are most likely to achieve their full potential, when raised in a family environment. Ideally, that will be within their own birth family, but where that is not possible for whatever reason – our aim is to provide foster carers who can reflect and respect a child's background and heritage and, through careful and considered matching, best meet the child's identified needs. All foster carers are expected to provide a quality of care experience that aspires to meet the very best standards that every child deserves. Our payment scheme is designed to recognise the differing skills and experience that individual foster carers bring to the fostering task.
- 1.2 We believe that the vast majority of children can be successfully cared for within a family setting. However, we recognise that for a small number of children, the degree of physical, emotional or psychological needs that they present can require a level of attention that will stretch the capacity of even the most caring and supportive families to the limits. Children with profound physical and/or learning difficulties, for example, may need a level of supervision and skilled specialist care that cannot realistically be provided by most foster carers who are likely to have other commitments on their time and energies. Traditionally, such children will be placed in residential care where the emotional and physical demands of caring for them can be shared between a number of

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adults. Whilst the quality of such provision may be excellent, it can often be difficult to replicate the kind of one-to-one interpersonal relationships that are so important to a child's ability to develop healthy attachments.

- 1.3 Exceptionally, however, potential foster carers may come forward who do possess a unique combination of knowledge, skills, experience, motivation and personal circumstances that enable them to meet those needs within a family context, and thus avoid the need for a child to be placed in residential care. To take advantage of such opportunities will however require the facility to undertake individual negotiations around appropriate financial support, and will thus place such carers outside of the present fostering payment schemes.

## 2. Detail

- 2.1 The specific requirements of any carers subject to such arrangements will include all of the following:
- 1) 2 adult carers who will be directly and actively involved in the care of the foster child/ren on a full-time basis. (ie no other employment or work commitments.)
  - 2) The carers will have no child-care commitments other than for the foster child/ren placed through SBC. (This includes own children of school age)
  - 3) At least one carer to hold a recognised professional social work or child-care qualification.
  - 4) Where the proposed care is of physically or learning disabled children, at least one carer to hold a recognised and relevant nursing qualification.
  - 5) Both carers to have had significant previous direct working experience, in a caring capacity, with children with needs similar to those for whom they are approved as foster carers. *Significant in this context means a minimum of 5 years.*
- 2.2 It is anticipated that the number of carers able to meet this specification will be extremely small, but for those who are eligible, individual circumstances and the 'types' of need able to be catered are likely to vary considerably. Consequently, no fixed fee level has been set for carers operating under this section of the Scheme; fees will need to be individually negotiated on a case by case basis. It is accepted, however, that in order to meet the first of the eligibility criteria, the fee will need to include compensation for loss of earnings in addition to the normal age-related allowances for the child.
- 2.3 Carers able to meet the above stringent criteria are likely to be highly employable in their own professional field, and realistically therefore the costs of compensating for loss of earnings of both partners are likely to be significant.

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Child Care social workers, for example, with 5 years post-approval experience will be earning in the region of £30 - £35K p.a.

- 2.4 Set against these costs are the significant savings likely to be generated by the avoidance of the use of a residential placement. The annual cost of such a placement, for the kind of child for whom this scheme is designed to cater, would typically be in the region of £175- £185K p.a.
- 2.5 Further major savings will be achieved where carers are able to provide placements for more than one child.
- 2.6 To date, one set of foster carers able to meet all of the required criteria have been identified and approved by Swindon Fostering Service. The couple are able to take two placements. A contract has been agreed, and one placement has been made, of a profoundly disabled child previously placed in a residential home. The overall saving to the department is currently circa £2.5K per week.
- 2.7 As yet no other potential carers have been identified who would meet the criteria for consideration as specialist carers as defined under this scheme. However agreement in principle to allowing further flexible deployment of placement budgets would enable similar arrangements to be negotiated should suitable candidates come forward.

#### Alternative Options

- Rigid adherence to our existing payments scheme will remove the possibility for some children in care to be placed in family environments rather than residential care

#### Risk Management

##### *Financial and Procurement Implications*

- The development of a wider range of placement options for children in care is in accordance with our duties and responsibilities under Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked –after Children.
- The overall children's social care placement budget is currently £6.6m and the average annual cost of residential placements is £159k compared to £12k for in house foster placements. The proposal therefore represents significant potential savings wherever a child can be placed with a specialist carer as opposed to a high cost residential placement.

##### *Legal / Human Rights Implications*

- The development of new fostering resources will promote better placement

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choice for children, their families, and social workers.

- 'Bespoke' placements for children will enable carers and the fostering service to better meet the requirements of Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards (NMS) eg 2.1 "Children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity."

### *Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA)*

- This development is covered by the Diversity Impact Assessment for the fostering service, which is available from the Family Placement Service. The scheme in itself is a means to secure a normal family life for children with profound disabilities, and so has a positive impact for this group. There is no adverse impact on the basis of race, religion, gender, sex, sexual orientation, marital/civil partnership status or maternity/pregnancy.

### *Links to Corporate Plans and Policies*

- Links to One Swindon Priority, 'Living independently, protected from harm, leading healthy lives and making a positive contribution' and specifically relates to the provision of a family life and being protected from abuse.

### **Consultees**

- The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

### **Background Papers and Appendices**

Copy of proposed contract  
Specialist Payment scheme

**Declarations of Interest** – The Cabinet Member / Shadow or Group Spokesperson / Ward Councillor should consider whether they have any known interests in any of the matters referred to in the Briefing Note. They are reminded that if they have such an interest this should be declared to the Monitoring Officer (Committee and Member Services). They should take no part in the consideration of the Decision Note and should refer the Decision Note to the Leader of the Council / Other Cabinet Member Group Leader / Other Group Spokesperson / Other Ward Councillor for consideration.

### **Consultation with Opposition Spokespersons / Ward Members**

Under the Council's Constitution opposition political group Shadow Spokespersons, and where relevant Ward Councillors, will be consulted on all reports where it is proposed that a Cabinet Member will be recommended to make a decision under their delegated powers.

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**Proposed Action:**

The Director, Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting be authorised to deploy funding from within existing Care budgets to develop specialist fostering provision as an alternative to residential care for children

**Response required from Opposition Spokespersons / Ward Members by:**

**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

**Shadow Spokespersons**

Cllr Fay Howard  
Cllr Sewell

Response received from Cllr Fay Howard – 24<sup>th</sup> November  
Agreeing the proposed decision to be taken under delegated author

No response received from Cllr Sewell

**Name of Spokesperson / Ward Member .....**

**Agreed the proposed Decision to be taken under delegated authority  
Note and request the proposed Decision be reconsidered**

**Reasons for Reconsideration**

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**Request Report be Referred to Cabinet**

**Signed .....**      **Date .....**

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