

CS/25/03
Cabinet
08 January 2025

Cabinet Response to the Children's Scrutiny Committee Fostering Task Group Report Report of the Interim Director of Children and Young People's Futures

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

- (a) That Cabinet are asked to agree the proposed responses to the Children's Scrutiny Committee Fostering Task Group report, as set out in Section 4 of this report.

2) Introduction

Children's Scrutiny Committee Fostering Task Group undertook a review of the fostering service between July and September 2024. They presented their report and recommendations to a meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Committee on the 11th November 2024. A copy of that report is attached as Appendix A.

3) Background information

On 11th November 2024, the Children's Scrutiny Committee approved the Fostering Task Group report and its recommendations (see minute *185) and agreed that it be submitted to Cabinet for a response.

The report and recommendations of the Children's Scrutiny Committee have been carefully reviewed. A response to each recommendation is outlined in Section 4.

A follow-up meeting took place between Foster Carers, Councillor Andrew Leadbetter Cabinet Member, senior managers and members of scrutiny on the 13th December 2024 to discuss the report. This was a very constructive meeting, key priorities for the Foster Carers present were for the Council to:

- Address the complexity and processes in relation to payment arrangements both in relation to the software and the administrative processes in the fostering service.
- Address the issues caused by Egress
- Recognise the achievements of foster carers through an annual celebration event.

Further meetings will take place on a bi-monthly basis to track progress.

4) Proposed response to the Scrutiny Committee Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Agreed/ Not Agreed/ Partially Agreed	Cabinet Response
1	That the foster carer allowance and fees review separately recognises foster carer's skills, experience and to reward them for their time.	Agreed	<p>A review of foster carer allowances and fees is underway with a range of potential options are being considered. These are based on analysis of what is being offered in other local authorities with detailed modelling.</p> <p>Our proposal needs to be fully sustainable and represent value for money whilst ensuring that we provide an offer that can meet the needs of our children in care as well as retaining our skilled and highly valued existing foster carers. Foster Carers will be consulted on the details.</p> <p>Any additional investment will need to be freed up through savings or budget reductions realised through the medium-term financial plans.</p>

2	The Council to work with Devon's District and City Council partners to explore a reduction/ exemption/ or discount to Council Tax and access to leisure facilities for fostering households.	Partially Agreed	<p>The Council fully agrees with the principle, further detailed work needs to be undertaken and engagement with our partners.</p> <p>Again, any additional cost incurred will need to be met through savings or budget reductions realised through the medium-term financial plans.</p>
3	The Council continues to commit to the Mockingbird programme and funds additional constellations in the 2025/26 Budget.	Partially Agreed	<p>The Council continues to be committed to the on-going success of the existing Mockingbird constellations.</p> <p>Currently there are no plans to expand beyond the 5 existing constellations. The intention is to consolidate these constellations and to consider the learning for the wider service in the context of the Government's wider reforms of children's social care.</p>
4	The Council shows it values the work of foster carers and re-instates an annual celebration event thanking foster carers for their service.	Agreed	<p>We have already begun to seek feedback from Foster Carers to find out how they would like us to involve them in celebrations to thank them for their vital hard work.</p> <p>The Council already includes foster families in its celebration events for our care experienced children.</p>
5	To improve the Council's current offer to foster carers:		
5a	Ensuring access to a device (laptop or tablet) as part of the offer, to support and enable foster carers to carry out their role effectively, and efficiently.	Not Agreed	The review of allowances will consider the cost of the use of personal devices by foster carers as part of the offer to foster carers rather than the Council directly providing and supporting separate personal devices for this purpose.

5b	The Council makes improvements to address the current challenges posed to foster carers by the use of Egress or gives foster carers access to a corporate email address.	Partially Agreed	Foster Carer representatives were advised at a meeting held on 13 th December 2024 that the use Egress for emails for foster carers would no longer be required. This change will be implemented during January 2025.As part of this, additional measures are being put in place to ensure data is protected. This change means that the recommendation to provide foster carers with a corporate email address is not required.
5c	As part of the Council's digital offer, develop or procure a 'Foster Carer portal' system.	Agreed	This requirement is included in the specification for the replacement of the current children's social care system. Current processes and access to information for foster carers are currently being reviewed to support this improvement ahead of these changes being implemented
5d	The Council explores improvements to the payments and expenses process with a longer-term view to develop or procure a digital solution for foster carers expenses and payments.	Agreed	The requirement is included in the specification for the replacement of the current children's social care system including a digital link to the replacement finance system.
6	Explore improvements in working practices within the fostering service to allow social workers to spend time working with families and young people.	Agreed	The National Minimum Standards for Fostering sets out the responsibilities of social workers in the Fostering Service. Arrangements will be reviewed to ensure that all the standards are met across the service. Fostering services: national minimum standards - GOV.UK
7	Review the terms, conditions, and package available to permanent staff to ensure equitable salaries, benefits, and retention payments	Partially Agreed	All Social Workers within Children's Social Care receive the same basic level of pay and terms and conditions. However, following a benchmarking exercise, an additional set of recruitment and retention payments were introduced

			<p>in October 2021 to particular staff groups, to help fill the high number of vacancies that were being experienced in these specific teams assessed to be hard to recruit into.</p> <p>A review is currently being undertaken by the People & Culture directorate, and recommendations will be considered jointly with Children & Young Peoples Futures' (CYPF) Leadership Team regarding recruitment and retention payments, including whether the teams in receipt of it should be extended based on their permanent staffing levels.</p>
8	<p>Review the equity of the policy of paying the £90 per annum Social Work England registration fee to some social workers and not others with the view of implementing a fair policy to all social workers.</p>	Not Agreed	<p>The only employees in Devon County Council (DCC) who can currently claim reimbursement for the £90 Social Work England registration fees are those in CYPF's who are in receipt of the Recruitment & Retention allowance, as specified in point 7 in this table. Other Social Care staff, in both Integrated Adult Social Care and CYPF's, in addition to numerous other staff across all directorates, fund their professional registration fees themselves. Extending the pool of staff who could have their professional registrations paid, wider than solely those in receipt of the Recruitment & Retention Allowance, would have considerable financial implications for DCC.</p>
9	<p>The Council ensures the widespread and best use of the range of resources connected to CoramBAAF (About us CoramBAAF)</p>	Agreed	<p>CoramBAAF produces a range of information for fostering services, practice guidance and forms for recording the different aspects of a foster carer's journey including assessment and review forms and requires licences to be held. The fostering service already has licences and makes use of the standard assessment form.</p>

10	The Council commits the necessary resources to ensure that the 'Snapshot' (a tool used to manage foster carer allocations and vacancies) is up to date, regularly reviewed and used effectively.	Agreed	Since the Task Group undertook their information gathering in relation to foster carer allocations and vacancies, the Fostering Service and the Case Management System team have prioritised work to improve the accuracy of the information held in relation to foster carers to develop reports that will ensure up-to-date records of each foster carer. The requirement for records of foster carer allocations and vacancies has been included in the specification for the replacement children's social care system.

Julian Wooster

Interim Director of Children and Young People's Futures

Electoral Division

All

Councillor Andrew Leadbetter

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Background Paper: Fostering Task Group Report to Children's Scrutiny Committee

Date: 11 November 2024

File Reference: [LDS/24/37](#)

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