



28 July 2022

REPORT TITLE:	FOSTERING UPLIFT PAYMENTS SCHEDULE
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF SERVICE PERMANENCE AND FOSTERING

REPORT SUMMARY

This report proposes an uplift of payments made to fostering households in Wirral to support foster carers combat the cost of living rise. This increase in payments will also help with the retention of foster carers within wirral. The uplift equates to 4 payments of £150 during the current financial year (2022/23) for each of the 298 fostering households which equates to £178,000 in costs to the local authority. During this time, a review will take place of skills payments to foster carers to support recruitment and retention as well as the increase in skill sets of foster carers who will be able to care for children with higher levels of complex behaviour and who have suffered trauma history.

Wirral Council foster carers live across the borough therefore encompassing all wards within the Council. This is not a key decision.

This uplift supports the objectives of the Wirral Plan specifically, Brighter Futures and Inclusive Economy.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Director of Children, Families and Education is recommended to agree an uplift for fostering households of £150 per three-month period for 12 months, at a total cost of £178,000.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To support in-house foster carers during this time of increased cost of living expenses when caring for children who are looked after by the Local Authority. By providing this additional financial support to carers, this will assist in retaining foster carers whom, without extra support, may seek to foster for Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) who pay higher allowances to foster carers. Wirral children placed with IFA's often cost the Council more than double the in-house fostering rates. This will also support our recruitment of new carers who will be made aware of the additional support the Council is providing.
- 1.2 Fostering skills banding payments will be reviewed to ensure foster carers have a fair deal, and incentives to continue in the profession and work with a variety of children, some of whom have very complex needs.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 To take no action, this would risk many carers giving up fostering as they are no longer able to afford the costs incurred, meaning children would have to be found new placements, which would have a detrimental impact upon their emotional wellbeing. Foster carers may decide to move and foster for an IFA and for the children placed with them the Council would be forced to pay on average of more, in excess of £500 per week per child placed to the IFA. This would be a significant cost to the Council budgets.
- 2.2 To uplift all foster carers skills banding payments without a review, a thorough review of carers skills bandings requires significant consideration and resources to undertake. This is likely to take a number of months and should also include consultation and engagement with carers which requires planning.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Without realistic payments for foster carers set against an inflation rate currently at 10% (June 2022) then foster carers will struggle to meet basic living costs in caring for Children Looked After.
- 3.2 Foster carers in Wirral are paid substantially less than their statistical neighbours and most other Local Authorities in the UK. There has not been an uplift in these payments for 10 years, apart from the basic fostering allowance which is uplifted via the Government setting the rate, and this has been way behind the inflation rate this year (2%).
- 3.3 As of 30th June 2022, there were 298 mainstream and connected Fostering Households. In total, these households support 58% of children looked after in Wirral.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 If agreed, the uplift to fostering payments will be provided by money set aside from children's services reserves.

Uplift Payments to Fostering Households to combat the cost of living rise and to retain foster carers within Wirral. This equates to £150 x 4 during the next 12 months, beginning in July 2022, at a total cost of £600 per fostering household this year (July 2022-July 2023). 298 fostering households equates to £178,000 in costs to the Local Authority.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The monitoring of the Fostering Service is required under the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Fostering Service Regulations 2011.
- 5.2 The local authority also has a duty to provide sufficiency of care options to children looked after, and as part of their sufficiency strategy local authorities must ensure they have adequate numbers of foster placements as laid down in the Care Standards Act 2000.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no direct resource implications arising out of the report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The risks in not supporting foster carers financially equate to foster carers leaving the profession or not being recruited in the first place.
- 7.2 Wirral would not be meeting its statutory responsibility to provide sufficiency of placements were this to happen
- 7.3 The cost of placing children in alternative accommodation are much higher (average Independent Fostering Agency cost is approximately £950 per week, and residential children's home is £4500 per week).

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Proposals to support foster carers were discussed at the recent Children's Committee held on the 21st June 2022 although the specific plan outlined in this paper was not proposed for ratification at committee.
- 8.2 There have been various recent consultations with finance partners to consider the feasibility of this plan and it has been agreed by finance partners.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to ensure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. The uplift is payable to all Wirral Council fostering households.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report. However, the fostering service recently took part in a tree planting event near Birkenhead aimed at supporting foster carer recruitment/awareness as well as supporting improvements in the local environment and climate change.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no community wealth implications arising out of the report.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Fostering Annual Report 2021/22

Appendix B Statement of Purpose Fostering 2022

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Fostering allowances 2022-2023

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children Young People Education Committee	21.06.2022