

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE DECISION MEETING (SPECIAL)

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care Decision Meeting held on Monday, 20 February 2017 at 10.00 am in Conference Room A, Civic Offices.

Present

Councillor Ryan Brent (in the Chair)

Councillor Rob Wood

6. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

7. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest. However, Councillor Wood wished to record that his son-in-law works for the Harbour School, his daughter works for Motiv8 and his Step Grandson works for the Housing team and his sister-in-law is the head of the education funding agency. He also wished to record that he is a local authority governor at both Charter Academy and Ark Dickens Primary Academy.

8. Means Testing Assessment Policy for Adoption, Special Guardianship, Child Arrangements and Residence Orders

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The report was introduced by Richard Webb, Finance Manager. He introduced Kelly Redman, Team Leader for Financial Assessments, Income and Recovery, whose team will be visiting all carers receiving financial support under Adoption, Special Guardianship Child Arrangement or Residence Orders, if the new policy is agreed.

Richard advised that he was proposing two amendments to the recommendations in the report: (1) to add to the second recommendation that the fostering rates will be adjusted in line with changes in the Government's Minimum Fostering Allowance rates for the South East and (2) to add to the third recommendation under the transitional protection arrangements that carers experience a reduction of more than 20% in their weekly level of financial support (rather than 50% as in the report).

In response to questions from Councillor Rob Wood, opposition spokesperson the following points were clarified by Richard Webb, Kelly Redman and Alison Jeffery:

- There is inconsistency in the current means testing assessment arrangements and the purpose of revising the policy was to ensure consistency, fairness and transparency of the assessment process.
- The allowances for carers subject to adoption orders and special guardianship orders reflect the parental rights of these carers, in comparison to foster carers.
- This proposal is in line with other local authorities. Officers however were mindful that this will need to be monitored to ensure that there is not a reduction in people wanting to adopt or enter into Special Guardianship arrangements. The Deputy Director of Children's Services - Safeguarding will also have the ability to dis-apply the means testing assessment process for a carer; where the application of the assessment would result in additional costs to the Council.

Councillor Rob Wood felt it was important to monitor caring arrangements following the introduction of the new means testing policy and the impact on the budget if some carers decided to cease being carers. Officers said that feedback and monitoring reports could be brought back to a future meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Ryan Brent, the following point was clarified:

- All carers will be visited individually to undertake a financial assessment review and to inform carers what benefits they are entitled to. It was anticipated that this process would take 10-12 weeks following approval of the policy.

Councillor Ryan Brent said that report was a fair report in respect of transitions and it was about balancing this in a field where allowances are constantly changing. He felt that this was a risk sensible report and that the revised policy will help to create a more equal playing field for carers.

DECISIONS: the Cabinet Member approved:

- The implementation of the *'Means Testing Assessment Policy for Adoption, Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement and Residence Orders'* at Appendix 1, with effect from 9th April 2017; noting potential changes to the 2017-18 Basic Income Support Personal Allowance Rates once approved by the Department for Work and Pensions (see Appendix 2).**
- The alignment of the weekly allowance rates for both holders of Adoption and Residence Orders with the age related Standard Fostering Allowance, with effect from the 9th April 2017; noting that the Standard Fostering Rates will be adjusted in line with changes in the Government Minimum Fostering Allowance rates for the South East.**
- The proposed transitional protection arrangements for carers as set out in section 8 of the report, with the following change to the transitional protection arrangements:**

The carers experience a reduction of:

- **More than 20% in their weekly level of financial support; and**
 - **The reduction is greater than £75 per week.**
- iv. **The proposed engagement and implementation process with carers as set out in section 9 of the report; which will be led by the Financial Assessment and Benefits team, together with officers from the Children's Social Care service.**
- v. **Delegated authority to the Section 151 officer to update the personal allowance rates as required, ensuring that they remain in line with the rates published by the Department for Work and Pensions.**

The meeting concluded at 10.25 am.

Councillor Ryan Brent
Chair