

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE : 22 MARCH 2007

LINK CARERS SCHEME

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Social Work Committee with the details of the outcome of the review of East Ayrshire Council Link Carers arrangements.
- 1.2 To advise Committee of interim proposals for revising existing payments and the financial implications of these proposals.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In January 2007 a report on the Children and Families Service was presented to Social Work Committee. This report advised Committee of a range of issues within the Children and Families Service. It included details of the Link Carers Scheme and advised Committee that these arrangements allow vulnerable children to remain within their families as a direct alternative to them coming into the care of the local authority.
- 2.2 Committee was further advised that a review was being undertaken of the Link Carers Scheme within East Ayrshire and that the outcome of this review would be reported to Social Work Committee in March 2007.
- 2.3 The Scottish Executive has recently undertaken a consultation on Fostering and Kinship Care and the response from them is awaited. This consultation could result in National developments in relation to payments to Foster Carers and Kinship Carers, however, it is proposed that East Ayrshire Council agrees interim arrangements to improve the payments to Link Carers within East Ayrshire at this time.

3. CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 It is important, that children are cared for by their family in the event their parents are not able to, providing it is safe and practical to do so.
- 3.2 East Ayrshire Link Carers arrangements allow social work to provide financial assistance to the extended families of children who cannot live with their parents in order to avoid children being taken into the care of the Local Authority.
- 3.3 These families provide an essential service to these children and it is important that the financial support provided by the Council continues to assist them to care for children without experiencing financial hardship.

3.4 There are currently 66 children whose carers receive link carers' payments resulting in an annual expenditure of approximately £100,000. This corresponds to 1/3 of the basic fostering rate at 2004 levels (former CoSLA rates).

4. LINK CARERS REVIEW FINDINGS

4.1 All existing Link Carers payments were reviewed against the care and support needs of the children. The reviews of the arrangements for each child also considered the legal status of the children and whether the financial support provided to the carer reflected the real costs of providing care and support to the child.

4.2 In all cases it was agreed the extended family care arrangements best met the interests and needs of the children.

4.3 It was concluded that the current Link Carer rates did not reflect the costs of maintaining children. Many of the children had additional support needs due to their previous parenting and care experiences which had presented carers with challenges in relation to the day to day care of the children.

4.4 The Review compared the existing East Ayrshire arrangements with other Council areas. This exercise highlighted the wide variations across local authorities in relation to arrangements for Link Carers payments. A detailed comparison was undertaken of the schemes in East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and Fife Council areas.

4.5 This benchmarking exercise reinforced the view that the current arrangements for Link Carers in East Ayrshire should be amended and upgraded in order that children can be offered the best possible support from their families.

5. PROPOSAL FOR EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL LINK CARERS ARRANGEMENTS

5.1 It is proposed that East Ayrshire Council continues to provide financial support to extended family members and kinship carers and introduces a new payment scale. It is further proposed that the new scale takes effect as of 1st April 2007. The proposed new scale corresponds to payments made at the current adoption allowances as at 2007 levels. The following table illustrates the proposed rates.

Age of Child	Proposed Interim Rates				
	Current Weekly Allowance	Proposed Weekly Allowance	Less: Child Benefit	Revised Weekly Allowance	2007/08 Allowance (inflation uplift of 3% applied)
	£	£	£	£	£
0 to 4	22.68	68.03	-17.45	50.58	52.10
5 to 10	28.14	84.43	-17.45	66.98	68.99
11 to 15	35.03	105.10	-17.45	87.65	90.28
16 to 18	45.36	136.08	-17.45	118.63	122.19

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The proposed new payments would cost an additional £200,000 per year and would equate to an average payment of £90.28 per week per child based on the 2007/08 allowance.
- 6.2 These figures are based on payments to existing carers and it is recommended that flexibility is built in to the scheme in order that new carers can access the benefits of these arrangements. This will be reviewed at the end of financial year 2007/08.

7. POLICY/LLEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The outcome of the Scottish Executive consultation on Fostering and Kinship care may impact upon East Ayrshire Link Carers Scheme. These proposals should therefore be considered as an interim position pending the outcome of the National Consultation. A report will be presented to a future Committee detailing the outcome of the National Consultation.

8. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The proposals to improve the Link Carers Scheme are consistent with the Improving Opportunities and Eliminating Poverty themes of the Community Plan.

9. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Link carers remain a matter of significant public and national interest as well as being one of central importance for individual children and their carers. They therefore demand a clear response. These carers fulfil a crucial role in providing children with alternatives to being taken into care. There are increased financial risks for the Council if the link carers scheme does not sufficiently support the recipients of it.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 Social Work Committee is asked to:-
- (i) note the outcome of the Link Carers review;
 - (ii) agree the proposals to increase payments to link carers in line with the rates noted at section 5 of this report;
 - (iii) note the information in relation to the National Consultation on Kinship Care;
 - (iii) Invite the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services to present a report on the outcome of this consultation to a future Committee; and
 - (iv) otherwise note the contents of this report.

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services
5 March 2007
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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. East Ayrshire Link Carers Review Report
2. Fife Council Link Carers Scheme
3. North Ayrshire Link Carers Scheme
4. National Consultation on Arrangements for Fostering and Kinship Care

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