

Council Meeting

20th March 2024

Motion submitted by Councillor Courtney under Council Procedure Rule 14

Introduction of a cap on children's social care costs to relieve financial pressures on Calderdale MBC and other Local Authorities

This council notes that:

It is neither poor management nor frivolous spending that is currently causing financial difficulties in the majority of Local Authorities across England. Increasing demands for council services, the cost of living and inflationary pressures are all taking their toll, while funding from central government has been vastly reduced since 2010, including by £84 million annually in Calderdale in real terms.

This council is concerned that:

- Increasing demand and the rising costs of both children and adults' social care in particular is putting a huge pressure on councils' budgets.
- The government's response to the MacAlister review which they commissioned, was to provide less than 10% of the additional funding for children's social care that was deemed necessary.
- A recent Local Government Association survey of councils revealed that the number of children's social care placements costing £10,000 or more per week has increased substantially in five years - with 120 such placements in 2018/19, rising to 1,510 in 2022/23, with 91% of councils now having at least one placement of this cost. The highest cost placement was £63,000 a week (£3.2m per year).
- Nearly every council (98%) said a lack of choice in placements was driving the high prices.
- Over nine in ten (93%) councils also highlighted children needing help with increasingly complex needs, including mental health needs or exhibiting challenging behaviours, as a factor.

This council further notes:

The measures taken by the council to reduce expenditure on costly external placements, such as:

- Promoting fostering and Special Guardianship, increasing fostering fees and introducing a council tax exemption for carers
- Increasing capacity in our own internal residential homes
- Block purchasing placements with local providers
- Investing in early help

This council believes that:

- Profiteering from the care of the most vulnerable children and young people is unacceptable.
- Consideration should be given to implementing bands and tariffs linked to need to ensure costs are appropriate to the provision being delivered while limiting private providers from generating excessive profits.

This council calls on:

The Leader to write to government and our Calderdale MPs asking them to support the introduction of legislation to cap the amount that private providers can charge for children's social care placements and agency staff, and to back the Local Government Association's three key areas for action:

- Roll out planned Department for Education programmes on the recruitment and retention of foster carers to all councils.
- Expansion of children's homes through capital investment, recruitment and professional development of children's homes workers and working with the voluntary and community sector.
- Work with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England on both inpatient mental health facilities (the number of inpatient mental health beds for teenagers fell by 20 per cent between 2017 and 2022) and joint delivery of placements for children with complex mental health needs.

Seconded by Councillor Wilkinson