

### EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE: 2<sup>ND</sup> MARCH 2016**

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Foster carers Fees and allowances scheme update
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<b>DATE:</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> February 2016

#### **1. Development of new Tier Alignment Scheme for foster carers**

1.1 In June 2015 cabinet agreed a new tiered scheme for foster carers fees and allowances. This was in response to placement and cost pressures associated with an insufficiency of foster carers within Suffolk Fostering service to offer placements to older children and young people with complex needs and sibling groups

1.2 Analysis of our fostering allowances and fees model had identified shortfalls in the scheme which did not support CYP's strategic and operational aims to increase in-house foster placement capacity and reduce the spend on externally purchased placements.

1.3 Our new model has 5 Levels at which foster carers can offer placements. Level 1 represents carers whose placement offer is limited by age, range or skill through to Level 5 where carers are able to offer placements to a wide range of older children with very complex and challenging behaviour.

1.4 It provides a tiered and flexible approach to incentivise existing and attract new foster carers to offer high priority service need placements. It reduces allowances to those carers with a limited or low service need placement offer. (Appendix table 4 and 5 from cabinet report ) The revision of our model forms part of a wider strategy set out within the Corporate Parenting and Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2014-16 (currently being reviewed) to build in-house capacity and reduce spending on placements purchased from external providers.

1.5 There are significant costs savings to be made to the purchase placement budget through increased in-house fostering capacity for the high priority need groups of looked after children. It was recognised from the commencement of the new scheme that it would take at least three years to realise this objective.

1.6 All foster carers were moved onto the new tier alignment scheme in October 2015. No foster carers resigned due to the changes to allowances that the new scheme introduced. The appendix attached to this report provides details of the Suffolk placement offer and eligibility criteria for carers, also the payments provided to carers under each tier according to age. The projected expenditure on fostering is also included up to 2019/2020, but this is dependent on the strategy being successful.

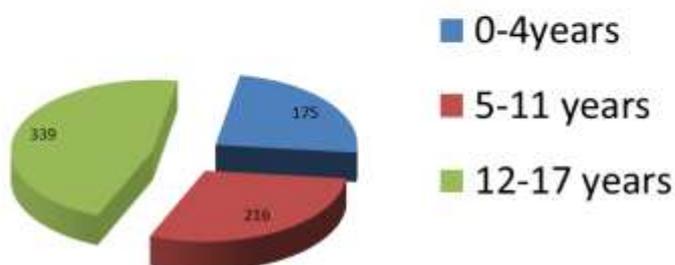
## 2. Trends in Looked after Children Population

2.1 There has been an increase in older children and young people coming into care in Suffolk recently and this reflects a national trend. Recent trends show a higher number of older boys coming into and staying in care for lengthy periods. Some of these young people have highly complex needs as a result of early experiences. Our strategy therefore to target recruitment at offers for older children remains appropriate but in particular for boys over 12.

Table 1 and 2 demonstrate how the age profile of children in care has changed between January 2014 and January 2016. Table 3 provides evidence of the gender profile of children in care with a higher proportion of boys than girls. We have also witnessed an increase in the number of children coming into care in 2015, rising from 716 in January 2015 to 777 in December 2015, This rise is mainly to do with 38 Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers being accommodated who are mainly males aged between 15 and 17.

Table 1 and Table 2

### Looked After Children by age Jan 14



### Looked After Children by age Jan 16

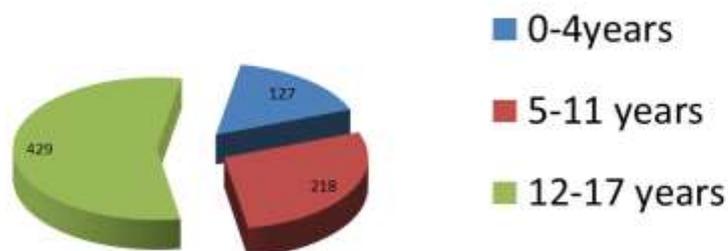
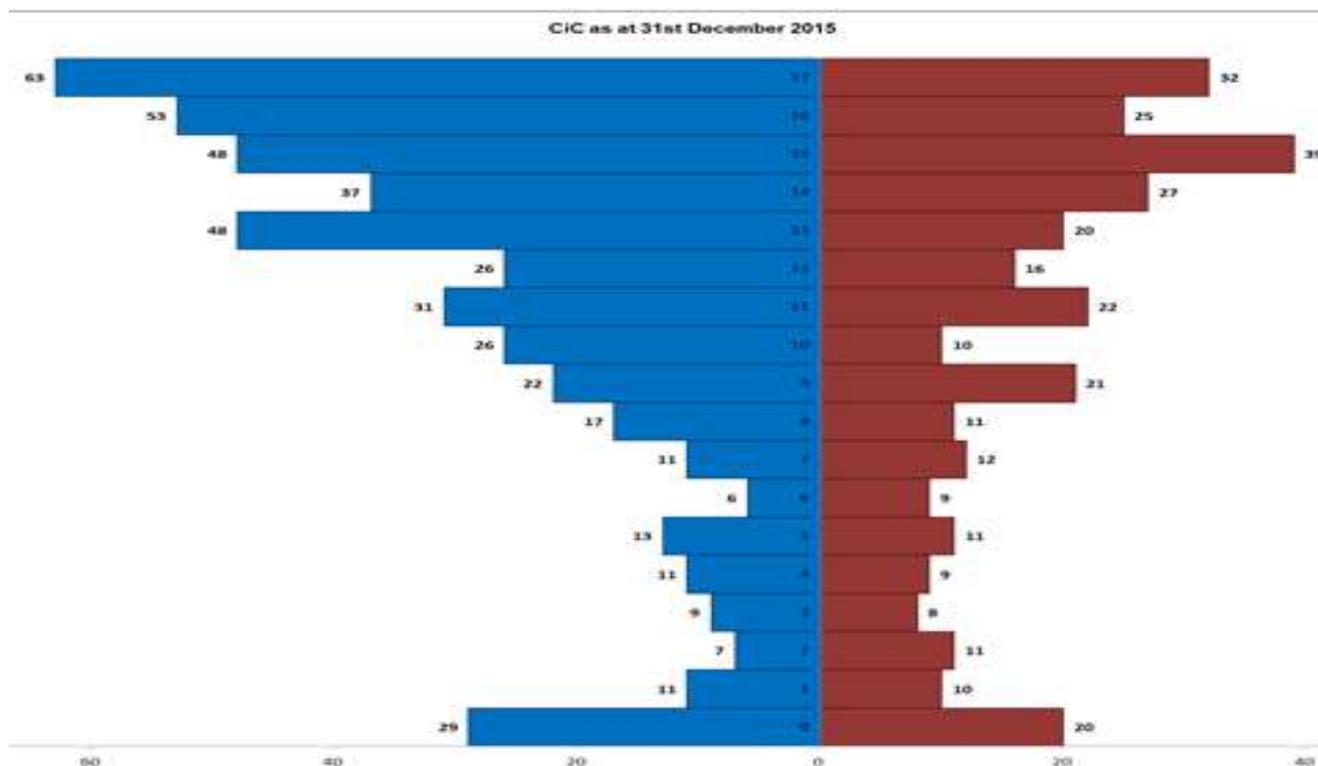


Table 3



### 3. Recruitment and retention of foster carers

3.1 Nationally and locally it is extremely challenging to recruit sufficient foster carers for older children with complex needs. Suffolk County Council operates in a fiercely competitive market place with circa 43 independent fostering agencies.

3.2 The latest Regional Thematic Data in March 2015 shows Suffolk as having the highest proportion of internal placements in the Eastern Region and along with Norfolk, the highest number of children placed within our own authority.

3.3 At the beginning of 2015/16 there were 401 children in Suffolk fostering service placement and a further 132 children placed with externally purchased placements. Currently there are 404 children placed with in-house foster carers and 170 placed with independent fostering agencies. It will clearly be a challenge to shift the balance of provision from the use of purchased to in-house provision but the changes we have made provides the best platform to help achieve this.

3.4 Recruiting foster carers particularly for older young people has always been challenging. Data recently published by Fostering Network shows that nationally, there was an overall reduction of 22% in newly approved fostering households in 2014/15 compared the year before and in the Eastern region this reduction was 32%.

## Tier Approvals

### Single/Multiple Tier approvals

Tier level	Number of carers
1	60
2	45
3	94
4	39
5	8
3 / 4	17
2 / 3	13
2 / 5	1
2 / 4	1
3 / 5	1
2 / 3 / 4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>280</b>

3.5 Ofsted inspectors have said in their recent inspection report:

*“Foster carers report that they are a part of the professional team supporting the child. They talk positively about the training they receive and the care taken in planning for the child, meeting their needs and the contact arrangements. Those looking after children with complex and challenging behaviours are also being strongly supported through Zipwire, an in-house intensive support service for carers.”*

3.6 19 households have been approved so far this year realising 39 placements. 15 households have been deregistered losing 25 placements, however there is a net loss of 7 placements for under 5s but a gain of 21 placements for over 5s .For over 11s there is no change in the overall number as 3 placements were gained but 3 also lost. The biggest placement gain therefore so far this year is for 5 – 11 year olds. Two new carers have been approved for and have taken sibling groups of 3 which is a very valuable offer. **The overall net gain so far this year is 21 placements for children 5 – 11.**

3.7 This is above our target of a net gain of 15 placements but does not include capacity for young people aged 12 plus. New carers are however more likely to want to start their fostering career with a younger child and over time develop the skills and confidence to move up our tier alignment scheme and offer for this older age group.

3.8 A strong offer of therapeutic training and support is essential to compete with Independent Fostering Agencies and give carers confidence in fostering adolescents for Suffolk County Council. We plan to further explore in this area in coming months.

3.9 The complex profiles of some children and young people needing placements requires very careful consideration and matching may mean that they need to be placed on their own, and excluding the placement of additional children due to risk factors. This affects placement capacity.

3.10 There is a need to focus on developing existing carers whilst recruiting new. Our new allowances structure allows foster carers to use training and development opportunities to increase their skills and move up the tier alignment scheme to a higher level.

3.11 We are now beginning to see an increase in interest in transferring to Suffolk from Independent Fostering Agency foster carers. We would anticipate these potentially translating into approvals during 2016.

3.12 In undertaking a review of our service structure we are prioritising the need to have a well-resourced recruitment team to ensure that we have a strong position in the market. Our recruitment campaign is focusing on our unique selling points (USPs) which are:

- Our competitive rates of pay
- Our knowledge of the children who need placements and responsibility for providing them with suitable placements to meet their needs
- Our strong support systems for foster carers including out of hours service
- Excellent training opportunities
- Direct access to therapeutic support

3.13 Use of social media is a high priority in our approach to recruitment and our website is currently being developed to redesign to strengthen our recruitment messages and make it more attractive and easier to use.

3.14 Research has highlighted the benefits of using foster carers in recruitment and we have now recruited 8 foster carers to be Ambassadors for the service who are directly involved in recruitment activity in their local communities

3.15 Our new website is being launched in April 2016. It is intended to position Suffolk Fostering Service as trustworthy and reputable and to create a community of existing and prospective carers by promoting engagement.

3.16 We seek support of County Councillors in helping to raise awareness through this campaign.

#### **4. Unaccompanied Asylum seekers**

4.1 The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) in the local authority's care has risen significantly over the past 3 years; as follows: 2013 – **14** / 2014 – **28** / 2015 – **44**. As of February 12<sup>th</sup> we have **38** under 18s receiving care and support services from Suffolk CYPS. Since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 we have taken into care one new arrival per week which will cause significant pressures.

4.2 Following a request from the Home Office and DfE and under the UASC dispersal programme (designed to share the burden of extremely high numbers of UASC entering the UK via Kent ports,) Suffolk has agreed to take up to **15** children (16+) from Kent by the end of April 2016. Kent currently has over 1,000 UASC for whom they are struggling to provide services. The programme attracts higher rates of Home Office Grant than Suffolk receives for their own UASC.

4.3 This additional money has enabled us to recruit a full time Social Worker specifically to work with this client group on a fixed term basis for one year, initially. Additional money has

been sourced from within existing budgets to recruit a Family Support Practitioner for 6 months. Again, this role is to work specifically with USAC providing direct support as well as creating development opportunities including around education, training, health and well-being, social/integrational activities.

4.4 The number of UASC in foster care at this time is **18**. Of these 15 are in purchased placements with agency carers with 8 of these placed out of county; one out of county placement is a kinship arrangement with family members. Most UASC in our care are over 16 and in semi-independent supported accommodation; good quality housing with appropriate and productive support is very difficult to find locally. We have been restricted to two or three providers where the support work provided has been of questionable quality and is not seen as good value for money. Work is being undertaken via a new Tendering Process to address this issue and we are hopeful that we will have greater availability of better accommodation and support provision for our clients in the near future.

4.5 Suffolk Virtual School is working with us to ensure there is enough ESOL provision for the 16+ UASC in our care but we still need to send many of our clients to Colchester for the best 16+ educational provision that includes IT and basic life skills. This level of provision is not currently available in Ipswich where most of our 16+ children, in semi-independent housing, are located.

4.6 The challenges of providing services to UASC include the complexity and unpredictability of the workload. There is no control over how many children may arrive at any one time; attending a 'lorry drop' (the most common means of entering the UK illegally), involves at least two social workers presenting at the relevant Police Investigation Centre. Where there are multiple individuals claiming to be under 18, four or more social workers may be needed. The fact that new arrivals claim to be children when they are not, means social workers are required to undertake brief enquiries on age and make initial decisions about appropriate care provision. Furthermore, where there is an age dispute and the young person could be under or over 18 or it is agreed they are under 18 but not clear if they are under 16 or not, then a full Merton Compliant Age Assessment must be completed, again by two suitably qualified and trained social workers. It can take 1 -2 days of social work time, to conduct the interview and complete the report and associated documents on each young person.

4.7 A further challenge is the availability of face to face interpreters particularly in certain languages such as Tigrinya or Tigre (main languages of Eritrea). There are times when the commissioned provider of language services for Suffolk (CINTRA) is not able to provide interpreters for these and even more commonly spoken languages such as Albanian and Kurdish Sorani. This causes delays in assessment and provision of appropriate support by our service. We also experience difficulties with Language Line telephone interpreting which, when required in a police station at night, can cause significant issues for the workers trying to interview new arrivals. These concerns have been raised with the provider who advises they are working on improvements.

	No change in payment scheme	New payment scheme agreed by Cabinet and implements from 1/10/15				
	2015-16	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of Suffolk Fostering Service carers at beginning of financial year	401	401	416	453	505	520
New Suffolk Fostering Service households in financial year		10	25	35	10	0
New Suffolk Fostering Service placements in financial year		15	37	52	15	
<b>Total number of Suffolk Fostering Service carers at end of financial year</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>520</b>
Annual cost of Suffolk Fostering Service carers at beginning of financial year	£5,414,801	£6,096,551	£6,303,236	£6,999,720	£8,036,184	£8,350,164
In-year cost of new in-house placements based on average of £391 per week		£154,928	£446,732	£556,632	£161,567	
Cost of additional Social Workers to support additional Suffolk Fostering Service carers			£100,000	£200,000	£200,000	£200,000
<b>Total spend on Suffolk Fostering Service care in financial year</b>	<b>£5,414,801</b>	<b>£6,251,478</b>	<b>£6,849,968</b>	<b>£7,756,352</b>	<b>£8,396,751</b>	<b>£8,550,164</b>
Number of externally purchased placements at end of financial year	132	117	80	28	13	13
Total spend on externally purchased care in financial year based on average of £856 per week	£5,875,584	£5,548,164	£4,411,396	£2,383,104	£906,570	£578,656
<b>Total spend on fostering</b>	<b>£11,290,385</b>	<b>£11,799,642</b>	<b>£11,261,364</b>	<b>£10,139,456</b>	<b>£9,303,321</b>	<b>£9,128,820</b>
Expenditure reduction on previous financial year		£509,258	-£538,279	-£1,121,908	-£836,135	-£174,501
Total annual expenditure reduction in 2019-20 over 2015-16 current cohort of placements at no change to payment scheme						-£2,161,565
Total number of fostering placements in financial year	533	533	533	533	533	533

## 5. Appendix

### 5.1 Projected Annual Foster care Placement Expenditure to 2019/20

<b>Tiered Scheme Level</b>	<b>Allowance £</b>	<b>Fee £</b>	<b>Total Weekly Payment £</b>	<b>Plus Additional payment per year for holidays etc.</b>
<b>Standard Level One 0 - 1</b>	123	0	123	492
<b>Standard Level One 2 - 3</b>	136	0	126	504
<b>Standard Level One 4 - 10</b>	139	0	139	556
<b>Standard Level One 11- 15</b>	159	0	159	636
<b>Standard Level One 16 - 17</b>	185	0	185	740
<b>Intermediate Level Two 0 - 1</b>	123	21	144	492
<b>Intermediate Level Two 2 - 3</b>	126	23	149	504
<b>Intermediate Level Two 4 - 10</b>	139	26	165	556
<b>Intermediate Level Two 11 - 15</b>	159	45	204	636
<b>Intermediate Level Two 16 - 17</b>	185	63	248	740
<b>Advanced Level Three 0 - 1*</b>	123	141	264	492
<b>Advanced Level Three 2 - 3*</b>	126	148	274	504
<b>Advanced Level Three 4 - 10*</b>	139	166	305	556
<b>Advanced Level Three 11 - 15</b>	159	196	355	636
<b>Advanced Level Three 16 - 17</b>	185	221	406	740
<b>Foster Plus Level Four 7 - 10</b>	139	266	405	556
<b>Foster Plus Level Four 11 - 15</b>	159	296	455	636
<b>Foster Plus Level Four 16 - 17</b>	185	321	506	740
<b>Specialist Level Five 7 - 10</b>	139	366	505	556
<b>Specialist Level Five 11 - 15</b>	159	396	555	636
<b>Specialist Level Five 16 - 17</b>	185	421	606	740

**5.2 Table 4: Rate of Payment for Allowances and Fees in the New Tiered Scheme**

**5.3 Table 5: Placement Offer and Eligibility Criteria:**

Tiered Level and Placement Offer	Carer Capacity
<p><b>Standard Level One</b> PLACEMENT OFFER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defined and narrow approval i.e. 0-5 or availability which excludes children from specific groups of need/behaviour</li> </ul>	<p>No previous experience of fostering or relevant work with children</p> <p><b>ESSENTIAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to meet the Fostering Standards including a basic understanding of positive parenting strategies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Intermediate Level Two</b> PLACEMENT OFFER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defined and narrow approval i.e. 0-5 or availability which excludes children from specific groups of need/behaviour</li> <li>• Short term placement / bridging to permanency</li> </ul>	<p><b>ESSENTIAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good understanding of positive parenting strategies</li> <li>• Capacity to move younger children onto adoptive / permanent placements</li> <li>• Commitment to training and professional development including completion of skills to foster training or equivalent prior to panel. Completion of a portfolio of evidence to meet skills to foster or equivalent</li> <li>• Suitable bedroom capacity (room for each child )</li> <li>• Evidence their ability to meet the Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC) standards applicable to carers</li> </ul> <p><b>DESIRABLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience of fostering and/or relevant work with children</li> <li>• Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC) completed</li> <li>• Attendance at support groups</li> </ul>
<p><b>Advanced Level Three*</b> PLACEMENT OFFER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children aged 6-18 years with complex behaviours i.e. recurrent bedwetting, sexualised behaviour, aggression, verbal abuse, stealing, lying, self-harming</li> <li>• Sibling groups</li> <li>• Children with moderate disabilities</li> <li>• Permanence offer for a child where other permanence options have been ruled out by the local authority as not being in the</li> </ul>	<p><b>ESSENTIAL – as for LEVEL 2 Plus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrable understanding of positive parenting strategies, child development and childhood trauma</li> <li>• Established fostering experience and/or extensive relevant work with children</li> <li>• Mentoring other carers and supporting the fostering service</li> </ul> <p><b>DESIRABLE</b></p>

Tiered Level and Placement Offer	Carer Capacity
<p>best interests of the child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC) completed</li> <li>• Child care / professional qualifications in working with children</li> <li>• Capacity to provide emergency response as requested by the Fostering Service</li> <li>• Attendance at support groups</li> </ul>
<p><b>Foster Plus Level Four</b> PLACEMENT OFFER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A wide range of children aged between 7-18 years with complex, challenging and risk taking behaviours i.e. smearing, self-harming, substance misuse, sexually harmful behaviour</li> <li>• Children with complex, multiple and severe disabilities</li> <li>• Sibling groups with complex, challenging, risk taking and/or harmful behaviours</li> </ul>	<p><b>ESSENTIAL - as for LEVEL 3 Plus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrable evidence of capacity to effectively implement positive behaviour management strategies to promote expected behaviours</li> <li>• Demonstrable evidence of ability to maintain placement stability where challenging and complex needs persist</li> <li>• Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC) completed and commitment to professional development and (advanced) training</li> <li>• Mentoring and supporting other carers through support groups</li> </ul>
<p><b>Specialist Level Five</b> PLACEMENT OFFER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering the range of placements between 7-18 years for children with a diverse spectrum of challenging and complex needs, behaviours and backgrounds.</li> <li>• Flexible offer of multiple placements concurrently or if child's needs/behaviour indicates, a single placement.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ESSENTIAL - as for LEVEL 4 Plus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to implement de-escalation strategies in volatile situations including aggressive behaviour</li> <li>• Demonstrable evidence of building and maintaining positive relationships with birth families</li> <li>• Capacity to work within a prescribed model of intervention to address dysfunctional behaviour</li> <li>• Demonstrable evidence of positive outcomes for children and young people</li> </ul>