

## Children's and Adults' Care and Education Committee

13 February 2019

### Fostering Fees and Allowances

Report by Director of Children's Services

Call-in deadline 5pm on Wednesday 27 February 2019 (ten working days after the meeting)

#### **Purpose**

To align fostering fees across Richmond, Kingston and Windsor and Maidenhead as part of the successful registration of the Independent Fostering Agency.

#### **Recommendation of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services**

To **resolve** that the local offer (fees and allowances) to foster carers as set out in paragraph 13 of the report is approved to take effect from 1 April 2019.

#### **Key Points**

- A. Ofsted required Achieving for Children (AfC) to register its fostering services as an IFA. AfC were granted registration in August 2018 and is aligning its operations to establish the IFA as a single service across all three AfC local authority areas by end of March 2019.
- B. AfC's operational areas currently structure foster carer remuneration in different ways. Fees paid are not always aligned to the skills of the carer or needs of the child. In Kingston and Richmond, a small proportion of foster carers are paid disproportionately more than other carers and the amounts paid are out of line with statistical neighbours. There are also wide variances in the training, development opportunities and the support provided to foster carers. AfC want to provide our foster carers with a fairer, more transparent offer that is better able to meet the needs of children who are placed in our care. AfC's offer must also be competitive, supporting our strategic aim to recruit new local foster carers for local children so that AfC can reduce reliance on more expensive placements secured through other IFAs and residential care.
- C. The proposed offer is based on the following principles:
  - promoting the wellbeing of children and young people to improve children's outcomes in adult life
  - a single, fair and transparent offer for all AfC carers that distributes money according to the child's needs and the carer's skills and experience, including incentivising care for the most complex children and stepping down to less intensive support
  - a competitive offer that supports the recruitment and retention of foster carers in line with our sufficiency strategy and offers value for money to the Councils
  - an offer that minimises disruption to carers and potential risk to placement stability, including the number of carers who might see a decrease in their income.

- D. The proposed offer to all approved foster carers, including connected persons carers, includes:
- a competency based training and development programme aligned to the fee bands recognising caring experience and professional expertise as well as training undertaken;
  - a banded reward fee based on the the experience and skill level of the carer;
  - a supplementary fee, paid per child in placement if the child reaches a threshold level of need;
  - an allowance based on the needs of the child, paid per child in placement; and
  - continuing supervision and support from a supervising social worker, but expanded peer to peer and therapeutic support.

- E. Based on caring arrangements currently in place, the proposed fees and allowances model would cost approximately 1.1% (£28,000) more per year than the existing arrangements on a total net basis across the three councils:

Council	Cost impact of new system per annum	Equates to the council caring for % number of children
Kingston	+£88k	3
Richmond	-£50k	n/a
Windsor and Maidenhead	-£10k	n/a

- F. The proposal minimises negative financial impact on foster carers:

Impact of new system	Proportion of Kingston foster carers impacted <sup>1</sup>	Number of Kingston foster carers impacted
Increase in income	80%	24
No change in income	17%	5
Reduction in income	3%	1

- G. In Kingston, only one foster carer would potentially see a reduction in income. In the proposed model, any carer who would see a reduction in income would still receive 3% to 15% more than carers in statistical neighbour authorities, if they care for a child with complex needs. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been conducted.
- H. A four week consultation period with all foster carers was held in November and December 2018, including an online survey; foster carer forums; and individual meetings with those most impacted.
- I. Phased transitional arrangements are proposed to implement the new system, aiming for a period of up to one year for existing placements, with all carers who are newly approved during this time and beyond commencing on the new system. Individual arrangements will be made for those who will see a reduction in their

<sup>1</sup> Based on the total foster carer cohort who have a child in placement at the time of writing.

income; these will be addressed on a case by case basis in exceptional circumstances, with arrangements focused on the best interests of the child or young person and maintaining placement stability. Any resultant financial impact will be balanced within year.

## Context

### **Fees and allowances**

1. Foster carer remuneration is paid in fees (the 'reward' for being a foster carer) and allowances (to cover the costs of caring for a child).
2. At present, although allowances across the operational areas are broadly in line with rates recommended by the Department for Education (DfE),<sup>2</sup> fees are structured in different ways with similarly trained foster carers being paid different fees. Most notably, when benchmarked against statistical neighbours, there is a wide variance in the fees that are currently paid to our carers, with some carers being paid over 50% more than statistical neighbours, whilst newly approved carers are paid approximately 10% less than statistical neighbours.<sup>3</sup>

Carer level	Allowance per week per child / £	
	DfE minimum weekly allowance - 2018 to 2019 (London)	Kingston
Babies	146	(0 to 2 years) 146
Pre-primary	149	(3 to 5 years) 149
Primary	168	(6 to 10 years) 168
11 to 15	190	(11 to 15 years) 190
16 to 17	222	(16 to 17 years) 222

Carer level	Fee per week per child / £	
	Average of statistical neighbours	Kingston
Level 1	195	0
Level 2	237	155
Level 3	315	205
Level 4 (enhanced)	315	305
Specialist <sup>4</sup>	n/a	565

<sup>2</sup> Guidelines for minimum weekly allowance for foster carers can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>.

<sup>3</sup> Statistical neighbours can be found in the the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT), which was developed by the Department for Education. Fostering fees of statistical neighbours can be found on each council's website.

<sup>4</sup> The specialist scheme exists in Richmond only, but some Kingston carers are currently paid the Richmond specialist reward fee for children in their care.

3. In a pressured and demand-led service, children are often placed with an immediately available foster carer, so more highly trained carers do not necessarily care for children with the most complex needs, as they would be expected to do under the fees structure. Staying Put arrangements, whereby care leavers aged 18 to 25 years old stay on with their former foster carers, can also affect the availability of well-trained carers. The strategic aim is to recruit more foster carers to reduce reliance on other IFAs and residential care.
4. Some 'specialist' carers care for two to four children at the same time, which can make it difficult to provide the specialist, intensive care intended for each child. Where it is not possible to provide intensive support through specialist carer schemes, it impacts on the local authority's ability to meet its sufficiency duty in securing sufficient accommodation and access to services for looked after children.

### ***Training and development***

5. In Kingston, foster carers are required to complete mandatory training (three to four courses) every few years. Additional training is also offered through the generic children's services training and development offer accessible through CPD Online.
6. Feedback from carers followed a general theme that accessing training is difficult, with little clarity regarding which training modules are applicable to them and concern that the courses available are not practical enough to provide them with the skills to care for children on a day to day basis.
7. Pay levels are not aligned with training levels. There is currently a lack of robust record keeping and tracking of foster carer training. All foster carers should have a personal development plan (PDP), which should be updated annually. This should be reviewed by their supervising social worker and the foster carer reviewing officer; however, anecdotally, PDPs and annual reviews are not conducted consistently, and foster carer training is not recorded elsewhere. This will also be addressed via the Policy, Inspection and Systems workstream.

### ***Support for foster carers***

8. Foster carers and connected persons carers can access support groups that are facilitated by a social worker, but these are not well-attended. There are some groups for specialist carers only, drop-in 'surgeries', and telephone check-ins, which are conducted by a Tier 3 CAMHS worker (NHS). These are not well-attended and are also not widely publicised. Foster carers are able to access the Foster Carers Independent Support Service (FISS) via Foster Talk membership. Foster carers have raised concerns regarding a lack of therapeutic support. A scheme providing therapeutic support to Richmond specialist carers has been discontinued for some time.
9. Out of Hours support, a regulatory requirement, was developed and launched in September 2018 for all operational areas. This provision will need to be reviewed by August 2019 to ascertain the most effective ways of providing support and advice to foster carers outside of office hours.

## Proposal and Options

### *Fees and allowances proposal*

10. Based on the principles outlined previously, three remuneration structures were considered. An option that matched Level 1 and 2 carers to statistical neighbours was discounted due to the the large proportion of carers that would be negatively impacted, and another option that saw the fewest proportion of carers impacted was discounted as it would be too costly.
11. The proposed remuneration structure includes:
  - a reward fee based on the the skill level of the carer; and
  - a supplementary fee, paid per child in placement if the child reaches a threshold level of need.
12. No changes to the current allowances are proposed.
13. The following fees model is proposed:

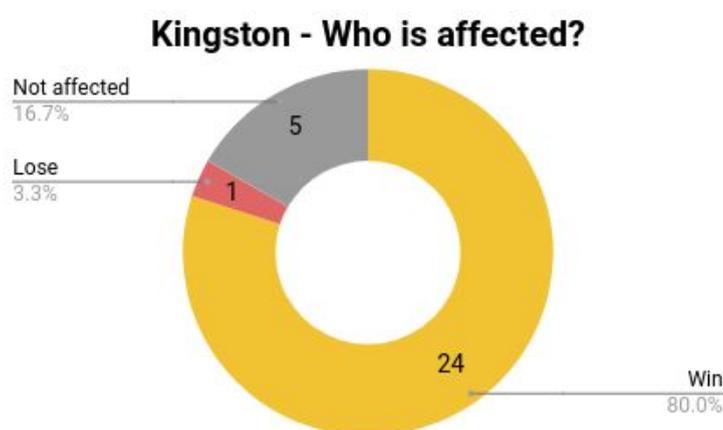
AfC carer level	Pay per week per child / £	Further information
Level 1	195	
Level 2	260	
Level 3	290	
Supplementary fee - moderately complex	50	The weekly supplementary fee is in recognition of the demands that caring for children with more complex needs places on carers.
Supplementary fee - highly complex	100	
Supplementary fee - at risk of residential care	Decided on a case by case basis in exceptional cases.	

14. Comparing the new proposal to statistical neighbours, the offer is favourable:

Career level	Average of statistical neighbours / £	New Proposal / £	% difference
Level 1	195	195	0
Level 2	237	260	+10
Level 3 (without complex child)	315	290	-8
Level 3 (with complex child)	315	340-390	+8 to 24

15. The proposal redistributes payments so that it increases or has no impact on the majority of existing carers' income whilst creating a fair system that allows for all those caring for children with complex needs to be suitably recompensed. The individuals negatively impacted are any Kingston carers who are paid an elevated 'specialist' rate - this is one carer, or 3% of carers in Kingston who currently have a child in placement. However, this carer would not be negatively impacted if the complexity of the child is high enough to warrant an exceptional payment that matches their current payment, decided by the IFA Board.

Kingston carer training level	% change in income
Level 1 (temporary)	0
Level 2 (newly qualified)	+12
Level 3 (most carers)	+14
Level 4 enhanced (caring for a child with complex needs)	+7
Specialist (without a complex child)	-36
Specialist (with a complex child)	-23



16. Further work is being conducted on additional allowances, including respite and holiday; children's savings; supporting other carers and the service; and Staying Put.

### **Assessing the complexity of a child's needs**

17. There is no current standardised process for assessing the complexity of a child's needs. To do this, it is proposed to use a standardised behavioural questionnaire based on the Iowa Department of Human Services Foster Child Behavioural Assessment.<sup>5</sup> Foster carer representatives on the offer to carers workstream, IFA Project Board and fostering service staff gave positive feedback on the questionnaire, stating that the questions reflect the important aspects of children's needs and the form was easy to understand and to complete.
18. A pilot across all children in placements showed that, using this assessment, approximately 6% of children were eligible for the higher complexity payment and 20% were eligible for the moderate complexity payment.
19. The process for completing assessments should be aligned with existing children looked after review processes following initial assessment:
  - For short term placements, the decision made about the payment at the six month meeting will remain for the rest of the placement except in exceptional cases. For long term placements, the decision made about the payment at the six-month meeting will be reviewed annually at a CLA review meeting.

<sup>5</sup> <http://dhs.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/470-4401.pdf>

- The child's social worker and foster carer will complete the form for each Looked After Child (CLA) review meeting, where a decision will be made to adjust the payment if necessary.
- An exceptional meeting could be called if a child's behaviour has changed significantly between CLA reviews. A child's needs assessment would be completed by the child's social worker as well as the ones already completed by the foster carer on a regular basis. The meeting should be attended by the supervising social worker; the child's social worker; the foster carer; and a senior manager. If there is sufficient evidence, the supplementary fee could be awarded at this meeting.

### ***Training and development***

20. It is intended to establish a three-level competency framework, complemented by a three-level training programme. The three levels of competency and training would align with the three carer levels in the proposed fees and allowances model. Foster carers should be supported in maintaining an ongoing training and development portfolio and evidencing the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care within 12 months of approval, the national minimum benchmark specified in Standard 20. Progression through the levels of the framework would be decided on a case by case basis following a recommendation from the foster carers' Supervising Social Worker, with approval delegated to a Fostering Team Manager.
21. Feedback from foster carer representatives was positive in relation to the proposed competency and training framework. A key theme in foster carers' feedback during consultation was the ability to take into account their previous experience. A competency and training framework that outlines a list of key competencies and training courses that AfC would expect foster carers to have attended at each level should address this.
22. A robust record keeping process will be established to track foster carers' competencies, training and development. This will be addressed via the Policy, Inspection and Systems workstream of the project, in conjunction with the Fostering Service.
23. The details of the competency and training framework are currently being developed with the foster carer representatives, the Fostering Service, and Workforce Development.

### ***Support for foster carers***

24. It is intended:
  - to establish peer to peer support in the form of 'mentoring' in small groups ('hubs'). Peer mentoring/buddying enables experienced foster carers to provide guidance and support to those who are newly approved, and this would also be part of the competency framework. The details of the proposed hub model of peer to peer support are currently being refined;
  - to continue access to Foster Talk or Fostering Network membership;
  - to work with in-house and commissioned psychologists and therapists and CAMHS to develop therapeutic support across both operational areas, accessible to all foster carers according to need.

- to extend support for other members of a foster carer's household
- to continue existing portfolio of events and activities and develop an annual programme (e.g. free membership at leisure centres; Legoland tickets; summer socials; Christmas pantomime tickets, etc.)
- that the Policy, Inspection and Systems workstream will be exploring platforms for support (for example, a closed message board), and potential systems that offer this capability.

## **Consultations**

### ***Foster carer project representation***

25. Foster carers representatives on the Offer to Carers project workstream and on the IFA Project Board have contributed to the development of the proposed offer to carers.

### ***Public consultation***

26. Consultation has taken place with all foster carers on:
- the proposed fees and allowances;
  - the Foster Child Behavioral Assessment for assessing the complexity of a child's needs;
  - the proposed training, development and support framework; and
  - transitional arrangements.
27. During the consultation, AfC:
- developed a web page with information on the offer and about the consultation, including a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section relating to the development of the IFA in general.
  - ran an online consultation using SmartSurvey.
  - provided an 'IFA' email address to which carers can direct their questions and comments.
  - developed a fees and allowances 'impact calculator' for carers.
  - wrote individual letters to all carers, outlining the proposed Offer to Carers.
  - offered and conducted individual consultations with carers who would see a reduction in their income.
  - offered individual consultations for all carers who would not be negatively impacted by the proposals, but prioritised those carers who would see a reduction in their income.
  - held forums available to all foster carers, where carers were able to share opinions and where AfC were able to respond to any comments or questions.

28. The table below summarises the consultation, decision making and implementation process undertaken since November 2018 and until full implementation:

Activity	Date
Chief Executive sign off proposal and process	7 November 2018
DCS liaise with Lead Members	7 to 9 November 2018
Consultation with foster carers opens	12 November 2018
Individual meetings with foster carers, prioritising those potentially negatively impacted by the proposals	As arranged
Consultation with foster carers closes	12 December 2018
Consideration of foster carer responses	11 to 12 December 2018
Final proposal consideration by IFA Board	12 December 2018
Kingston Children's and Adult's Care and Education Committee consideration	7 February 2019 (papers by 7 January 2019)
Richmond Cabinet consideration	14 February 2019 (papers by 13 December)
Windsor and Maidenhead Cabinet consideration	The Lead Member, having read the proposal, has delegated the decision back to Achieving for Children.
Final decision published to foster carers	End February 2019
Transitional arrangements commence	1 April 2019
Full implementation	1 April 2020

### Responses to the consultation

29. A summary of the main themes arising from feedback, and Officer responses to these comments, are set out in **Annex 1** to the report. The following table indicates the number of responses to the consultation:

Local authority area	Number of responses
Kingston	Online survey - 0 Foster carer forum - 2
Richmond	Online survey - 6 Foster carer forum - 0
Windsor and Maidenhead	Online survey - 2 Foster carer forum - 10

## Timescale

30. The target date for full implementation of the proposed fees and allowances structure is 1 April 2020.
31. Phased transitional arrangements are proposed to implement the new system, aiming for a period of up to one year for existing placements (i.e. from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020), with all carers who are newly approved during the transitional period and beyond commencing on the new system.

## Resource Implications

### - Fees and allowances

32. In adopting a fairer system of fostering fees, based on current foster carer and placement arrangements, there would be an increase in the annual cost for Kingston of c.a. £88,000. This increase would be realised after the transitional period (1 April 2020 onwards). However, AfC is not requesting additional funds as part of this proposal, and any resultant financial impact will be balanced within year.
33. During the transitional period, there would be an annual estimated cost of c.a. £34,000 associated with maintaining the existing payments of carers who are on a specialist rate, assuming current placements remain until April 2020.
34. Overall, the proposed fees and allowances system costs c.a. £28,000 (1.1%) more than the existing arrangement on a total net basis across AfC's local authority areas.

Local Authority	Current weekly cost for core allowances	New weekly cost for core allowances	Annual additional cost	Equates to the council caring for an additional % children
Kingston	£14,589	£16,294	+£88,660	3

### - Training, development and support

35. In the 2017-18 financial year, the total cost for training carers is approximated to be £6,675, and £3,394 was spent on the Foster carers Independent Support Service.
36. Due to the lack of robust record keeping of foster carers' training, it is not readily possible to estimate the costs of the proposed competency and training framework. Anecdotally, it is anticipated that most applicable training courses have been or will be commissioned or are already available in some form. Work is in progress to understand what training has been commissioned already, what can be commissioned, what will be commissioned, and cost implications (if any).
37. There should be no cost associated with the establishment of the hub model of peer to peer support. The proposal to establish a therapeutic support group for foster carers is being further explored.

## Legal Implications

38. The Care Standards Act 2000 provides for the provision of fostering services by an IFA that is an undertaking that discharges functions of local authorities in connection with the placing of children with foster parents under the Children Act 1989. AfC is such an undertaking.
39. In England, all fostering agencies must be registered with OFSTED.
40. The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 sets out the statutory scheme for the conduct of fostering services generally.
41. The relationship between a local authority and a foster parent is governed by the foster care agreement, the terms of which are prescribed by regulation and include details of training and support, review and placement procedure. Foster parents also have a right to receive payment.
42. The basic amount of fostering allowance payable, and the basis upon which it is calculated, is for the local authority to decide with reference to the national minimum allowances published annually. In addition to the basic fostering allowance, local authorities have the discretion to pay enhanced rates for specialist foster care.
43. Legal advice may need to be sought on a case by case basis in relation to any foster parent who claims their rights have been breached if the decision is taken to implement these proposals.
44. The local offer proposals are in accordance with the statutory scheme and are within the local authority's powers. However, members must still be satisfied that the proposals are reasonable having taken into account the results of the consultation and the Equality Assessment.

## Risk Assessment

45. The key risks as a result of this proposal are:
  - the loss of carers within the service, resulting in placement disruption to children, higher external IFA costs for the same placements, or fewer carers available for local placements;
  - an inability to recruit more foster carers to the service, if carers leave the service; and
  - reputational risk if foster carers who are not in agreement with the proposal approach the press and circulate damaging media about AfC.
46. To mitigate the above risks, we have proposed an offer to carers that minimises the negative financial impact on carers and minimises disruption to carers and any potential risk to placement stability. The proposed system is a single, aligned offer for all AfC carers, intended to distribute money fairly according to the child's needs and the carer's training and provide competitive remuneration for carers whilst offering value for money to the Councils and their constituents.
47. AfC have also consulted with foster carer representatives on this proposal as part of its development, and have endeavoured to incorporate their suggestions, address any issues, and share updates with them throughout. AfC will consult with the wider foster carer cohort, with particular attention to those carers who would be negatively impacted by the proposed system.

48. Each council is required to meet the cost of children in their statutory care; this will fluctuate based on children who come through system. The overarching financial target is to reduce cost of children in foster care by recruiting more foster carers, which is being addressed via the Publicity, Recruitment and Retention workstream. The budget for recruitment of foster carers for the next financial year across AfC is currently being determined.

### **Equalities Impact Assessment**

49. The proposed offer to carers will negatively impact the Kingston carers who are on a specialist rate (one child under the age of 18). It will also impact the Richmond Specialist carers (ten children under the age of 18) and the Level 3 carers in Windsor and Maidenhead who do not currently care for children with complex needs (three children without complex needs in the care of three different Level 3 carers). These groups only make up 11% of the foster carer cohort.
50. All other foster carers will see an uplift in their pay by the new system or be unaffected. This is particularly important for newly approved carers in Kingston and Richmond, who are currently being paid 10% less than newly approved carers in statistical neighbourhoods.
51. A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been conducted, focused on the foster carers who are anticipated to see a reduction in their income in the proposed model, across all of AfC's local authority Members. This can be found in **Annex 2** of the report.

### **Policy Implications**

52. New policies will be developed to outline and support the offer to carers.
53. A new Foster Carer Handbook will be developed and shared with all AfC foster carers by end March 2019. This will outline the new fees and allowances policy and the new training, development and support policies, once agreed.

### **Health Implications**

54. There are no health implications arising directly from this report.

### **Road Network Implications**

55. There are no road network implications arising directly from this report.

### **Environmental & Air Quality Implications**

56. There are no environmental and air quality implications arising directly from this report.

### **Background papers**

None other than those referred to in this report.

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## Summary of comments /feedback from the consultation and Officer responses to the comments

### - about Fees and allowances

*Feedback:* Respondents generally agreed with the principles underpinning the proposed fees and allowances, but expressed concerns if their income would decrease. In such cases, a key concern was their ability to undertake alternative employment whilst acting as a foster carer, with most stating that they did not believe that they would be able to do both.

*Response:* AfC acknowledge that, where fostering is the family's sole income, the impact of having a gap in placements or having children removed whilst an allegation is investigated can be profound. However, the need for in-house placements makes gaps in placements highly unlikely and AfC can carefully plan with those carers who are wholly reliant on fostering for their income.

*Feedback:* Some carers have individual contractual arrangements with the local authority that they would like honoured. Some carers would also like greater clarity on the fee amounts that would be paid in exceptional cases, where children are at risk of residential care, and how this would be agreed.

*Response:* Most current contracts have never been formally reviewed and individual, exceptional cases will be looked at on a case-by-case basis, focused on the best interests of the child. A robust process for agreeing the fee amounts in exceptional cases, which would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, will be established and signed off by the IFA Project Board.

*Feedback:* Many foster carers raised concerns regarding the management and impact of allegations made against them by children or young people, as this would potentially impact on their ability and/or suitability to have children in placement and therefore their income.

*Response:* AfC will consider whether it would support foster families when a child has been removed due to an allegation, with each circumstance assessed individually. Legal advice will be sought as appropriate.

*Feedback:* Some carers felt that they were sometimes pressurised into agreeing to staying put arrangements. Some carers also felt that staying put arrangements for young people with special educational needs or learning disabilities should be considered differently from those for young people without, with payments to potentially reflect this.

*Response:* AfC recognise that staying put arrangements can deplete the pool of available foster carers for children, and therefore are looking at developing a supported lodgings scheme that would enable some young people from 18 years to benefit from an arrangement whereby family support is still available. Regarding staying put arrangements, the proposals are distinguished between young people without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and those with an EHCP. For the former, the present proposal is to establish a flat rate across the IFA; for the latter, the proposal is to assess the level of payment on a case by case basis.

*Feedback:* During the consultation, some carers felt that the current placement and matching process was not maximising the use of in-house foster carers according to their terms of approval and placement preferences.

*Response:* Ofsted would be unlikely to accept any carers being asked to take a child without their full participation in the matching process. The placements and matching workstream will be reviewing the current matching process and ways in which to maximise the use of in-house carers.

*Feedback:* Foster carers have requested further clarification on paid respite and holiday payments (to take children and young people on holiday with them). Carers raised that holiday allowances should not be used to send a child on activities away from the foster family.

*Response:* The present proposal is that respite payments would be according to the complexity of a child's needs and holiday payments would be a flat rate for all carers. These additional allowances are currently being further developed.

#### - about Foster Child Behavioural Assessment

*Feedback:* Most respondents understood that the assessment would be a useful tool in measuring the complexity of a child's needs, and felt that it was easy to use and reflected most behaviours of children in their placements. However, some carers felt that a degree of flexibility was required, as it did not always cover all the needs exhibited in the children they currently have in placement - for example, carers suggested there should be a criterion related to whether a child had experienced past fostering or adoption breakdowns, as this would likely then meet the threshold for the highly complex needs payment. Some also felt that it needed to be updated to reflect current concerns, such as county lines.

*Response:* AfC will be refining the tool that will be used to assess the complexity of a child's needs, and will be taking on board carers' feedback on criteria to include.

*Feedback:* Carers felt that there would be a time delay in assessing the complexity of a child's needs between the child first entering a placement and carers, the child's social worker and the foster service having sufficient knowledge of the child's needs to accurately assess their complexity. Carers expressed concerns regarding the resultant impact on their payments.

*Response:* AfC will be refining the process for assessing and reviewing the complexity of a child's needs, including timeframes for review.

*Feedback:* Some carers felt that the assessment could be abused to exaggerate a child's complexity of needs in order to meet the threshold for a higher payment level.

*Response:* The assessment would be completed by the foster carer, the child's social worker, and the supervising social worker to ensure all views are represented in decision making.

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- **about Training, development and support framework**

*Feedback:* Most carers have shared positive feedback on the proposed competency-based training and development framework, and would be willing to support other carers in a mentoring system as a 'buddy'. Some carers in Richmond and Kingston expressed that a therapeutic support group would be beneficial. Carers also stated that more support from their supervising social workers was needed.

*Response:* The support offer to foster carers is currently being further developed, and will also be taken forward by the Placements and Matching workstream.

*Feedback:* Foster carers have expressed that they would like some clarity on AfC's expectations of carers at different levels. Some carers advised that AfC need to be clear on its expectations of Level 3 carers, as the increase in pay from Level 2 to Level 3 is small (+£30 per week per child if the child in placement has no to low complex needs). This includes, for example, whether Level 3 carers would be expected to support the service by delivering training, as they felt that such requirements would warrant an additional payment beyond the Level 3 reward fee. Some carers also shared the view that most foster carers, if trained properly, could supervise contact sessions and therefore contribute to supporting the fostering service.

*Response:* The competency and training framework is currently being developed with the Fostering Service and Workforce Development. This will detail expectations of carers at each level.

- **about Transitional arrangements**

*Feedback:* Carers have been in agreement with putting in place transitional arrangements for those who would be negatively impacted by the proposed offer to carers. Some carers have expressed that, beyond the transitional period (i.e. from 1 April 2020), they would not wish to continue fostering with AfC or would retire from fostering.

*Response:* The recruitment and retention strategy is currently being developed by the Publicity, Recruitment and Retention workstream. This will include how to mitigate, as far as possible, the risk of foster carers leaving the service during or after the transitional period.