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Howard Sykes MBE

31/03/22

Dear Councillor Sykes

**Ref: Foster Carer Fees.**

I am a constituent in the ward you represent and live [REDACTED]  
I am also a local authority foster carer who looks after children and young people on behalf of you the Corporate Parent.

I feel I have no alternative but to write to those that represent me and who are also the Corporate Parents, who are responsible for the children and young people looked after by the local authority, part of this responsibility is ensuring that foster carers have what they need to look after the children and young people in their care including full financial provision to meet the full cost of looking after them thus allowing them to meet their outcomes.

It would seem that once again foster carers have been overlooked in the decision making by Oldham Council (Corporate Parent) and I am compelled to bring to the council's attention that we are not exempt from the struggle the country finds itself in, which for carers is being exasperated by the lack of increases that have failed to keep us in line with inflation.

The basic allowance has had no increase since 2010/2011 & the skills payment element has only increased by 1% in 2011/12 and 1% & in 2014/15, the CPI inflation rate for February 2022 was 6.1% and is continuing to grow exponentially expecting to hit 7% In April.

***"The NMS 28.3 states that allowances & fees paid are reviewed annually & the fostering service consults with foster carers in advance of any changes to the allowance & fees."***  
This would beg the question as to who it is that has not reviewed the allowances & fees year on year, the Corporate Parent or the fostering Service?

We would like to ask the Council how we are expected to look after the vulnerable children placed in our care on allowances and skills payments that have in essence been cut year on year? It is not possible to provide to the same level of care today as we did in 2010 with allowances that have been frozen and nor can carers meet the day-to-day household costs with a skills payment increase that only totals 2% in a 12-year period, which is also being used to subsidise the child's allowance.

The lack of increase to allowances and skills payments is resulting in children missing out on the things they should be doing as we cannot afford to do what we once did with them, as there is no surplus money to do it with after the day to day living cost have been met.

A number of carers have done research across other local authorities and found that where allowances are in the same region as Oldham's they have other financial incentives which help i.e., council tax exemption, gym memberships, automatic holiday pay without the need to ask for it, things that can make it that little bit easier to carry out our roles, sadly Oldham is lacking in these things and have overlooked the foster care provision in Oldham year on year.

Some other authorities have raised allowances and fees as they recognise to retain and attract new carers you have to be willing to invest in them, only recently Glasgow carers child allowance deficit has been acknowledged and they have been offered a 10% increase, surely this is evidence that we are not getting enough to meet the full cost to care for our children and young people.

Oldham was once one of the best fee-paying authorities in the country and was matching IFA's once you got to group 4, now we are constantly fighting to get what we need and Oldham foster carers are tired of this, we came in to fostering to offer children and young people a loving, stable home where they could be nurtured and given the experiences that other children have, we did not expect to have to fight for what they need or what we need and deserve, this is affecting retention and recruitment as carers either resign or move to a better financial support provider and potential carers decide not to be assessed by Oldham choosing other fostering providers or not to foster at all.

We need to make you the Corporate Parent aware that we feel you are failing in your responsibility to these children and to those who care for them, it really is not acceptable that foster carers are not remunerated as they should be.

We respectfully ask that you do not use the "we are meeting the National Minimum Allowance mantra" as we all know the figures published by the DfE are immoral and unjust, they go nowhere near enough to cover the full cost of caring for children and they are purely a minimum level that local authorities and IFA's cannot go below.

The DfE are also very clear that carers should not be out of pocket in the fostering role, NMS 28.1 ***"each foster carer receives at least the national minimum allowance PLUS any necessary agreed expense for the care, education and reasonable leisure interest of the child, including insurance, holidays, birthday's, school trips, religious festivals etc, which cover the full cost of caring for each child placed with him/her.***

Oldham only meets the cost of birthday's, festivals & holidays, we are expected to use the allowance to absorb the costs of all other extras, why is this?

This needs to be looked at and current policies reviewed urgently, and we request that all foster carers fees, including mileage etc should be brought in line with inflation to enable us to carry out our roles, allowing us to meet the expectation of providing the full care to our children and young people.

Yours sincerely

