

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE CABINET</b>
<b>Date:</b>	26 January 2022
<b>Executive Member/Reporting Officer:</b>	Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader Tony Decrop, Assistant Director of Children's Services
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>FOSTER CARER OFFER CONSULTATION REPORT</b>
<b>Report Summary:</b>	This report provides an update on the outcome of the Foster carer offer public consultation.
<b>Recommendations:</b>	That Executive Cabinet be recommended to agree: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) That the proposals for the foster carer offer from the report agreed at Executive Cabinet on the 28 July 2021 are approved as the Final offer taking into account consultation comments and affordability.</li> <li>(ii) The Equality Impact assessment is noted and the implementation delivery plan agreed.</li> <li>(iii) The cost in the current year is financed from the central contingency and future years included in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).</li> </ul>
<b>Corporate Plan:</b>	The review of the Foster Carer offer is in line with the corporate plan in terms of ensuring that children who become cared for after are able to remain in Tameside with Tameside foster carers. Children therefore continue to be a part of their own communities despite not living within their birth families. This offer will have direct impact on reducing the number of children placed externally and outside of the borough.
<b>Policy Implications:</b>	In line with Policy and Financial Framework
<b>Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer &amp; Chief Finance Officer)</b>	<p>The report of the 28 July 2021 set out the basis of consultation for this report.</p> <p>The financial implications outlined in the July report, that an estimated increase in budget of £686k to for the foster care element and £476k for the impact of Special Guardianship carer's (SGO). This would be an increase of £1.162m.</p> <p>Budget has been set aside in the council MTFP for this which creates a pressure that would need to be mitigated by other cost savings should members approve this report.</p> <p>It is estimated point where the cost becomes cost neutral would be once we had created additional foster care placements of 5, expected to be 2 IFA's and 3 residential placements conversion. The service expects this to be achieved alongside other placement reductions by 2023/24.</p> <p>Each carer and SGO would need to be assessed for the relevant skills levels before progressing through the levels for increased payments. It is recommended that once the assessment has taken place, that budget is awarded on an actual basis.</p>

## **Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)**

All foster carers receive an allowance for each child they foster. The amount depends on the age of the child, and is paid per day or per week depending how long the child is in the care of a foster family.

The basic allowance is to cover food, clothing, pocket money, a contribution towards housing costs such as household bills and other expenses associated with day-to-day living. Foster carers also receive set allowances to cover "additional costs" such as caring for a child over Christmas or another significant religious festival and the child's birthday.

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2002 provide for payment of an allowance to foster carers. Standard 28 provides:

- Each foster carer receives at least the national minimum allowance for the child, and any necessary agreed expenses for the care, education and reasonable leisure interests of the child, including insurance, holidays, birthdays, school trips, religious festivals etc., which cover the full cost of caring for each child placed with her/him.
- Payments of allowances and any fees paid are made promptly at the agreed time and foster carers are provided with a statement of payment at the end of each tax year.
- Allowances and any fees paid are reviewed annually and the fostering service consults with foster carers in advance of any change to the allowance and fee.
- The fostering service advises foster carers of financial and other support that is available to foster carers where a child remains with them after they reach the age of 18 or where they care for/provide a home for a child and their parent(s).
- There is a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments and distinguishes between the allowance paid and any fee paid. The policy includes policy on payment of allowances and any fee during a break in placement or should the fostering household be subject to an allegation.
- The written policy and the current level of payments are provided annually to each foster carer and commissioners of the service. The foster carer receives clear information about the allowances and expenses payable, and how to access them, before a child is placed.

The power to prescribe minimum allowances for foster carers through Regulations was included in Section 49 of the Children Act 2004. The national minimum allowance was first introduced in the DFE guidance: The National Minimum Fostering Allowance and Fostering Payment Systems: Good Practice Guidance 2006. The national minimum allowance is reviewed annually.

There is also case law which sets out how cases should be considered in relation to payments and the service is undertaking a further assessment to ensure that all carers are receiving the correct payments.

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 at Regulation 17 provide that a fostering service provider must 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.

Details of the feedback from the consultation are included in this report. That feedback needs to be carefully considered by the decision makers in order for the process to be both fair and robust. It would help if the report could summaries the initial changes which were proposed to the council's policy and any further changes which are now proposed after taking the feedback into consideration.

The report needs to be clear as to the base line and how success will be measured and monitored both in terms of improvements to children's lives and monetary efficiency and effectiveness.

**Risk Management:**

This is covered with the report

**Background Information:**

<b>Appendix 1</b>	Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Form
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Foster Carer Offer Marketing Plan Overview
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Foster Care Offer Overview
<b>Appendix 4</b>	Cabinet report 28.07.2021

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report author Glen Perryman, Fostering Service Unit Manager.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In house (Local Authority run) foster care is widely recognised to provide the best option for the majority of children who require care from their Local Authority. It enables children to remain local to their family, friends, home community and services such as schools and health and represents by far the best value for money, at significantly less than half the cost per placement when compared to independent (private) fostering providers.
- Unfortunately over recent years we have not given our own fostering service the attention that is required in order to grow its size or maintain or improve its performance and as a result the proportion of our cared for children who are placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) has grown disproportionately and is now at close to 50%.
- The ambition of this investment proposal, which sits alongside an ambitious three year recruitment strategy, is to make it more attractive to become an in-house foster carer for Tameside Council and once here to stay, helping to ensure that children are able to be placed with local foster carers wherever possible by initially stabilising our current fostering cohort and then seeking to expand. Enabling children to continue to attend local schools and have contact with their families and friends (where appropriate).
- It should be noted that to do nothing, would most likely lead to further reductions in capacity and an increased reliance on IFAs, children being more often placed out of Borough and the associated increased costs of both.
- It has to be recognised though that we are operating in an increasingly difficult context in terms of recruiting and retaining foster carers, as Local Authorities and IFAs compete for a largely finite resource of individuals who wish to foster against a nationally increasing number of children who require these placements. Foster carers recruited and retained locally though offers the opportunity for our Tameside children to stay in Tameside in a family home, and can be uniquely attractive to local carers – “local carers for local children” and for every placement made saves the Local Authority from £490 per week (compared to average Independent Fostering Agency Fees).
- To enable this we need to make the offer from the Local Authority as attractive as possible.
- Whilst we recognise that we cannot compete like for like with independent fostering agencies in terms of fees paid, we can place ourselves in a better position by having comparative rates when compared to other Local Authorities and to compete with IFAs for those families who want to foster locally but for whom the difference in rates currently makes it unaffordable. The proposal is to increase fees to a level of the higher median for Greater Manchester.
- The ambition is to eventually realign our figures from a roughly 50/50 split figures to the optimum provision of 85% in-house fostering placement capacity.
- As previously stated though this is an extremely competitive market with many competing players, so whilst our ambition for growth as detailed at section 3.4 onwards may seem cautious, growing our capacity by the end of 2025/26 with a minimum carers of 57 and high estimate of 73, this is in reality a stretched and challenging target, set against a total net growth in placements across the 10 GM LAs in the past year of 7 placements.
- It is worth noting though, that we are moving from a relatively low base of in house carers as previously detailed, so this does give some headroom in terms of attracting local carers/prospective carers to a revitalised and dynamic fostering agency with their own LA, which may not previously have appeared as attractive a proposition when compared with an IFA.

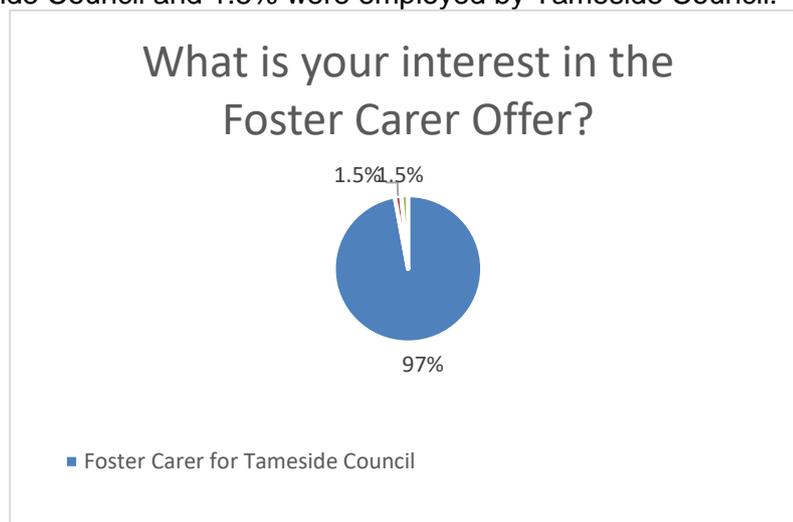
- This report proposes a financial uplift in level 2 skills payments of £30 per week per child will shift Tameside into the top half of GM median entry level skill payments to approved foster carers and to Increase Level 3 skill payments by 10% (£15 per week per child). This will also apply to our existing foster carers giving a much better chance of retaining those carers we currently have while increasing our recruitment rates.
- The estimated costs of this uplift alongside a number of other improvements foster carers have told us would make us a more attractive recruiter means the proposed investment for the revised fostering offer is £686k.
- As detailed in the finance section the scheme will break even at the point that 27 additional placements are made with in house carers as opposed to IFAs, projected to be in the year 2023/24.
- The investment will be tracked, then formally reviewed and reported on at 3, 6 and 12 month intervals to assess whether the investment is delivering the improvements and increases we had expected.  
The review points will be
  - March 2022
  - June 2022
  - December 2022
- The wider offer of a 24 hour support line and additional training and support sits in parallel with this financial package to support improved recruitment and retention.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report should be read in conjunction with the Executive Cabinet Report dated 28 July 2021 which is included at **Appendix 4**.
- 1.2 Following Executive Cabinet agreement to the proposed recommendations to improve the foster carer offer, it was agreed a Full Public consultation would take place with an updated Equality Impact Assessment. The consultation looked to seek feedback on the recommendations of the improved offer to Tameside Foster Carers.
- 1.3 The consultation was hosted on the Tameside's Big Conversation website with a link to a Survey Monkey Questionnaire. The consultation was promoted through Tameside Council's Social Media channels, the website, staff portal and other communication methods.
- 1.4 We also undertook a targeted consultation piece with existing Tameside Foster Carers, who are identified as being directly impacted by the implementation of a new foster carer offer. Alongside the survey monkey for foster carers to complete the service undertook three focus groups that were facilitated by the Policy, Performance and Intelligence Team with support from the fostering service to ensure that it was non biased and had independence.
- 1.5 The consultation was promoted with foster carers through the fostering service newsletter and weekly reminders via emails.
- 1.6 The consultation ran for 8 weeks from 2 August 2021 and 28 September 2021. We decided not to run the consultation period immediately after Executive Cabinet, as we wished to avoid the school holidays, to ensure that everyone had the opportunity to attend any arranged Focus Groups.
- 1.7 The focus groups took place on the 8 September, 14 September and 24 September 2021.

## 2. CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 2.1 The survey monkey went live on 2 August 2021 and closed on the 28 September 2021. To make the survey as simple and accessible to all, there were three questions to cover the three main areas of the proposed recommendations to improve the foster carer offer. The areas were identified as:
- Foster care payments & reward
  - Training and development offer
  - Support offer for foster carers
- 2.2 There were 69 responses in total from the survey. The below graph shows that 97% of respondents were foster carers for Tameside Council, 1.5 % were interested in becoming a foster carer for Tameside Council and 1.5% were employed by Tameside Council.



- 2.3 Three focus group sessions took place over Zoom and all Tameside Council foster carers were invited to attend. The sessions took place on the following dates:
- Focus Group 1 took place on 08/09/21 with 8 households in attendance
  - Focus Group 2 took place on 14/09/21 with 5 households in attendance
  - Focus Group 3 took place on 24/09/21 with 1 household in attendance
- 2.4 The focus groups were promoted by regular correspondence with foster carers via newsletters, emails and asking the fostering service staff to promote it through regular interactions with the foster carers.
- 2.5 The focus groups were not as well attended as expected, and the number of households in attendance were only around 5% of the total number of approved fostering households.
- 2.6 Overall 86 Tameside Fostering households engaged with the consultation, that's 49% of the total number of approved fostering households.

### **3. CONSULTATION RESPONSE – PAY AND REWARD**

- 3.1 The first question on the survey asked for comments and opinions on the proposals relating to Pay & Reward of Foster Carers in Tameside. The following responses were provided:
- 28% of respondents feel positive about the overall plans regarding payment & reward;
  - 20% of respondents felt that it is fair to align the payments for connected and mainstream carers;
  - 10% said that all foster carers should receive the same payment & reward, regardless of experience or foster carer type
  - 10% felt that the proposals still are not enough to attract new foster carers;
  - 10% commented that there were no incentives in the proposals for Level 4 carers
- 3.2 The foster carers in attendance at the three focus groups gave the following responses to the discussion on payment and reward element of the new proposed offer:
- Foster carers felt that the proposal to uplift basic levels of pay is welcome. This was said to be an essential (referring to uplift level 2, align connected carers and recruited carers etc.)
  - Some carers commented on the lack of further incentives for Level 4 carers.
  - The start-up grant was said to be vital. Some reasons given were that some reported personal experience of difficulty when a new child was placed with them.
  - It was felt that the proposal of a referral fee when one foster carer recommends Tameside to someone who later becomes a carer – there were concerns that this creates too much of a monetary focus on the decision to foster.
  - In contrast, referral fee was seen as an incentive by some as it helps to attract other people who would make good foster carers to undertake the role. It was cited that independent agencies often offer £500.
  - It was said that the £30 uplift would not make Tameside competitive with IFAs. Suggestion that in order to tackle it properly, Tameside should be offering higher fees closer to that of IFAs. Other comments in the chat by others echoed this sentiment.
  - There was a consensus that the revised offer is a positive move in the right direction, however still a way to go with some of the existing issues mentioned.
- 3.3 The survey results and focus group comments show that a significant proportion of carers feel positive about the proposals, with many commenting that it is a step in the right direction to align the allowances for mainstream & connected carers. However, some feel that there is more to be done in equalising payments across the board, regardless of experience or foster care type and also becoming more competitive with IFA's. Carers who feel that the proposals will help with foster carer recruitment (5%) made some positive comments. However, in addition to those listed above some suggestions were made of the following;

they feel bridging payments should be made available to foster carers between placements (8%) and that foster carers should be entitled to paid holidays (3%).

- 3.4 Overall, 53% of the total survey responses were positive comments regarding the proposals. While there were some respondents that disagreed with the referral fee proposal all other comments focused on further suggestions rather than disagreeing with the other proposals made. This shows that overall, foster carers feel that the plans are a step in the right direction (and though some feel that there is further work to be done to build upon these) they are welcomed in the main.
- 3.5 In response to the to the comment that there was no incentive to Level 4 approved foster carers, it was explained that we would have ideally liked to uplift all skills level payments, however we needed to focus on the entry levels initially to enable us to grow the number of new carers. Level 4 foster carers in Tameside receive a competitive allowance in comparison to the other GM Local Authorities. We are committed to continue to review allowances annually.
- 3.6 Some comments suggested that the uplift would still not be enough to challenge the Independent Fostering Agency Sector. During discussions it was explained that Tameside Fostering services would not be able to increase allowances to directly compete with IFA's as we don't have the resources to do this and it would not be sustainable. We advised that the uplift to skills level 1 and 2 would make us more competitive in GM and that we would be able to market this to attract and grow the foster carer community.

#### **4. CONSULTATION RESPONSE – TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

- 4.1 The second question on the survey asked for comments and opinions on the proposals relating to training and development of foster carers in Tameside. The following responses were provided:
- 55% of respondents believe the training proposals sound positive and will benefit them as a foster carer;
  - 23% of respondents feel that they are already happy with the current training provided and feel that it meets my needs as a carer already
- 4.2 The foster carers in attendance at the three focus groups gave the following responses to the discussion on training and development of foster carers foster carers element of the new proposed offer:
- There was a general feeling that the organisation of training had improved although some participants would rather face-to-face training where you have the opportunity in coffee breaks to network with other foster carers, something that has proved difficult with virtual training. It was felt that a lot can be learned from each other.
  - Other suggestions for training included – having a portal showing all training, payslips etc. in one place, as well as the idea of suggesting new types of training.
  - It was said that the Steering Group was an important move – this would be an easy way for foster carers to work together like a professional team.
  - One participant noted that the attachment training they had recently been on had been the best training received in the last 20 years (not just related to fostering).
  - Overall the proposals on training and development were welcomed and were seen as positive for foster carers.
- 4.3 It is very positive to see that the majority of foster carers are either happy with the new proposals, or feel that they already receive adequate training. While there has been much ongoing development in the training offer for foster carers throughout the pandemic, the proposals will bring a much enhanced & varied offer to foster carers built on the strong foundations already in place.

- 4.4 While acknowledging that the plans are welcomed, some other comments regarding training and development including carers wanting more specific detail on the proposals (3%) and carers requesting more accredited courses to be included as part of the offer (3%) and also that training should be offered outside of school hours for better accessibility (3%).
- 4.5 In response to the comments from carers regarding to face to face training, the fostering service are looking at how some training in 2022 can return to face to face in safe and secure way. The training programme will be a hybrid approach of both face-to-face and virtual training via Zoom to make it as accessible for all approved foster carers. Foster carers will continue to shape and develop the training programme as part of the new foster carer offer and will be invited to working groups.
- 4.6 Work is being undertaken to look at how we can have a foster carer portal as part of the website. This would act as a space that foster carers could access securely to book on training, access any online maternal, submit mileage and expenses.

## **5. CONSULTATION RESPONSE – SUPPORT TO FOSTER CARERS**

- 5.1 The third question on the survey asked for comments and opinions on the proposals relating to improving the level of support to foster carers in Tameside. The following responses were provided:
- 58% of respondents believe that the new proposals sound positive and will support them in their role as a foster carer;
  - 15% of respondents are pleased with the proposals as long as they are supported with proper implementation
- 5.2 The foster carers in attendance at the three focus groups gave the following responses to the discussion on to improving the level of support to foster carers foster carers element of the new proposed offer:
- Regarding the proposals to establish a foster carer forum, it was said that having the experience and input of other foster carers is important, not just from social workers
  - The move to having a first port of call for foster carers was welcomed
  - Practice standards will create among foster carers a better idea of what standards can be expected of social workers, which is positive. At the moment there is some inconsistency depending on the social worker.
  - Other comments reflected that all the proposals in this section were positive. Participants were hopeful that the support offer to bring up standards for children's social care as opposed to the fostering side of things.
  - It was felt by some that the Forum should be independently chaired.
  - A question was raised regarding if there is any work to take place regarding retention of social workers, citing difficulties with children having multiple changes of social worker.
- 5.3 To summarise the response to the support proposals, it is good to see that they were welcomed by the majority of foster carers, with many positive comments made. Some further suggestions were made including the provision of Respite support (3%) and a plan for the retention of social workers (6%) to allow for better continuity for children. Overall, foster carers felt that the support plans were a step in the right direction and were happy with the proposals made.
- 5.4 Consideration to an independent chair for the foster care forum is a good idea, and this is something that will be explored as part of the new offer during the implementation stage.
- 5.5 We have updated foster carers on the Local Authorities plans in respect to recruitment and retention of social workers within children services.

## **6. CONSULTATION RESPONSE – ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

- 6.1 In the survey we asked for any additional comment in relation to the improved offer for Tameside foster carers. The following responses were received:
- 67% of respondents feel that the proposals are positive and will support them in their role as a foster carer;
  - 8% commented that a foster carer handbook is much needed and will be welcomed by foster carers
- 6.2 In the three focus groups we asked for any additional comment in relation to the improved offer for Tameside foster carers. The following responses were received:
- Participants said that the proposed offer is a positive start, not the endpoint of doing better but moving in the right direction for children in Tameside.
  - Further comments suggested the possibility of foster carers having a 2-week break in between placements. Some expressed the need for this over having a referral fee introduced.
- 6.3 The results show that the majority (67%) of the responses regarding the overall proposals are that carers feel positive about the foster carer offer. Other comments that were made about the proposals overall were that matching and referrals should be done so carers are not without placement for long periods (8%) and that more flexibility around holidays for foster carers should be considered (8%).
- 6.4 The foster carer handbook has now been launched and the feedback from our foster carer community has been positive.
- 6.5 Consideration was given at the time of the review of the foster carer offer to consider paid break in-between placements. It was decided not to proceed with this recommendation and that individual requests would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

## **7. MARKETING AND RETENTION ACTIVITY – NEW FOSTER CARER OFFER**

- 7.1 Following the consultation process we have reviewed the Recruitment and Marketing Strategy and set out how we will market the new offer following its approval.
- 7.2 We currently have 102 mainstream fostering households looking after 155 children in foster care but we do not have enough in-house foster carers to meet the demand of children requiring foster care. The ratio of foster placements to foster carer households currently stands at around 1:5
- 7.3 We need to recruit another 70-80 foster carers over the next 3 years (while retaining our existing carers) to achieve net growth & enable us to place more children with in house Tameside Foster Carers and remain in their local area. We also need to consider losses of carer households due to retirement, resignation etc.
- 7.4 To principal aims & objectives of the marketing plan are to raise awareness for the new Foster Carer Offer within Tameside and also to position Tameside Council Fostering Service as the fostering service/agency of choice to local people. To break down the aims into clear marketing objectives;
- 7.5 Campaign Objectives
- To raise awareness for the new Foster Carer Offer within Tameside;
  - To clearly highlight the benefits of fostering for Tameside Council;
  - To position Tameside Council Fostering Service as the fostering service/agency of choice to local people.

- 7.6 Tactical Objectives
- To increase the number of fostering households within the fostering service;
  - To achieve net growth in fostering households year on year.
- 7.7 The below details techniques that are currently being utilised to recruit new foster carers and have been in place over the previous year. These are helping to work towards growing the foster carer network but much more support is needed through the foster carer offer to achieve net growth. However, particularly the retention techniques have been proving successful in foster carer satisfaction with many feeling better supported in their roles.
- 7.8 The below outlines the existing foster carer recruitment activities that are taking place;
- Constant digital campaign across Google and Facebook;
  - Fostering Campaigns e.g. Foster Care Fortnight – radio, local & regional press, MEN etc.;
  - Working with other Local Authorities;
  - Tameside Council Social Media;
  - Virtual drop in events;
  - Retargeted CRM mailers;
- 7.9 While the above have been successful in generating enquiries, the current offer to potential foster carers is a big obstacle in converting these enquiries into approvals. Particular challenges include; Independent Fostering Agencies offering higher financial rewards, the perception of lack of support from the Local Authority/ negative preconceptions of historic LA offering; single applicants not able to foster due to finances, fear of the unknown, financial implications on families to name a few.
- 7.10 The below is the methods utilised to ensure that whilst recruiting new foster carers there is a real aim and focus on the retention of our foster current carers. The following have been undertaken:
- Fortnightly newsletters;
  - Training & Support;
  - Support groups;
  - SSW's;
  - Buddy system;
  - Foster Carer Handbook;
  - SMS comms;
  - Celebration event;
  - Seasonal Gifting & engagement e.g. Christmas video.
- 7.11 The above techniques have been in place over the past 12 months and have helped to progress in making carers feel supported, valued and appreciated. However, with limited resources these efforts can only go so far. The full training, development and support plan as detailed in the foster carer offer aims to ensure that these plans can really form substance, and develop a full and consistent approach to foster carer retention. This will help in gaining the trust of foster carers and showing them that they are professionals whom the service value and want to develop in their roles.
- 7.12 Our strategy aims to be inclusive, so we are talking to all Tameside residents over the age of 21, with a spare bedroom and the desire to help local children.
- 7.13 We also want to ensure our messages resonate with the following groups: carers for siblings, single applicants, carers for teenagers, BAME applicants, disabled applicants, applicants under the age of 50, LGBTQI+ applicants, home based workers.
- 7.14 Some of the barriers to fostering need to be addressed in key messaging, in order to reach the right people, with the right message at the right time. Key messaging helps to dispel these

barriers, responding directly to key questions raised by potential enquirers:

Barrier	Key Messaging
<p>Awareness &amp; Consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wasn't aware that Tameside were in such need of foster carers</li> <li>• I had never considered fostering but I think I would be good at it</li> <li>• I would love to help local children but I don't know much about fostering</li> </ul>	<p>Awareness &amp; Consideration</p> <p>Tameside Council are in urgent need of foster carers for children and young people 0-18, sibling groups, children with additional needs</p>
<p>Legacy &amp; preconceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have heard negative things about Tameside Fostering Service in the past</li> <li>• How have things changed?</li> <li>• Is the support different now?</li> </ul>	<p>Legacy &amp; preconceptions</p> <p>Tameside Council's new foster carer offer is an unprecedented investment in the service to improve the offering to foster carers</p> <p>A new &amp; improved service offering to support carers</p>
<p>Eligibility</p> <p>Can I foster?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If I work</li> <li>• If I am single</li> <li>• If I have children</li> <li>• If I rent my home</li> <li>• Etc...</li> </ul> <p>Do I have the right skills and experience?</p> <p>How does fostering work with my family, job, current commitments etc.?</p>	<p>Eligibility</p> <p>You can foster regardless of age, marital status, religion, sexuality, employment status, whether or not you are a homeowner etc...</p> <p>(Breaking down common myths to fostering)</p> <p>You can foster whether or not...</p> <p>Over 21, spare room...</p>
<p>Support &amp; Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will I be supported?</li> <li>• What training is on offer?</li> <li>• How do I progress as a foster carer?</li> <li>• Is this something I could do as a career?</li> </ul>	<p>Support &amp; Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training &amp; development programme</li> <li>• Access to FIWs</li> <li>• Dedicated SSW</li> <li>• Clinical support</li> <li>• Psychological support</li> <li>• Educational support/virtual school</li> <li>• Foster Carer Advice line 24hr</li> <li>• Support groups</li> <li>• Training opportunities e.g. skills to foster, IHVs.</li> <li>• Quarterly Meetings</li> <li>• Career Development</li> </ul>
<p>Allowances &amp; Reward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can I afford to foster?</li> <li>• Will the allowances equate to my current salary if I give up work?</li> </ul>	<p>Allowances &amp; Reward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uplifted base allowances</li> <li>• Expenses</li> <li>• Celebration Events</li> <li>• Max Card</li> <li>• Seasonal incentives; events, gifting etc.</li> </ul>

7.15 The marketing plan has been developed to encompass digital, event-led and relationship-led marketing that focuses on reaching the right people, with the right message, at the right time. It is crucial that an omni-channel approach is utilised to reach key audiences appropriately. The ways in which we will market to the different audiences include: retargeting previous enquiries, and ongoing digital campaign, foster carer recommendation & retention, recruitment events and member/partner engagement.

- 7.16 An ongoing omni-channel Marketing Campaign will help to reintroduce the Fostering Service as a competitive choice for local people. Some key channels include:
- Facebook Lead Generation;
  - Google Ads;
  - Outdoor Advertising/ Out of Home digital Sites;
  - Spotify Advertising;
  - Paid Advertorials e.g. MEN article;
  - Radio Advertising e.g. Tameside Radio (ads and regular slot) and BBC Radio Manchester;
  - Local Press e.g. Tameside Reporter;
  - Recruitment Events w/ fostering branded merchandise;
- 7.17 We will retarget previous enquirers with various marketing techniques. Some of the reasons enquiries do not progress include:
- Increased allowances offered by Private Fostering Agencies
  - Financial implication
  - Common fostering myths e.g. being too old/young, renting home etc.
  - Fear of the unknown
  - Lack of knowledge of support on offer
- 7.18 Some of the ways we can retarget include: CRM personalised mailers, SMS with link to new offer brochure, inviting previous enquirers to info events.
- 7.19 It's really important that we utilise Council members, partners and existing foster carers to advocate for the new foster carer offer and push out key messages. Some ways we will do this will include:
- Foster Carer Comms on referral scheme/including training session;
  - Referral Cards for all cares, staff and elected members
  - Foster Carer Event Support including Packs with branded merchandise & banners/info packs etc;
  - Information sessions held for all to brief on the new foster carer offer;
  - Information packs distributed to all: printed & digital.
  - Partner leaflet drops in local areas
- 7.20 We will continue to prioritise retention of our existing foster carer community with the new offer to ensure that they play a key part in growing the internal fostering service. The tried and tested methods listed below will continue to be used, whilst we also look at the implementation of more through the new foster carer offer.
- Newsletters
  - Celebration Events
  - Foster Carer Association as part of the new offer
  - Fostering Committee meetings with Senior Leadership Team
  - Support & Development
  - Seasonal Events and Gifts
  - Involvement in training developments and pathways
  - Cared For Children's Events
- 7.21 As part of the marketing strategy there will be both face-to-face and virtual event planned throughout 2022. The plans are to include information drop-in sessions every fortnight, where new enquirers will be invited along with previous enquirers. These will run alongside in-person community events to take place every fortnight (staggered with virtual so there is an event every other week), drop-ins at Costas, local cafes, Active Tameside, Foodie Friday, etc. here will be merchandise with fostering brand & carers, SSW's and Marketing & Recruitment Office to be present at events. This will involve the introduction of an event for carers & SSW's to book on to.

- 7.22 Engaging partners and members will be key to the implementation and marketing of the offer, and will help key messages to reach a wide audience. Some ways in which this will be done is to provide each member/partner with recruitment packs specially created (both digital & printed) for to hand out to potential enquirers in their wards. Packs will contain information leaflets, business cards and recommendation cards to be given out. We will also provide information sessions will be held for all partners and members to brief them on the new improved foster carer offer.
- 7.23 The new foster carer, this will be an opportunity to specifically target foster carers from independent fostering agencies (IFA) who care for our children to consider transferring and fostering for the Local Authority.
- 7.24 The new offer provides a range of support services for carers and a chance to develop through our new training pathway. As part of the permanence strategy, we will be holding 'permanence planning meetings' prior to children being matched long term to foster carers. Where children are placed with IFA carers, we will be providing those carers with information on our new offer (see appendices) so they consider fostering for Tameside and a potential transfer. We will also asking those carers to consider Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) where it's appropriate for children to have full legal permanence.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 The response to the consultation was on the whole positive and that the majority of those who responded stated that they were in agreement to the proposed recommendations and could see the benefit of the new offer to them and new carers.
- 8.2 All participants felt that the improved offer would enhance the support that foster care's received and enhance them in their role as foster carers. The feedback was that they felt that the offer would support them remaining as foster carers for Tameside.
- 8.3 Its acknowledged from the consultation that the financial uplift to skills level 2 and 3 was positive, some responses stated that this did still not go far enough to attract new foster carers and suggest that the Local Authority increase the uplift further to compete directly with the private sector. We have explained to participants that this was a viable option for us and did not have the financial resources to achieve this.
- 8.4 There were responses that stated there no incentive for those carers who had already achieved level 4 status. We have considered the responses from those carers who are level 4 carers, and although we would have liked to uplift all skills levels, we are not able to do this currently. The carers who are skill level 4 receive a competitive allowance in comparison to our GM neighbours and some compete directly with IFA competitors. We will review all allowances annually as set out in the recommendations.
- 8.5 The foster carers who have participated in the consultation feel that the new improved offer is a 'good start' but there is still some further work to be completed. We hope that the implementation of the new offer will ensure that that existing foster carers feel valued and provides them with enhanced support and training opportunities to meet the needs of Tameside cared for children.
- 8.6 We have outlined an ambitious marketing strategy for the implementation of the new offer. Its important that we get our message out far and wide to attract people to become foster carers for the Local Authority. There will be a mix of both virtual and face-to-face events, alongside a very heavy digital presence through social media channels that have proved successful during the past 12 months.

8.7 We have considered all of the responses from the survey and the focus groups. On the basis that the respondents have stated that they feel the new offer and its recommendation will benefit from the new offer, we propose that the recommendations agreed in the Cabinet report dated the 28 July 2021 (**Appendix 4 refers**) are those recommended to Cabinet as the final proposals following the consultation with no changes at this time.

## 9. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 As set out at the front of the report.