

National Review of Care Allowances

Recommendations

Summer 2018

September 2018



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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National Review of Care Allowances – Recommendations – Summer 2018

Foreword

High quality care, trusting consistent relationships, and support that is flexible to meet the needs of individual children are what is needed in order to improve outcomes for our looked after children. The support that families receive can make a real difference to the children and young people they care for and in developing the recommendations, we have heard the voices of approximately 1000 young people, foster and kinship carers, adopters and practitioners who told us what matters to them when it comes to allowances and wider support. Many of those who participated in the consultation said that they would welcome support that goes beyond the foster, kinship or adoption allowance they receive, focusing on how they can get the information and support they need, when they need it most to improve the lives of their families.

The work of the Group is firmly set within the framework of Getting it Right For Every Child, supporting improvements for the outcomes and wellbeing of our children and young people. We have taken a rights-based approach, identifying the needs of children in foster and kinship care, as well as those who have been adopted and focusing on how, as Corporate Parents, we can collectively meet those needs. This Review intended to complement the work of the independent Care Review, by looking at ways to improve the life chances and wellbeing of children in kinship and foster care, as well as adopted children.

As a Group, we were asked to look at the current landscape of foster, kinship and adoption allowances, including the practical and financial support available and to recommend ways in which it could be improved. I am grateful to the members of the National Review of Care Allowances Group for their dedication and support in developing the recommendations and to everyone who contributed to the consultation.

Iona Colvin
Chair, National Review of Care Allowances

Introduction

The 2017/18 Programme for Government contained a commitment to review foster, kinship and adoption allowances, bringing forward proposals for national kinship care and foster care allowances in summer 2018. This commitment followed a SNP manifesto pledge in 2016 to *continue to provide practical and financial support for kinship and foster care families, and introduce a new national allowance for kinship care and foster care*. The manifesto commitment sharpened the scope of previous work on foster and kinship care allowances, in considering options for a national scheme.

It is important to note, that this work also builds on *A National Review of Foster Care*, which considered what improvements to foster care allowances could be introduced as well as the wider support available and many of the conversations that are happening at a local and national level around support for kinship and adoptive families.

The financial and practical support provided to kinship, foster and adoption families allows parents and carers the space required to focus on the needs of the children in their care. However, we know that there is significant variation in the rates of allowances paid to families across local authorities. The purpose of the Review was to consider the feasibility of a national scheme of kinship and foster care allowances and to submit recommendations to the Minister that addresses parity, equity and sustainability.

The task of considering the feasibility of a Scottish rate of allowances for children in kinship and foster care was a complex one and impacts on a wide and varied audience. To support the development of this programme, a Group was established, which included representatives from Scottish Government, COSLA, local authorities, Social Work Scotland, third sector stakeholders and Scotland Excel. The Group was chaired by Iona Colvin, Chief Social Work Adviser. The Terms of Reference and list of members can be found at Annex A.

Background

The supporting guidance on the [Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#) states that foster carers are charged with providing not just basic care but optimum care for looked after children. The Regulations sets out expectations that allowances should cover:

- a healthy diet and good physical care;
- opportunities for stimulation and exercise;
- development of social skills and participation in activities in the community;
- building self-esteem, including good presentation and acceptability by peers;
- a safe and comfortable environment;
- full inclusion in special celebrations such as birthdays, Christmas or other cultural or religious events and promoting and developing educational opportunities

On 1 October 2015, an agreement between Scottish Government and local authorities came into force to ensure that kinship carers receive the same allowances as foster carers within their local area and that the allowances for kinship carers should meet the expectations set out above. There is currently no statutory guidance that stipulates a minimum or maximum payment to meet the needs of children in kinship and foster care. In addition, local authorities have a statutory duty to have clear and accessible policies to reflect foster and kinship allowances.

With regard to adoption allowances, each local authority is able to develop their own adoption allowance scheme within the parameters of the [Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#) and it should be noted that there are a variety of models used, and considerations are often made based on individual circumstances and based on the needs of the child adopted. Regulation 10 of [The Adoption Support Services and Allowances \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#) outlines the purpose of an adoption allowance and the circumstances where it may be paid. .

Outline approach

The rights and needs of children in kinship and foster care as well as adopted children were central to the work of the Review Group. The approach adopted by the Group was seen in the wider context provided by [Getting It Right For Every Child](#) (GIRFEC) as the means by which, better outcomes can be achieved for all children and young people and their wellbeing improved, by ensuring they receive the right help at the right time from the right people. This ensures that foster, kinship and adopted children grow up feeling safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. The Group noted the importance of a relational approach that keeps the child at the centre of decision-making, underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Group also noted their collective role as Corporate Parents to represent the principles and duties on which improvements can be made for looked after children and young people. In tandem with GIRFEC, as Corporate Parents, the Group focused on the actions necessary to uphold the rights and secure the wellbeing of children in foster and kinship care as well as adopted children, complementing and supporting the actions of parents, families and carers, working with these key adults to deliver positive change for vulnerable children. The Scottish Government's recent report [Turning legislation into practice together](#) on how looked after children, young people and care leavers have benefited from corporate parenting support since the introduction of Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 offers an account of how corporate parenting has been embraced by the many different representative public sector individuals and organisations throughout Scotland.

In taking forward the Review, the Group recognised that the needs and rights of the child are paramount and that there was an opportunity to provide consistency and transparency to foster, kinship and adoption allowances across Scotland. The group met on 7 occasions and took a thematic approach to scope out the order and the wide range of topics that the review should cover over a series of meetings. It is important to note that the Group acknowledged the work undertaken in other parts of the UK and further afield in developing proposals for a national allowance, as well as approaches to develop the cost of a child growing up in the UK, notably the work

taken forward by the Child Poverty Action Group. Details of the themes for each meeting are included in Annex B.

Consultation and engagement

The Group were keen to know what children, young people, their carers, professionals and providers need to ensure looked after children are supported to achieve their potential. In partnership with Scottish Government, Social Work Scotland, COSLA and The Fostering Network and on behalf of the Group, a model was developed that utilised focus groups to capture richer, more in-depth information, as well as a survey to gather the views of partners and stakeholders.

A Community of Interest model built around a foster, kinship and adopted child was developed. The model aimed to support a range of perspectives and experiences including carers and support workers, focusing on their current situation with regards to care allowances and overall support for a looked after or adopted child, and the ways in which this can be improved. As the Community of Interest was built around children in each care setting, it ensured the needs of the child remained the focus throughout.

The focus groups were delivered by local authority practitioners, as well as third sector partners. The Group were also keen to hear from children and young people and several focus groups were held specifically to listen to the views of looked after children, following a similar model. In addition to the in depth discussions happening through the Communities of Interest, a survey was developed and circulated to capture the views of stakeholders and carer networks, focussing on the key themes that were being considered by the working group. The findings of the survey and the Communities of Interest work are available separately and underpin the rationale for the draft recommendations.

Recommendations

The Group have agreed in principle to improving consistency and transparency of information about child allowances as well as improved support for foster, kinship and adoptive families and carers. In making the recommendations to Ministers and COSLA Leaders, the Group recognised the need for further discussions between national and local government, as many supported a change in policy and practice. The Group considered the relevant legislation that supports the administration of foster, kinship and adoption allowances as well as wider support and agreed that the following recommendations could be met within the existing legislative framework.

Improve consistency and transparency in the delivery of child allowances

There was consensus from the consultation responses and among Group members that improvement in accessing information about allowances is required as currently, carers did not feel well equipped. The survey findings highlighted that approximately one third of respondents (36%) stated that they find it easy/very easy to access relevant information, with the number falling (23%) among kinship carers. The Group felt that a standardised approach to guidance would be beneficial for carers and young people to address the issue of insufficient information around entitlement to and purpose of allowances. With regard to a Scottish Recommended Allowance, the survey results highlighted overwhelming support, with 92% of respondents in favour. In developing this recommendation, the Group considered different methodologies utilised across the UK and beyond and agreed that the Child Poverty Action Group's Cost of a Child survey, as well as the Household Expenditure model, most recently taken forward in developing the Welsh National Recommended Allowance were favourable models. The Group also agreed that the needs of children in foster and kinship care are often greater than for a child who is not care-experienced and that any allowance should reflect this. This approach was consistent with consultation findings, where 94% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with this approach. National allowances in England, Wales and Northern Ireland currently include a 50% uplift of the cost of a child. As part of the Group's approach, young people were asked about their understanding of allowances and they felt that information for carers should be clear and easy to read, either online or in leaflet form. They also thought that their carers should have as much information as possible to support them in their role.

Number	Detail
Rec 1	All foster and kinship carers should have a clear understanding about what the allowance for children in kinship and foster care is intended to cover. Any information should be clear, relevant and readily available via local authority and other providers' websites and via other means for those who do not have access to the internet.
Rec 2	Adoptive agencies should ensure that prospective adopters are made aware at the earliest opportunity within the adoption process about the purpose of an adoption allowance, as well as the process for applying.
Rec 3	To achieve consistency for children and young people in foster and kinship care, Scottish Government and COSLA should consider a Scottish Recommended Allowance, based on a methodology agreed by the Working Group, in order to meet the list of core components identified by the Group.

Improve consistency and transparency in the delivery of information and support for families and carers

During the Group's discussions, the needs and rights of children in foster and kinship care, as well as those who were adopted, went beyond allowances administered by local authorities and providers and the Group thought it was important to address many of the issues that were raised via the survey and the Communities of Interest. Several of the following recommendations are built on the tenet that carers do not undertake the role for financial gain and would welcome smoother access to the services and support available, including the benefits system, care system, universal services and third sector organisations that are designed to support care experienced children and their families. With regard to other payments made to foster carers, approximately two-thirds of foster carer survey respondents (64%) stated that they did not have a clear understanding of what additional payments foster carers in their area may receive. Similarly, the majority of foster carer respondents (83%) felt they did not have a clear understanding of what exceptional payments foster carers in their area may receive.

Throughout the consultation, there was also specific mention of the needs of kinship carers, who can often face different challenges to foster carers and therefore require different support. The consultation findings highlighted that kinship carers do not feel particularly well informed at the beginning of the process and would welcome greater support from local authorities around what they are entitled to, both relating to allowances, but also, training, support (including peer support) and advocacy. With regard to support for adoptive families, the Group considered the vital role post-adoption support can play, often years after a child has been adopted, in helping address issues and reduce the number of disruptions. Families can sometimes be reluctant to return to a local authority and the recommendation is aimed at addressing stigma and breaking down the barriers that some adoptive parents feel.

As part of the Group's approach, young people were asked what further support they would welcome and many said that they would like someone else they could talk to and have fun with – they spoke about some kids having befrienders and some stated that they would like this. They also asked for a greater focus on their health and wellbeing, with a particular focus on their mental health, which could be supported via better equipping their carers and parents to meet their needs.

Number	Detail
Rec 4	In line with Getting It Right For Every Child, additional and exceptional payments beyond the child allowance should be linked to the identified needs of children in foster care and information about such payments should be shared with foster carers at the earliest opportunity. Local authorities should have an approach to decisions around these allowances which is clear and transparent and which supports a single planning framework, via a Child's Plan.
Rec 5	Scottish Government should undertake a mapping exercise of policy objectives linked to foster, kinship and adopted children, to ensure their needs are represented and policies continue to be aligned.
Rec 6	Information about benefits and tax should be readily available and accurate, with the information provided by UK Government departments, including DWP & HMRC, taking account of the differences between carers in Scotland and the rest of the UK. Support for local authority staff responsible for advising carers should be developed, particularly relating to the implementation of Universal Credit.
Rec 7	As part of the information provided to carers by local authorities, a 'Carer's letter' should be developed to enable kinship families to have a clear understanding of what they are entitled to. This should include access to allowances, benefits, training and peer support.
Rec 8	Learning from best practice, local authorities' support for kinship families should focus on the identified needs of carers and young people. Examples include support linked to trauma and loss, peer support, as well as dedicated workers for carers and children in kinship care.
Rec 9	In line with GIRFEC, all local authorities as corporate parents should continue to work collaboratively, particularly driving attainment within schools in order to address the needs of children in kinship and foster care, as well as adopted children.
Rec 10	Consideration should be given as to how to mitigate the impact of Universal Credit on kinship families, which now disregards the "child element" for a looked after and accommodated child.
Rec 11	We know that many adoptive families benefit from post adoption support, long after the Adoption Order is granted. To support adoptive placements throughout childhood, adoption agencies should consider the provision of an annual post adoption contact for all adoptive families, aimed at providing early and appropriate support to the child and family in line with GIRFEC. Particular consideration should be given to out-of-authority placements and the transition from placing to residing authority.
Rec 12	A knowledge hub should be established to enable the sharing of best practice between the services and providers that support care experienced children and their families.

Annex A: Core Group Terms of Reference and Membership

Background

The SNP manifesto previously committed to *continue to provide practical and financial support for kinship and foster care families, and introduce a new national allowance for kinship care and foster care*. The manifesto commitment sharpened the scope of previous work on foster and kinship care allowances to considering options for a national scheme. On 25 July 2017, the Scottish Government announced via a Parliamentary Question its intention to gather together a group of experts to carry out a review of foster care allowances, kinship care allowances and adoption allowances.

Aim

The National Review of Care Allowances (the Review) will consider firstly a national approach to care allowances for children living in foster care, and then the implications of this for other equitable groups of children living in kinship care and adoptive placements in Scotland. A national approach should be able to be implemented within the current level of overall funding.

Tasks

Explore the feasibility of introducing a new national scheme of foster care allowances that delivers parity, equity and sustainability and improves on the current system.

Agree a realistic methodology for calculating national care allowances based on the needs of children living in foster care and equitable, kinship and adoptive care placements.

Consider some broader options for financially remunerating foster carers that might be achieved should funding become available or that could be achieved through new welfare powers being devolved to the Scottish Parliament and the roll out of Universal Credit.

Output

It is anticipated that the review will provide a series of policy options that can be presented to Scottish Ministers and CoSLA leaders for consideration.

Consultation

The Scottish Government will be responsible for conducting any sector wide consultation that may be required either during and/or following the findings of the Review.

Timescale

The Review will begin in autumn 2017 with an expected completion date of summer 2018.

Meetings

The Review Group will have flexibility to agree a schedule of meetings and organise other activities that will help them to complete the tasks of the Review.

Due to the complexities surrounding the individual elements of this Review, the chair has expressed an interest in taking a phased approach which they will present to group members at an introductory meeting. A reference group will support and help to gather views/information from represented bodies to feedback to the core group.

Secretariat and analytical support for meetings will be provided by the Scottish Government.

National Care Allowances Review Group - membership

Core Group

Iona Colvin, Scottish Government (Chair)
Heather Brown, Scottish Government (Secretariat)
Vivien Thomson, Social Work Scotland
Sharon McAlees, Social Work Scotland
Laura Caven, CoSLA
Lauren Bruce, CoSLA
Paul Manning, Executive Director of Finance, South Lanarkshire Council
Sara Lurie, The Fostering Network Scotland
Gill Westwood, Citizens Advice Scotland
Susan Hunter, Citizens Advice Scotland
Scott Dunbar, Edinburgh City Council
Linda Richards, Perth and Kinross Council
Fiona Aitken, Adoption UK (Scotland)
Aileen Shaw, Glasgow City Council (shared duties on the group with Cathy Coll)
Cathy Coll, Glasgow City Council (shared duties on the group with Aileen Shaw)
Euan Kidd, Scotland Excel
Ellen Searle, Scottish Government (Social Security policy)
Miranda McIntosh, Scottish Government (LAC policy)
Fiona McDiarmid, Scottish Government (LAC policy)
Tara Clark (Scottish Government (LAC policy)
Claire Brookes, Scottish Government (LAC policy)
Sasha Maguire, Scottish Government (Analytical Team)

Note: Scottish Government policy officials may not be required to attend every meeting of the Review core group but proper representation will be ensured depending on agenda items.

20 Nov 17 What does parity look like?

- Terms of Reference and core principles
- Current arrangements for kinship, foster & adoption allowances
- Defining and delivering parity, consistency and transparency

16 Jan 18 Learning from others

- Cost of a child - CPAG & other parts of UK in setting a NMA
- Components of a core allowance
- Additional needs of looked after children

21 Feb 18 Foster care

- Understanding the needs of foster families
- Funding landscape including LA definition of fees & allowances

14 Mar 18 Kinship care

- Understanding the needs of kinship families
- Links with Social Security & benefits system

17 April 18 Adoption

- Understanding the needs of adoptive families
- The value of post adoption support
- Agree consultation approach

6 June 18 Consultation findings

- Consultation and focus groups results
- Draft recommendations

9 Aug 18 Final report and recommendations

- Recommendations to Ministers and COSLA Leaders
- Focus on the allowances and wider support



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-78781-210-9 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, September 2018

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS468746 (09/18)

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