

**Education and Children's Services
Scrutiny Committee
2 March 2016**

Covering Report: Foster Carers

Summary and Objectives

1. The objective of this scrutiny is for the committee to understand, and make any recommendations in relation to, the Council's Foster Carers scheme, following implementation of the new Foster Care Allowances and Fees scheme that was approved at Cabinet on 16 June 2015.

Scrutiny Focus

2. Key focus areas for this scrutiny include the following:
 - i) What has been the impact so far of implementation of the new Foster Care scheme?:
 - What has been the impact on financial savings?
 - How is the service being promoted?
 - ii) What is the anticipated impact of asylum seekers and unaccompanied children on numbers of foster carers, funding requirements, any language issues, and the need for re-profiling of the strategy?
 - iii) What are the current trends in numbers of Looked After Children, compared to regional and statistical neighbours, and the national context?
 - iv) How many Foster Carers have we lost? What is the level of 'churn'?
 - v) What has been the feedback from the Ofsted Report regarding the Foster Care scheme? [NB. See also Agenda Item 5]

How this relates to County Council priorities

3. This scrutiny is linked to the County Council's corporate priorities as indicated below:

The County Council's Corporate Priorities	Link to this scrutiny
Raising educational attainment and skill levels	✓
Supporting the LEPs to increase economic growth	
Maintaining roads and developing Suffolk's infrastructure	
Supporting those most vulnerable in our communities	✓
Empowering local communities	✓

4. Having considered the evidence, the Committee may wish to:
- i) make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, and/or the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services;
 - ii) agree topics which could benefit from more detailed scrutiny at a future meeting, seek to influence partner organisations, or request further information.

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Background

5. The Proposed Scheme for Foster Carer Allowances and Fees was presented to the Cabinet on 16 June 2015. The Cabinet:
 - Noted the placement and cost pressures associated with the Suffolk Fostering Service being unable to offer sufficient foster care placements to older children and young people with complex needs and sibling groups under the existing scheme of carer fees and allowances;
 - Took account of carers' feedback in respect of the consultation and to agree the proposed tiered scheme for future foster carer allowances and fees; and
 - Agreed a timescale for full implementation of the proposed tiered scheme for fees and allowances to begin on 1st October 2015.
6. A related proposal regarding Special Guardianship Support Allowances was agreed at Cabinet on 13 Oct 2015.

Main Body of Evidence (attached)

- (i) **Evidence Set 1** (10 pages) - A report from Children and Young People's Services addressing the above focus areas.

Supporting Information and References (available online)

- Cabinet papers for 16 June 2015 (Agenda Item 7):
<http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=16/Jun/2015&c=The Cabinet>
- The Minutes of the 16 June 2015 Cabinet meeting:
<http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/LoadDocument.aspx?rID=09002711818bc62c>
- Cabinet papers for 13 Oct 2015 (Agenda Item 9):
<http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=13/Oct/2015&c=The Cabinet>
- SCC Website - Fees and allowances overview:
<http://dreams.suffolk.gov.uk/existing-carers/fostering/fees-and-allowances/>
- Annual Corporate Parenting Board Report, Cabinet, 15 September 2015,
<http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/LoadDocument.aspx?rID=090027118190b9c4>