

REPORT TO: Cabinet Member Children's Services

DATE: 14th September 2010

SUBJECT: Home Extension for Special Guardians who reside in Wrexham

WARDS AFFECTED: All

REPORT OF: Peter Morgan – Strategic Director – Children, Schools & Families

CONTACT OFFICER: Marilyn Josefsen, Interim Service Manager, Provision
Tony Murphy, Fostering Manager

EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL: No

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

This Report is for consideration of a building extension that will provide bedroom and living space for two looked after children, Child A (born 2008) and Child B (born 2006), who have full care orders (Section 31 Children Act 1989) and who will remain in the care of their great aunt and her partner until adulthood under a Special Guardianship arrangement. Legal Services have been consulted and will make the necessary arrangements to place a charge on the property.

REASON WHY DECISION REQUIRED:

The Special Guardians' accommodation is a three bed-roomed house with bathroom, kitchen/diner and lounge of limited size. The Special Guardians have two of their own children (a boy born in 1997 who is the son of the maternal great aunt and a girl born in 2008 who is the daughter of the Special Guardians).

The Special Guardians did apply to the Fostering Service to care for the children when they were initially taken into care but the viability report was not approved by the Fostering Panel because of the financial position and the lack of space within the applicant's home. The Special Guardians had a legal charge on their home and each of them had been made redundant. They had placed their home for sale with an estate agent for the purpose of settling their mortgage and outstanding debts. They then planned to rent a larger property in order to accommodate Child A and Child B.

They had the support of the birthparents to make an application to the court to be made party to the proceedings and to apply for a Special Guardianship Order.

The court approved their request to be assessed as Special Guardians and this report by an independent social worker was positive. They had resolved the issue

of the financial charge against the property and were in a better financial position at that point. The Local Authority was requested to consider a Special Guardianship package of support under the regulations. (Adoption Act 2002 and the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005).

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Cabinet Member is asked to consider the ongoing financial support in compliance with the Special Guardianship Regulations; an investment to extend the property in order to keep two siblings within their extended family through to adult life.

KEY DECISION: No

FORWARD PLAN: Not appropriate

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: Following the expiry of the “call-in” period for the Minutes of the meeting.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

Private rented accommodation was considered as an option but this would not give any certainty of residence and the impact that this would have on the family by moving from their community and support network. The proposed properties were in a rural location and would have a major impact on the family and the children. The rental costs would need to be subsidised and the proposed government changes to the Welfare and Housing Benefits system would be prejudicial to the placement of the children subject to this report.

IMPLICATIONS:

Budget/Policy Framework: MB167 A4211 Fostering Services

Financial:

<u>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</u>	2009 2010 £	2010/ 2011 £	2011/ 2012 £	2012/ 2013 £
Gross Increase in Capital Expenditure		26750		
Funded by:				
Sefton Capital Resources				
Specific Capital Resources				
<u>REVENUE IMPLICATIONS</u>				
Gross Increase in Revenue Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton funded Resources		yes		
Funded from External Resources				
Does the External Funding have an expiry date? Y/N	When?			
How will the service be funded post expiry?				

Legal:**Risk Assessment:****Asset Management:**

**CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN/VIEWS
CONSULTED LEGAL SERVICES; LOOKED AFTER TEAM 1;**

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE MONITORING:

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community	/		
2	Creating Safe Communities		/	
3	Jobs and Prosperity		/	
4	Improving Health and Well-Being		/	

5	Environmental Sustainability		/	
6	Creating Inclusive Communities	/		
7	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy		/	
8	Children and Young People	/		

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS RELIED UPON IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Adoption Act 2002

Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

Sefton Policy for Special Guardianship Financial Support

Fostering Regulations 2002

Fostering National Minimum Standards 2002

Standard 6.4

Each child placed has his/her own bedroom and accommodation arrangements reflect the child's assessed need for privacy and space.

Background

The children, Child A (born in 2008) and Child B (born in 2006) became looked after children by Sefton Council on 19/06/09 under a Police Protection Order and an Interim Care Order was granted on the 22/06/09.

On the 19/06/09 the children were placed with foster carers for the initial emergency placement and then they were moved to a matched placement with foster carers on 24/06/09. The children were then moved to kinship foster carers on 31/07/09 so that they would be cared for within their extended family. Unfortunately this arrangement could not be maintained and the carers asked for the children to be moved, and as there was no capacity within Sefton Fostering Service to provide an appropriate placement, the children were placed with an Independent Fostering Agency, where they remained until the court hearing in August to determine the permanency arrangements.

The plan from the court proceedings is that the children be placed under a Special Guardianship Order with the maternal great aunt and her partner to secure the stability and permanency for the children within the extended family.

The Special Guardians are both currently unemployed and in order for this plan to be successful, they have requested assistance from the local authority for financial support by provision of age appropriate fostering allowances less any welfare benefits/income support to which they may be entitled. They have also requested an extension to their home to provide the extra bedroom, living space and privacy for the children.

The Special Guardians have a mortgage on their home, which is valued at £109,950 and the settlement amount is £80,357.82p.

The cost of an extension would be (including VAT) **£26,750.**
(Quotation from HughesWard Construction)
and planning/building permission

The current cost of care for the two children within the Independent Fostering Agency is £675.22 per child per week.

The annual agency cost for the two children = **£70,223**

If this Special Guardianship Order and the Package of Support is not granted, the options for the children are long-term foster care or adoption if it is in their best interests. The use of the agency placement would continue until the permanent placement of the children is determined.

Recommendation

The Special Guardianship Order would ensure that the children remain within the extended family and maintain links to the birth family.

The cost of the support plan would be offset against the potential Independent Fostering Agency cost, and the future regular provision of the fostering allowances is dependent on the rights to welfare benefits and potential future employment. The annual review of circumstances entails a means tested financial report to assess the level of support to be provided.

The current position

The projected cost for the construction is quoted to be £21860 + vat. There would also be the costs of plans and building consent, which is budgeted at £1000.

The legal Department will establish contractual obligations between the Special Guardians and Sefton MBC in relation to a legal charge being made against the property which will be enforced ie become payable in full if the carers sell the property.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Member is asked to approve:

Expenditure for the purpose built 2-storey extension for the house in Wrexham as a means of providing permanency for Child A and Child B, two looked after children aged 22 months and 4 years respectively.