

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 20th September, 2010

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WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Education and Children – Councillor Pantelic

PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

1. **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet of the recommendations of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel with regard to the Foster Carers' Allowances and the Breakaway, Slough service for children with learning difficulties and disabilities short break unit statement of purpose.

2. **Recommendations**

The Cabinet is requested to resolve: –

- (a) That the recommendation of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel that the proposal put forward by representatives of Slough's Foster Carers that the allowance paid for the first looked after child for each carer be set at £300, a reduction of £100 from the current allowance provided be approved and that all other allowances paid to Foster Carers should remain at the current rate.
- (b) That the recommendation of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel that the updated Statement of Purpose for Breakaway, Slough service for children with learning difficulties and disabilities short break care unit be approved.

3. **Community Strategy Priorities**

There are none arising from this administrative reference report.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

There are none arising from this administrative reference report.

(b) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

There are no direct Human Rights Act implications.

5. Supporting Information

Foster Carers Allowances

- 5.1 At the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel held on 7th September 2010 a report on the policy on Foster Carers (FC) and a related call-in on the proposed reductions to the Foster Carers' allowances were considered. The Strategic Director of Education and Children's Services advised that the proposed reduction of the Foster Carers' Fee should be examined within the context of the substantial savings that the directorate has been required to make. The proposal to reduce the foster carers' fee was put together following an assessment across the whole Directorate. It was noted that the fees currently received by Slough's FC were generous compared to those paid by neighbouring authorities. Currently fees included a maintenance allowance of £125 per week per child and a £400 allowance for the first placement and £200 allowance for any subsequent placements. It was proposed that the allowance for the first placement be reduced £200.
- 5.2 Cllr Maclsaac was invited to introduce his call-in and raised the following concerns regarding the proposed reduction of the fees:
- That given the difficult nature of the job reducing the fees will lead to a loss of current FCs and will make it increasingly difficult to recruit further FCs.
 - That FCs have submitted an alternative proposal but feel that the current proposed cuts will be devastating
 - That Slough is comparable to London areas and should not be examined next to the rest of Berkshire etc.
 - That it would be a false economy as it would increase Slough's reliance on the more costly Independent Foster Agencies.
- 5.3 Two representatives were invited to speak on behalf of Slough's Foster Carers (Eugene Travers and Zareen Keeton). A number of concerns were raised and they addressed several points contained in the reports. The meeting was asked to consider the fees in light of the highly difficult and 24/7 nature of the role. The FCs acknowledged the significance of the required cuts and pressures on local government but emphasised that these should not be made from front line services and that the care offered to children would be affected where FCs were being asked to subsidise their income with alternative employment. In recognition of the difficult financial situation the FCs understood the need for cuts but proposed that these should be limited to a reduction of £100 from £400 to £300 for the first placement for each carer.
- 5.4 In consideration of the above, a number of suggestions were put forward by Members and discussed by the Panel. Having considered the representations of the FCs and the potential implications for Looked after children and the cost implications the Panel resolved to endorse the proposal put forward by the FCs.

Breakaway, Slough Service for Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Short Break Unit Statement of Purpose

- 5.6 At its meeting on 7th September 2010 the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel considered a report presenting the Breakaway, Slough service for children with learning difficulties and disabilities short break unit Statement of Purpose for 2010-11. The National Minimum Standards for Children's Social Care

(2002) requires Breakaway to have a Statement of Purpose, which has to be approved and annually reviewed by Elected Members. Members felt that the Breakaway unit provided an exceptional standard of service that was pivotal to the vulnerable children in Slough and also provided excellent value for money for the Council.

- 5.7.1 After consideration of the report, Members resolved that Cabinet be recommended to approve the Breakaway, Slough Service for Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Short Break Unit Statement of Purpose

6. Appendices

Appendix A - Breakaway, Slough Service for Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Short Break Unit Statement of Purpose Statement of Purpose

7 Background Documents

Agenda – Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Panel, 7th September, 2010.