

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) held at
3.30 pm on Tuesday, 3 March 2015

Present:

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ruane

Shadow Cabinet Member: Councillor Lepoidevin

Employees (by Directorate):

People: P. Fahy, S. Giles, L. Gosling, A. Maqsood,
J. Sembi, R. Sugars

Resources: S. Bennett, G. Holmes, J. Newman

Public Business

24. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

25. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 20 January and 2 February were agreed and signed as true records.

There were no matters arising.

26. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that approval be given to exclude the press and public under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 for consideration of the private report indicated in Minute xx below relating to “ Annual Statement of payments to Coventry City Council Foster Carers” on the grounds that that item involves the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as it contains information relating to the identify, financial and business affairs of an organisation and the amount of expenditure proposed to be incurred by the Council under a particular contract for the supply of goods or services.

27. Annual Statement of Payments to Coventry City Council Foster Carers

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director of People which proposed changes to the skills fees and maintenance allowances to be paid to Coventry City Council foster carers in 2015/16. A corresponding private report detailing commercially confidential aspects of the proposals was also submitted for consideration (Minute 31 below refers)

The proposed changes to the skills fees paid and maintenance allowances to foster carers had also been considered by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (their Minute 45 refers)

As part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, there is a clear target to save £400k by increasing the number of in house foster households (per year and cumulatively) and reducing the number of more expensive external placements. The average number of internal placements up to 31 May 2015 is 149. The savings target assumes an increase of 32 internal placements by 31 March 2016, rising to a cumulative 58 new placements by 31 March 2017. This increase will be dependent upon ensuring the allowance and payment arrangements bring Coventry broadly in line with neighbouring local authorities and the number of independent fostering agencies located in or near Coventry.

The proposed changes to payments to foster carers outlined in the report is the final part of the plan that will bring Coventry's payment structure into line with other local authorities and will make the Service more competitive with the independent sector as it introduces a fee per child.

Following a period of consultation with carers, the changes will include introducing a skills fee per child and standardising discretionary payments to carers. There is also a proposal to introduce compulsory saving arrangements for children looked after for more than 12 months, which will bring the City Council in line with the independent sector arrangements.

The Cabinet Member questioned officers on aspects of the report including the benchmarking work undertaken and the length of time it takes to process expenses claims.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:-

- (1) Agrees an uplift of 1.8% of the weekly maintenance allowance for foster carers from 2015/16**
- (2) Agrees on the adoption of a fee per child payment in respect to the payment of the skill fee for foster carers from 2015/16**
- (3) Notes the introduction of savings for Looked After Children, the proposal to streamline payments and initiatives to engage and support the development of foster carers and the Coventry Foster Careers Association.**

28. Managing Emergency Accommodation

Further to Minute 14/15, the Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director of People which indicated that the City Council commissions a number of support services for people in housing crisis. These include homelessness services for Adults, support to families with children in need including those with No Recourse to Public Funds, and Supported Accommodation for people aged 16-24. In addition to these support services, the City Council works with the private

rented market and Registered Social Landlords to ensure that housing options are available for people who would otherwise be homeless.

There are also homeless charities in the City that provide independent support and sometimes accommodation to people who are homeless outside of the provisions of a City Council funding arrangement.

Despite these arrangements being in place, there is not always capacity in the available services, where this is the case, and on an emergency Bed and Breakfast accommodation is used in order to meet the City council's statutory responsibilities for homelessness.

Recognising that Bed and Breakfast is not ideal accommodation, the City Council is committed to reducing its use, and should Bed and Breakfast be required, it is only used in exceptional emergency situations where clear action plans are in place to limit the duration of stay.

To monitor and ensure exit plans are managed and progressed, an Emergency Accommodation Panel will be established to be chaired by the Head of Housing and consisting of representatives from the Placements Team, Route 21 and Children's Social Work. The Panel will meet monthly and provide strategic and operational oversight of the City Council's use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and monitor the exit plans for all vulnerable people, families and young people placed in emergency accommodation, including Bed and Breakfast.

In order to emphasise the City Council's commitment to reducing its use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, the report proposed that the City Council should sign-up to Barnados' "Beyond Care" pledge to demonstrate its commitment to providing appropriate support to care leavers. :-

"I support Barnados' "Beyond Care" campaign. I will work to make sure that our local authority takes the necessary steps so that care leavers in our area have better accommodation and support"

The Cabinet Member questioned officers on aspects of the report including the length of time that Bed and Breakfast accommodation can be used; and the current number of people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation in the City; work with voluntary organisations to provide alternative emergency accommodation; comparisons and benchmarking with other local authorities in relation to their use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation; and information relating to those families with No Recourse to Public Funds.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:-

- (1) Approves that the City Council signs up to the Barnados' "Beyond Care" campaign to demonstrate its commitment to providing appropriate support to care leavers.**
- (2) Approves the establishment of an Emergency Accommodation Panel to provide oversight of Young people, families or vulnerable people placed in emergency accommodation.**

- (3) Requires that all young people aged under 18 and covered by the provisions of the Children Act accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation for a period in excess of 2 days are reported to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on a quarterly basis.**
- (4) Requests that officers undertake a feasibility study regarding the impacts, costs, benefits and deliverability of adopting a policy of limiting the use of Bed and Breakfast and Emergency accommodation by the City Council to a set period of time, with a view to submitting a report to Cabinet containing recommendations for consideration in due course.**
- (5) That officers be requested to provide the Cabinet Member with an update in relation to those families with No Recourse to Public Funds.**

29. Outstanding Issues Report

The Cabinet Member noted a report of the Executive Director of Resources that identified those issues on which further reports had been requested and were outstanding, so that progress could be monitored.

30. Any Other Urgent Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

31. Annual Statement of Payments to Coventry City Council Foster Carers

Further to Minute 27 above, the Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director for People which detailed commercially confidential aspects of proposed changes to the skills fees and maintenance allowances to be paid to Coventry City Council foster carers in 2015/16.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:-

- (1) Agrees an uplift of 1.8% of the weekly maintenance allowance for foster carers from 2015/16**
- (2) Agrees on the adoption of a fee per child payment in respect to the payment of the skill fee for foster carers from 2015/16**
- (3) Notes the introduction of savings for looked after children, the proposal to streamline payments and initiatives to engage and support the development of foster carers and the Coventry Foster Careers Association.**

(Meeting closed at 4.35pm)