

## **What is happening with birthday and festival allowances?**

You will all remember that previously there was a sudden reduction in birthday and festival allowances announced. It was quite rightly pointed out by lots of people that it wasn't right to announce this change without proper consultation and communication. Kath Drescher (Senior Manager) then sent out a letter in July 2017 to all carers, apologising for the lack of consultation and explaining that the change would be put on hold until consultation had been undertaken.

At the moment we have been told that there are still consultations underway with young people regarding their views in regard to proposed changes to birthday and festival allowances. At the strategy group meeting in September this issue was discussed, and a number of possible options for how to fairly distribute birthday and festival allowances were explored. Luke Chapman (Service Manager) had distributed a document to everyone beforehand outlining some possible options for how to distribute the money and asked for everyone's views.

Decision-making is still underway regarding the outcome of this and an implementation date for any change is yet to be agreed.

Once a decision is made this will be communicated to carers – keep an eye on the newsletter for further updates. However, we are told that it is not anticipated that the effect will be immediate – the intention is to give carers as much advanced notice of any change coming into effect as possible.

## **What is happening about savings for children in foster care in DCC?**

DCC Fostering Service has realised that it is out of step with other local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies in terms of ensuring that children in care have access to savings.

All children in care already have an ISA opened for them once they have been in care for one year, which is managed independently from the local authority. This provides a cash sum that will become available to them (in an agreed way) once they become adults.

In addition to this, it is recognised that children and young people in care need access to savings that they can access on a more frequent basis (ie. not waiting until adulthood). As with any child, it might be that the savings go towards a special event, purchase or holiday.

One of the options previously explored was that foster carers would be responsible for making sure they opened a bank account for children and young people, and paid in a certain amount each week from their weekly fostering payments. However, it was then recognised that this represented a lot of logistical difficulties (eg. how to open bank accounts and what happens when children move placements or when children are in respite care).

The fostering service is now looking at extracting £5/week from the weekly fostering payment before this goes to the carer, and this being paid into a 'separate interest bearing account' for the child or young person. This would mean that foster carers would not need to take responsibility for opening or managing bank accounts for young people and there would be no confusion about whether carers were making the correct payments. As stated, this would be a general savings account, and access to it would not need to wait until the young person was 18.

Decision-making and timescales regarding this are yet to be finalised – keep an eye on the newsletter for updates.

**I still am not sure what respite I can get as a DCC foster carer?**

Generally it is a good idea that foster carers wherever possible include children and young people in their holiday plans, and that respite is only used when it is needed and fits with the child or young person's needs, rather than just as a matter of routine.

However, all carers can still take paid respite. The first fourteen days of this per financial year is subject to approval by fostering team managers. However, the team managers are reasonable people and it would be very unusual for them to deny any request that falls within the initial fourteen days per financial year. They assure us that it is not the intention to deny foster carers holidays when they need these!

Any requests beyond 14 days need to be approved by Placement Review Panel (which has always been the case). This is a panel made up of senior management which takes place weekly. Alternatively, respite beyond fourteen days could be taken unpaid.

### **What is happening about how support is provided to foster carers – is it true that we are switching from Fostering Network to Foster Talk?**

The fostering service currently provides carers with membership to Fostering Network. In May 2017 the fostering service announced that they were considering switching this membership to another provider – Foster Talk. This was based on their assessment that Foster Talk offered a better level of support to foster carers.

Foster carers then asked that this decision be postponed until further consultation had been undertaken. Both organisations have now made presentations to a fostering management meeting (to which two foster carers

were invited). In addition, they have also agreed to make presentations to the FCA. The FCA will then feedback to the service manager regarding what they felt were the positives/negative of each organisation's offer.

The decision regarding which organisation is contracted to provide the support will then be made by the fostering service manager. Again – keep an eye on the newsletter for an outcome regarding this.

There has been some anxiety amongst carers that this decision might be budget-driven. The fostering service manager has provided reassurance at strategy meeting that there is almost no difference in price between the two organisations. The decision-making is about trying to get the best possible support for foster carers, not about anything else.

### **I hear Luke Chapman used to be on the Board of FosterTalk – what does this mean ?**

On the first day that Luke started work for DCC there was a Strategy Meeting where FosterTalk were doing a presentation. Luke informed everyone that he used to be a non-executive Director. Luke had this role in 2010 - 11 and was invited on to the Board to help ensure that the views of LA carers were taken into account. There was no monetary reward for the role and no financial gain if more LA's joined FosterTalk.