


Grants Determination Sub- Committee	
13 March 2018	
Report of: Debbie Jones, Corporate Director, Children's Services	Classification: [Unrestricted]
Tower Hamlets Foster Carers Association Annual Grant	

Lead Member	Amy Whitelock- Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Originating Officer(s)	Ishara Tewary and Nancy Meehan
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Community Plan Theme	A transformed Council making best use of resources and with an outward looking culture.

Executive Summary

This report provides a rationale for a grant of £6000 to be awarded to the Tower Hamlets Foster Carers Association (THFCA). The grant is essential for the THFCA Committee to carry out their day to day activities that underpin the smooth running of the service. The Tower Hamlets Fostering service has provided this grant to the committee over the past 10 plus years.

Some of the many benefits the THFCA Committee provide are, being a voice for all foster carers and foster children, advocating for carers during allegations and complaints, promoting the welfare of foster children, contributing to a more efficient and effective service delivery for foster carers and foster children and assisting with the recruitment and retention of foster carers. The THFCA Committee is an invaluable resource not only for foster carers and foster children but also a vital asset to the Fostering and Children's services.

Recommendations:

The Grants determination subcommittee is recommended to:

1. Award the Tower Hamlets Foster Carers Association Committee an annual grant of £6000 in order to conduct their role and responsibilities in supporting and advocating for the foster carers and foster children.
2. Delegate to the Corporate Director: Children, authority to make future annual grant awards to Tower Hamlets Foster Carers Association (THFCA).
3. That it be noted that awards to THFCA will be reported to the Grants Determination Sub Committee as part of the annual Grants Register report.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The reason for requesting the grant be awarded to the Tower Hamlets Foster Carers Association Committee is to enable the Committee to continue to conduct its work and activities in advocating for and supporting the needs of foster carers and foster children.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 There are no alternate options as the THFCA Committee is dependent on the grant to perform their functions.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Tower Hamlets Foster Carers' Association (THFCA) is a voluntary group run by and for foster carers approved by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Once approved all foster carers automatically become members of the THFCA and can access the benefits of the Association. The THFCA is also affiliated to the Fostering Network and all carers are members of the Fostering Network. THFCA is independent of the fostering service but works closely with managers and staff of the fostering service. The main aims of the THFCA are to:
- **Provide a voice for foster carers**
To ensure good communication and collaboration between the THFCA members, the local authority and voluntary organisations for the advancement of foster care and foster children.
 - **Advocate for foster carers with allegations and complaints**
To provide individual and confidential support for carers as and when needed.
 - **Promote the welfare of fostered children**
To promote and effect cooperation in achieving the best possible quality of service for children and young people looked after.
 - **Enhance service delivery**
To work closely with the fostering and children's services to identify gaps in service provision, and to improve systems/procedures with a view to contribute to and promote enhanced service delivery.
 - **Aid in recruitment of Foster carers and retention**
To encourage suitable persons to become foster carers through the fostering recruitment activities and the ambassador scheme, attend fostering initial home visits with social workers to prospective carers, co-facilitate the preparation training for prospective carers, mentor newly approved foster carers as part of the mentoring scheme and support new and approved carers at the fostering panel. The THFCA also arranges an array of activities and trips for foster carers and children.

- 3.2 The THFCA elects a committee of 10 foster carers at their Annual General Meeting (AGM) in line with their Constitution. The officers consists of a Chair person, Vice chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, liaison officer, event's organiser and any other role required to meet the needs of the Association. The THFCA committee's key function is to provide a means for foster carers to communicate their feedback and opinions to the fostering service. Equally the fostering service can contact the Committee to consult the views of carers on new procedures, the implementation of government regulations or to inform them of important events, such as the OFSTED inspection. The Committee is also represented on the Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Body and the Fostering Network's Foster Carers Association National Forum.
- 3.3 The Committee meets once a month for two hours at Mulberry Place. The fostering manager joins the meeting for one hour during this meeting to receive and provide feedback as described above.

4. FUNDING MATTERS

- 4.1 Historically, the Fostering service provided an ex-gratia payment of £6000 to the THFCA committee to fund their work and activities. The fostering service also has a monitoring role in ensuring the funds are utilised appropriately The THFCA committee utilises the funds to pay for the mobile phone, events and trips planned for the carers and foster children during the year, foster carer support group expenses, the AGM expenses and committee member expenses. Each month, the treasurer is expected to provide a breakdown of expenses and income to the fostering manager for review. A financial statement is produced at the AGM for all foster carers to view the description of the expenses and income.
- 4.2 In December 2017, the Legal services and the Central Benefits services deemed the payment is not an ex -gratia payment but a grant and therefore needs to be presented to the Grants Determination Sub- committee for approval for the funds to be paid to the THFCA committee.
- 4.3 To surmise, the THFCA committee is an invaluable resource not only for the foster carers and foster children but also a vital part of the fostering service and Local Authority as a whole in view of the enormous contribution and value they bring to the fostering families and foster children of Tower Hamlets.

5. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 5.1 Within Children services there is an allocated budget of £6,000 and the expenditure is included in the current forecasts.

6. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 6.1 The Council has a duty under regulation 17 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 to provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as

appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. Providing a grant to the Tower Hamlets Foster Carers Association to enable them to provide support to foster carers is consistent with this duty.

- 6.2 The grant agreement should include a clear monitoring process against defined parameters in order for the Council to demonstrate either: that delivery is in line with the application and, therefore, the grant achieved its purpose; or provide clear delineation where outcomes were not achieved and the reasons for such failure are apparent. Monitoring should therefore include measuring performance against the expected outcomes.
- 6.3 When making the grant, the Council must ensure that no part of the funds issued represents a profit element to any of the recipients. The inclusion of profit or the opportunity of making a profit from the grant or third parties indicates that the grant is really procurement activity and would otherwise be subject to the Council's Procurement Procedures and other appropriate domestic and European law. This would mean therefore, that the Council would have failed to abide by the appropriate internal procedures and external law applicable to such purchases.
- 6.4 The proposed grant appears to fall under the *de minimis* threshold for the purposes of European restrictions on State aid.
- 6.5 When making grants decisions, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the public sector equality duty). A proportionate level of equality analysis is required to discharge the duty and information relevant to this is contained in the One Tower Hamlets section of the report.

7. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct equalities or diversity implications.

8. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct implications.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Should the grant not be awarded to the THFCA committee there is a risk that the ability to offer support to foster carers and children by the committee will be compromised, which could impact the recruitment and retention of foster carers. There is a process in place to scrutinise how the grant is utilised which entails monthly monitoring of the spending and the financial statement produced at the THFCA Annual General Meeting.

10. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 All members of the THFCA and committee have enhanced DBS checks and have a supervising social worker who is responsible for ensuring that children and young people are safeguarded in their care. All activities that are undertaken by the THFCA is monitored by the fostering service to ensure safeguarding is robust.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

None

Appendices

None

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

NONE

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