
Prioritising allowance needs for Special Guardians and families with children who are voluntarily looked after by the local authority by introducing Financial Assessment

Overview

Bristol City Council is proposing changes to the funding it offers to parents and carers who need extra help to provide care for their children. This would enable us to reduce the budget for this service by £50k in 2018/19.

Our proposals are described in the survey below. Please give us your views.

Savings to other services

You can see the full list of savings which we propose to make over the next five years as part of our Corporate Strategy and Budget Consultation at www.bristol.gov.uk/corpstrategy

Next steps

Your feedback, along with the views of other local groups and partners, will be taken in to consideration in developing a set of final proposals that match local needs wherever possible. The proposals will be put to the Mayor and his Cabinet to make a final decision. In making a decision they will also take consultation responses into consideration.

The consultation results and the council's decision on how to deliver future services will be published in early 2018.

Introduction

There are several ways in which the council supports children who no longer live with their parents.

The council cares directly for some children (currently more than 650). Approximately a quarter of these children are looked after by the council through a voluntary agreement with their parents.

Around 500 other children are cared for by 'Special Guardians'. A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is a way in which children can gain the security and support of a permanent home and family when they can no longer live with their parents and would otherwise be in the care of the local authority. Special Guardians are usually a family member for the child or someone who knows the child well and is connected to them in some other way; for example a foster carer may become the Special Guardian for a child they have looked after. The council provides financial support in the form of a weekly allowance to Special Guardians.

Further information is available in 'Caring for a family or friend's child' (www.bristol.gov.uk/social-care-health/caring-for-family-friends-childrens)

Overall, the cost of the council providing essential services and changes in the council's income will leave us with a gap in our finances of £108m over the next five years. This is because prices keep going up, as does the demand for services such as social care and education, because we have a growing population. The council has to make savings across many of its services.

What this means for the service

As part of these overall savings, Bristol City Council is proposing changes to the funding it offers to parents and carers who need extra help to provide care for their children. This would enable us to reduce the budget for this service by £50k in 2018/19.

Our proposals are described below. You can see the full list of savings which we propose to make over the next five years as part of our Corporate Strategy and Budget Consultation at www.bristol.gov.uk/corpstrategy

Our Proposals

The council proposes to introduce a financial assessment of three aspects of its provision to children in care. This is intended to ensure that people pay something towards the care if they can afford to, and full funding is reserved for those who need it most. These three proposals are:

Proposal 1: a financial assessment of Special Guardians. The council proposes to reduce or end the payment of the allowance for Special Guardians whose financial situation means they do not need the full allowance for looking after the child(ren). The reduction in allowance for individual Special Guardians would range from no reduction to £243 per week, depending on the age of the child, other benefits and income of the Special Guardian. (The council does not currently undertake any financial assessment of Special Guardians, unlike adoption allowances which are subject to a financial assessment of the family).

Proposal 2: The council will provide practical support to carers and children according to assessed need which may range from therapeutic interventions (for which Adoption Support Fund applications may be made on behalf of the family) to practical, play and parenting support, or support to access universal and targeted services.

Proposal 3: The Council proposes to pilot a financial assessment of parents' income where children are voluntarily accommodated (looked after under Section 20 Children Act 1989) by the local authority. Parents will be required to contribute towards the cost of their child's care where they are assessed as being able to afford it. Individual families would be required to contribute approximately £40 per week towards living expenses and clothing allowance. (Information about Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 is available at: https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/media/277498/s20_guidance.pdf)

How many people will be affected?

There are currently 514 children living in a permanent family arrangement through Special Guardianship or a similar Order and to whom the Council pays a weekly allowance. It is anticipated that financial assessment will affect the financial support we pay to 15 (3%) of these families.

There are 661 children in our care, 180 of whom are accommodated on the basis of a voluntary agreement with parents (Section 20 Children Act 1989). It is anticipated that financial assessment will affect nine (5%) of these families.

What do other councils currently do?

Some other local authorities undertake an annual financial assessment of Special Guardians. This is allowed within the Children Act Statutory Guidance on Special Guardianship.

The council will consider what financial assessment is undertaken by other councils for children who are accommodated and will develop a model of financial assessment similar to that proposed for SGO carers and in place for people who adopt children. Charging parents is allowed by the Children Act 1989 (in some cases) and is subject to assessment.

Annual savings table:

2018/19 £000	2019/20 £000	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	Total £000
50,000	0	0	0	0	50,000

Please let us have your views on the proposals.

1 Do you agree or disagree with proposal 1: a financial assessment of Special Guardians?**Proposal 1 - Further information**

A financial assessment of Special Guardians. The council proposes to reduce or end the payment of the allowance for Special Guardians whose financial situation means they do not need the full allowance for looking after the child(ren). The reduction in allowance for individual Special Guardians would range from no reduction to £243 per week, depending on the age of the child, other benefits and income of the Special Guardian. (The council does not currently undertake any financial assessment of Special Guardians, unlike adoption allowances which are subject to a financial assessment of the family).

Please select only one item

- Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree
 Strongly disagree

2 Do you agree or disagree with proposal 2: the council will provide practical support to carers and children according to assessed need?**Proposal 2 - Further information**

The council will provide practical support to carers and children according to assessed need which may range from therapeutic interventions (for which Adoption Support Fund applications may be made on behalf of the family) to practical, play and parenting support, or support to access universal and targeted services.

Please select only one item

- Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree
 Strongly disagree

3 Do you agree or disagree with proposal 3: pilot financial assessment of parents' income where children are voluntarily accommodated by the local authority?

Proposal 3 - Further information

The Council proposes to pilot a financial assessment of parents' income where children are voluntarily accommodated (looked after under Section 20 Children Act 1989) by the local authority. Parents will be required to contribute towards the cost of their child's care where they are assessed as being able to afford it. Individual families would be required to contribute approximately £40 per week towards living expenses and clothing allowance. (Information about Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 is available at: https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/media/277498/s20_guidance.pdf)

Please select only one item

- Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree
 Strongly disagree

4 Do you have any further comments on this proposal?

About you

We would like to receive feedback from people with as wide a variety of views and needs as possible in Bristol. It would be very helpful if you could complete the following 'About You' questions. This will help us ensure that no-one is discriminated against unlawfully.

Information provided will be treated confidentially and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and only used to ensure that everyone is treated fairly.

5 What is your postcode

6 What is your age group?

Please select only one item

- Under 18 18 – 24 25-44 45-64 65-74 Over 75
 Prefer not to say

7 What is your gender?

Please select only one item

- Female Male Prefer not to say

8 Are you transgender?

Please select only one item

- Yes No Prefer not to say

9 What is your ethnicity?

Please select only one item

- White British Other white Mixed / Dual Heritage Black / Black British
 Asian / Asian British Other ethnic group Prefer not to say

If other, please specify:

10 Are you disabled?

- Yes No Prefer not to say

11 What is your religion?

- No religion Christian
Sikh Buddhist Hindu Jewish Muslim
 Any other religion or belief Prefer not to say

If other, please specify:

12 What is your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual (straight) Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual Prefer not to say

Data Protection: Data you supply will be held and used in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Personal information you supply is confidential. The council will only publish aggregate or summary results from the consultation, which will not identify individuals. Information will be stored for two years.