

SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 14 th November 2019
Report Subject	Adaptations to Foster Carers Homes Policy
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foster carers provide loving homes and life-changing care for children who can no longer live with their birth families. Flintshire Social Services recognise that in some circumstances the home environment of foster carers can limit the placement opportunities. This is particularly the case for supporting sibling groups or children with disabilities.

As a result Flintshire Social Services is proposing to introduce the 'Adaptations to Foster Carer Homes Policy' to give Flintshire and the children it is responsible for more choice and options for placements which can offer better value for money for the authority.

The Policy seeks to introduce a grant scheme, which offers foster carers financial support to make adaptations to their existing home, or financial assistance towards the purchase of a new larger or more suitable property, up to the value of £36,000 for adaptations or £20,000 for the relocation to a new property. The grant will be subject to terms and conditions outlined in a Financial Assistance Agreement. Clawback will be applicable under certain conditions, as a means of safeguarding public funding, through a local land charge or legal charge.

The proposed Policy and Grant Application Process is attached for further information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Committee review and support the Adaptions to Foster Carers Homes Policy.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE ADAPTATIONS TO FOSTER CARERS HOMES POLICY
1.01	<p><i>Foster carers</i> provide loving homes and life-changing care for children who can no longer live with their birth families, giving them a brighter, happier future. Fostering can involve looking after children of all ages, from babies to teenagers, who come from different backgrounds.</p> <p>Flintshire Social Services values the care, love and commitment given by its foster carers to the children and young people living with them.</p> <p>However, it is recognised that the role of a foster carer can sometimes be challenging, juggling work and caring commitments, as well as welcoming new children into the home with limited space; but with the right support, training and resources, carers are making a huge impact on the lives of children in Flintshire.</p>
1.02	<p>The Council recognised an opportunity to support foster carers in either making necessary adaptations to their home or supporting them to purchase a larger more suitable house to provide adequate space for children and young people to live and thrive in their care; which in many cases is a more cost effective placement option for children.</p> <p>Therefore, it is proposed that this Policy is introduced to support children in finding the right placements in loving homes and support foster carers in increasing the capacity or useable space within their home so that they can provide the right placement for the child/ children. It also enables the Council to seek better value for money in comparison to many alternative out of county or high cost placement options.</p>
1.03	<p>As a local authority it is our objective to ensure that Flintshire has sufficient and suitable foster care placements, for children and young people, which is in their best interests and meets the well-being outcomes of the children and young people. This policy aims to meet the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the range and choice of available placements for children who require a home outside of their birth family, locally • Enable skilled and able foster carers to extend the number of places they are able to offer, or to maintain existing placements as circumstances or needs change • Seek best value for money from the range of placements available by using them in the most efficient and effective way • Any placements made are first and foremost in the best interests of the children, • Secure stability or permanence for a children
1.04	<p>This Policy will enable Flintshire to offer <i>grant funding</i> to foster carers to assist them with the cost of making adaptations to their home or financial assistance towards the purchase of a larger more suitable home which will</p>

	<p>provide adequate space, which is of a sufficient standard, for children and young people to live and thrive in their care.</p> <p>This grant funding is introduced to complement the range of support provided to foster carers by the Council.</p>										
1.05	<p>Applications for granting funding will be considered up to a maximum of £36,000 (£20,000 for relocation), however this may be increased in exceptional circumstances such as essential work to meet the assessed needs of children with complex or multiple needs.</p> <p>To enhance the number of foster carers, the Policy provides the discretion to waiver up to £10,000 of grant funding, dependent on the financial assessment of the foster carer and/or property owner and the proposed child placement arrangements.</p> <p>Applications to waive any associated costs will be consider by the Foster Carers Adaptations Panel (which is aligned to the existing Out of County Panel), and will require the endorsement of the Senior Manager for Children’s Services. The costs associated with any waiver will be met through grant funding where available to the local authority (e.g. ICF), or Social Services revenue budget.</p>										
1.06	<p>Grant funding will usually be repayable to the local authority, on a sliding scale, if any of the following clawback conditions are triggered within a 10 year period or sooner if the child reaches maturity (18 years of age) or has a life limiting condition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sale or transfer of the property • Resignation or death of the foster carer(s) • Termination of approval • Notice given on the individual placement by either Social Services or the foster carers • Foster carer(s)/ property owner wishes to repay the grant funding <table border="1" data-bbox="320 1391 1385 1653"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="320 1391 852 1496">Clawback triggered within (from the date of the signed financial agreement)</th> <th data-bbox="852 1391 1385 1496">Percentage of grant funding repayable</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="320 1496 852 1541">1 -2 years</td> <td data-bbox="852 1496 1385 1541">100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="320 1541 852 1574">2 – 4 years</td> <td data-bbox="852 1541 1385 1574">75%</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="320 1574 852 1615">4 – 6 years</td> <td data-bbox="852 1574 1385 1615">50%</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="320 1615 852 1653">6 - 10 years</td> <td data-bbox="852 1615 1385 1653">25%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Clawback triggered within (from the date of the signed financial agreement)	Percentage of grant funding repayable	1 -2 years	100%	2 – 4 years	75%	4 – 6 years	50%	6 - 10 years	25%
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1.07	<p>All grant applications for funding will be considered against the criteria as outlined in the Policy. If the application does not meet the criteria, the local authority will inform the carer(s) in writing of the reasons for refusal.</p> <p>Where the carer(s) is refused funding and they wish to appeal against the decision, they should appeal to the Council in writing within 15 working days of the date of refusal stating the grounds for appeal.</p> <p>All appeals will be considered by the Chief Officer Social Services and the Chief Officer Housing and Assets, the decision by the Chief Officers will be</p>										

	final in respect of that individual case and will not be binding upon any future applications made by that or any other applicant.
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2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Flintshire Social Services does not envisage there being significant demand for this grant scheme, this is based on our experience and demand to date.</p> <p>The introduction of this Policy offers the authority more cost effective options for placements for children in its care as well as having a robust and transparent process for doing so.</p> <p>Flintshire Social Services introduces this grant scheme with a flexible, shared-cost approach, therefore there is an expectation that the foster carer will provide 100% financial contribution towards the costs of any additionality to the works or house move. The financial contribution will be 'means tested' as part of the application process – please refer to the 'Grant Funding Application Process'.</p>
2.02	<p>Capital funding: It is proposed that £60,000 per annum is utilised from the Council's capital programme budget. Capital funding will be used for individual projects costing over £20,000.</p> <p>Funding for projects below £20,000 will be sought from other funding streams including the Integrated Care Fund (ICF), and other grant opportunities. Funding for projects under £20,000 would be the responsibility of Social Services to source and/ or cover.</p>
2.03	<p>There are no revenue or human resource implications for the approved revenue budget/workforce structures within Social Services for the current financial year.</p> <p>The grant scheme will be managed and delivered by the existing staff structures within the Fostering Service, in Social Services.</p>
2.04	<p>Support from other internal service areas, such as the Regeneration Team and Valuation, will be subject to a re-charge to Social Services. This re-charge will then be included in the total cost of the project and incorporated into the Finance Assistance Agreement with the foster carer/ property owner.</p>
2.05	<p>Any grant funding awarded under the discretionary £10,000 may lead to in year revenue implications for Social Services that would need to be managed within the Portfolios allocated budget. This discretionary waiver will be monitored throughout the first year of the Policy's inception and reviewed to ensure it is financially manageable and also continues to meet its intended purpose of attracting more foster carers in Flintshire.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT								
3.01	<p>The primary risk for the grant scheme is insufficient funding. However, Flintshire Social Services has a statutory duty for the children it is responsible for, therefore it would be required to find a suitable placement for the child/children regardless of the introduction of this Policy.</p> <p>As noted above, Social Services will always explore and utilise other available sources of funding, such as Disability Facilities Grant and Integrated Care Fund, before making capital requests or utilising base budget.</p> <p>Each project funded by the grant scheme will have its own set of risks and challenges. As part of the initial feasibility and project management all highlighted risks will be monitored and mitigated throughout the project.</p> <p>Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles Impact</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="320 786 1386 2065"> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="320 786 555 1025">Long-term</td> <td data-bbox="555 786 1386 1025"> <p><u>Positive impact</u></p> <p>Enable skilled and able foster carers to extend the number of places they are able to offer, or to maintain existing placements as circumstances or needs change</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="320 1025 555 1249">Prevention</td> <td data-bbox="555 1025 1386 1249"> <p><u>Positive impact</u></p> <p><i>This Policy aims to prevent the need for out of county, and potentially expensive, placements of local children and young people</i></p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="320 1249 555 1626">Integration</td> <td data-bbox="555 1249 1386 1626"> <p><u>Positive impact</u></p> <p><i>Local children and young people will remain integrated within their local community, schools and social networks.</i></p> <p><i>By supporting local placements relationships with the birth family can be maintained, if appropriate and safe to do so.</i></p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="320 1626 555 2065">Collaboration</td> <td data-bbox="555 1626 1386 2065"> <p><u>Positive impact</u></p> <p>The Council, across a range of Portfolio's, will work collaboratively to deliver the aims and objectives of this Policy.</p> <p>Services will work together to prevent, manage and solve any placement issues or changes in circumstances.</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Long-term	<p><u>Positive impact</u></p> <p>Enable skilled and able foster carers to extend the number of places they are able to offer, or to maintain existing placements as circumstances or needs change</p>	Prevention	<p><u>Positive impact</u></p> <p><i>This Policy aims to prevent the need for out of county, and potentially expensive, placements of local children and young people</i></p>	Integration	<p><u>Positive impact</u></p> <p><i>Local children and young people will remain integrated within their local community, schools and social networks.</i></p> <p><i>By supporting local placements relationships with the birth family can be maintained, if appropriate and safe to do so.</i></p>	Collaboration	<p><u>Positive impact</u></p> <p>The Council, across a range of Portfolio's, will work collaboratively to deliver the aims and objectives of this Policy.</p> <p>Services will work together to prevent, manage and solve any placement issues or changes in circumstances.</p>
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Involvement	<u>Positive Impact</u> <i>Placements are always made be in the best interest of the child/ children, and where appropriate consider the child's voice and choice.</i>
Well-being Goals Impact	
Prosperous Wales	<u>Positive impact</u> The procurement of suppliers and contractors to undertake the adaptations to the properties will, wherever possible, under the agreed framework be sourced locally which will include the employment of local tradesmen.
Resilient Wales	<i>No impact</i>
Healthier Wales	<u>Positive impact</u> Children should be able to live in a stable family-based setting that supports their well-being and meets their outcomes
More equal Wales	<u>Positive impact</u> Increasing the range and choice of available placements for children who require a home outside of their birth family, locally. Enable skilled and able foster carers to extend the number of places they are able to offer, or to maintain existing placements as circumstances or needs change
Cohesive Wales	No impact
Vibrant Wales	No impact
Globally responsible Wales	No impact

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	A range of internal and external colleagues and stakeholders have been consulted and contributed to the development of this final Policy, these include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Flintshire County Council, colleagues in:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Housing ➤ Legal ➤ Regeneration ➤ Finance ➤ Social Services, including Social Services Management Team ➤ Chief Officers ○ Externally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>North Wales Policy Developers Group</i> ➤ Sample of foster carers <p>In addition to the above, good practice examples of similar policies in other local authority areas have informed the development of this policy, such as Cheshire West, Leeds and Nottingham.</p>
4.02	<p>The Policy is introduced and complements other adaptation Policies within the Council, such as the Disability Facilities Grant (DFG).</p> <p>The core offer contained within both the DFG and Foster Carers Adaptations Policies are aligned to ensure the Council is consistent in its approach to adaptations of private properties, these includes: a clear criteria, maximum grant amount, repayment terms, the primary clawback triggers and methods of safeguarding public funding.</p>

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 - Adaptations to Foster Carers Homes Policy
5.02	Appendix 2 - Grant Funding Application process

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	As part of the development of the Policy, Social Services is completing a thorough Integrated Impact Assessment to ensure the potential impacts of this Policy managed appropriately; the headline impacts have been shared within this report.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Craig Macleod, Senior Manager: Children – Social Services Telephone: 01352 701313 E-mail: craig.macleod@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	(1) Budget: a statement expressing the Council's policies and service levels in financial terms for a particular financial year. In its broadest sense it

includes both the revenue budget and capital programme and any authorised amendments to them.

(2) **Financial Year:** the period of 12 months commencing on 1 April

(3) **Foster Carers** are ordinary people who are willing to open up their hearts and homes to provide care to other people's children.

(4) **Grant Funding** are a type of funding provided by the government, local councils and some private organisations. Organisations have to apply for the grant and demonstrate how they will meet the outcomes and conditions of the grant. Grants don't normally have to be repaid but will be subject to clawback in certain circumstances.

(5) **Integrated Care Fund** from Welsh Government supports health and social care services to work together to meet the needs of:

- older people with complex needs and long term conditions including dementia
- people with learning disabilities
- children with complex needs due to disability or illness
- carers, including young carers
- children at risk of becoming looked after, in care or who are adopted

Funding is currently available until March 2021 and is being used to support a wide range of revenue schemes as well as building related projects.

(6) **North Wales Policy Developers Group** is a group of policy developers from across North Wales who support one another with the development of similar or regional policies.

(7) **Revenue:** a term used to describe the day to day costs of running Council services and income deriving from those services. It also includes charges for the repayment of debt, including interest, and may include direct financing of capital expenditure.