

Report to:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	28 July 2021
Executive Member:	Cllr Bill Fairfoull - Deputy Executive Leader (Children's)
Reporting Officer:	Tracy Morris - Assistant Director Children's
Subject:	FOSTER CARER OFFER
Report Summary:	<p>This report provides a summary of the finding and details of all the recommendations of a recent review of our Foster Carer Offer that was a commissioned piece of work as part of the 7 Looked after Children sustainability projects.</p> <p>This covering report provides an over view of this review and the internal service review and response to its recommendations and proposals to take forward.</p> <p>Not all recommendations that have been made in the review are accepted fully by the service and the overview report seeks to provide a rationale as to why.</p> <p>There are clear proposals for implementation and there are costs to consider and agree attached to some of these proposals. The overview report provides the details of these costs.</p>
Recommendations:	<p>That Executive Cabinet be recommended to agree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) That the proposals for the foster carer offer are approved for consultation as set out in the report. (ii) That prior to any final decision being made as to the Foster Care Offer an implementation delivery plan will be presented to Cabinet together with the consultation feedback and an equality impact assessment. (iii) The cost in the current year is financed from the central contingency provision.
Corporate Plan:	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.
Policy Implications:	Following completion of recommendations one and two above, relevant policies and associated procedures will require updating as appropriate in line with the final decisions made by Cabinet.
Financial Implications:	The financial impact of the recommended increase in fostering allowances is in two parts.
(Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	<p>First, the allowances, support and training that will be provided an additional £686,072 based on current numbers.</p> <p>This is in the context of more expensive other forms of care provision. The average cost for each type of placement is shown below, which demonstrates, that even with the increased cost per</p>

placement, the internal foster care provision is still the most cost effective option currently open to us.

Placement Type	Average Full Year Cost per child £
Revised Internal Foster Care payments	18,554
Current Average cost of IFA	44,030
Current Average cost of Residential	237,728

In order to cover the increased costs of in house fostering allowances a transfer of 27 children from the Independent Fostering Agencies into in-house fostering care would cover the increased costs represented in this proposal, or 3 children from residential care into in-house fostering at the average cost.

Secondly, there will also be a corresponding increase in payments to Special Guardianship Order (Special Guardianship) carers as a result of the Councils non-detriment policy, for foster carers who convert to Special Guardianship carer's. This is estimated to be £475,800. Therefore the total cost of this initiative is £1,161,872. The cost in the current year is recommended to be financed from the central contingency provision. A full breakdown of costs can be found in section 7.

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, plus 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.

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. A number of the proposals advise that there are no direct costs arising from the proposal although this needs to be considered in light of the fact that there are existing infrastructure costs and the intention is that it will be managed within existing budget. That said these should also be benchmarked to be able to demonstrate value for money.

Finally Members need to carefully consider the details set out in this report including the outcomes from the consultation to ensure that the proposals provide the necessary support and provisions for our foster carers to ensure a sustainable and consistent fostering service that also represents good value for the Council in these challenging times. Whilst the heads of paragraphs 3.4 to 3.6 inclusive set out what we intend to deliver there needs to be clear deliverables and timelines and how this will deliver value for money and demonstrate how this money will deliver better outcomes rather than staying the same for more cost. Before making a final decision on any Policy changes Members must be sighted on an equality impact assessment and this can be undertaken during the consultation process.

Risk Management:

Clearly, there is a risk that any private foster agency or other local authority will use the new proposed offer to review their own offer.

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Tracy Morris, Assistant Director of Children's:



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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 grown 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 £555 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 complete 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 cautions, growing our capacity by the end of 2024 by circa 31/38 placements, 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 £686,072.
- 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 6, 12 and 18 month intervals to assess whether the investment is delivering the improvements and increases we had expected.
The review points will be
 - December 2021
 - 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 Tameside's Looked After Children's 7 Sustainability Projects were developed as a response to the following challenges.
- i. Reduce the need for local authority care. This will be done by strengthening prevention work and improving children's progress through care. Families require more practical support earlier to prevent cases from escalating
 - ii. Stabilise the existing LAC cohort. We currently have too many expensive placements and too many that are placed out of borough. We can stabilise placements by ensuring there is appropriate support and respite provision for both families on the Edge of Care and fostering placements nearing placement breakdown. This will include therapeutic support and support for families so that children can remain with them safely.
- 1.2 An independent review was commissioned in 2020 as part of the 7 Looked after Children sustainability projects and it has sought to build a better understanding of how Tameside local authority internal fostering services, can effectively improve its fostering offering and encourage, attract and retain increasing numbers of high quality foster carers in order to keep pace with demand for placements.
- 1.3 This report provides an overview of the final report of the review on the offer to foster carers approved by Tameside MBC. The fostering offer relates to the package of allowances, reward, training and support that foster carers receive.
- 1.4 The fostering national minimum standards, together with regulations on the placement of children in foster care, such as the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services. They apply to local authority fostering services, independent fostering agencies and voluntary organisations providing fostering services under the Children's Act 1989.
- 1.5 They are minimum standards rather than best possible practices. They focus on achievable outcomes for children. The fostering service providers and Ofsted should use them to secure positive welfare, health and education outcomes for children and young people as well as reducing risks to their welfare and safety.
- 1.6 The DfE expects local authorities to place children as near to home as possible and they are expected, as far as reasonably practicable, to:
- "secure sufficient accommodation within the local authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area" (the sufficiency duty)."*
- 1.7 This review has been a detailed and thorough review of the current offer and how this compares to other Local Authorities in GM and the North West. It has also compared the offer against the private market in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's).
- 1.8 The project officer has also undertaken consultation with current foster carers so their views have been fully considered and taken seriously in this review.
- 1.9 Following the completion of the review a draft report was provided and this was considered by the Assistant Director, Head of Service and Service Unit Manager for Fostering in order to consider findings and recommendations. At this meeting the recommendations hadn't had the financial calculations.

- 1.10 The full review report makes a number of recommendations for next steps to be taken forward by the service. These have now been reviewed internally and proposals in what the service agrees needs to be implemented are detailed in this overview report for consideration and approval.
- 1.11 The review of the Foster Carer offer is a very detailed report that reflects information gained from broad consultation with individuals, groups and organisations who have generously contributed to the review. It makes findings and draws conclusions, following submissions from those with both personal and professional experiences of fostering.
- 1.12 It is not the intention to repeat the detail of the full review in this overview report but it is intended to present key information in terms of what needs to change in the offer so we are able to grow an internal resource of not just increasing numbers of foster carers, but also developing the skills of foster carers to promote placement stability for some of the more complex children and young people.

2. WHY TAMESIDE NEEDS TO IMPROVE IT'S OFFER TO FOSTER CARERS

- 2.1 There is a national shortage of foster carers and this situation is reflected regionally across Greater Manchester, including in Tameside.
- 2.2 The Greater Manchester Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2022 contains the wider context of Greater Manchester's ambition for children, young people and their families. It also includes a commitment to review:

“placement sufficiency across Greater Manchester to capture the varied needs of looked after children alongside the current offer of placements and the requirements of placements in the future” and to “develop a Greater Manchester Commissioning Plan and Sufficiency Strategy to ensure children coming into care are provided with a quality placement which meets their needs, ensuring permanence is achieved at the earliest stage.”

- 2.3 Between 31 March 2016 and 31 March 2020 the national number of mainstream LA fostering households decreased by 14.3%, while the number of mainstream IFA households increased by 4.7%. If this trend continued at the same year-on-year average percentage change, **IFAs will have more mainstream fostering households than LAs, by around 2026/27**
- 2.4 Recent data has been provided and has evidenced that Tameside have placed 43 children with IFA carers within our own borders. Tameside use of IFA's is the second highest in GM and there is a pressing need to improve the balance of availability of internal placement options at local level. The cost of an IFA placement to the local authority, is significantly higher (circa 50%) than a local authority approved foster placement cost (not taking into account Council infrastructure costs so not directly comparable).
- 2.2 The average weekly fee paid to an IFA for an individual placement made by Tameside in 2019/20 was £811.00.
- 2.3 The cost of a Tameside in-house foster care placement (with Level 2 payment uplift of £30 per child per week) would range from: £262 per week for a 0-1 year old child - £328 per week for a 16-18 year old young person. This is an average weekly placement cost of £286.80 for a placement with an in-house foster carer.
- 2.4 Considering the number of IFA and in-house placements for 2019/20, which were: **110 in house placements vs. 106 IFA placements** (a 51%/49% split). The average weekly placement costs for 2019/20 were as follows; (please note these are based on average costs only):

- 110 (51%) in-house placements based on current Level 2 at an average weekly cost of £256.80 = **£28,248 placements cost per week on average**
- 106 (49%) IFA placements on average £811 per week = **£85,966 placements cost per week on average**
- **Cost per week = total of £114,214 placements cost per week on average**

2.5 The ambition is to realign these figures to the optimum provision of 85% in-house fostering placement capacity. However the net recruitment growth ambition outlined in section 3.18 would provide give a 73%, 27% by the end of 2024/25 split between in-house and IFA respectively, the finances would show the following;

Numbers	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	%
In House	110	110	135	172.5	242.5	292.5	73%
IFA's	106	106	106	106	106	106	27%
	216	216	241	278.5	348.5	398.5	100%

NB Growth assumptions that the 2019/20 baseline holds for 2020/21

Setting aside the projected growth, if the mix of carers was able to be shifted towards internal provision 73% the using the 2019/20 figures the costs would be as follows

- 157 (73%) in-house placements on average Level 2 (uplifted) at a weekly cost of £286 = **£45k placements cost per week**
- 59 (27%) IFA placements based on previous year average costs = **£47,849 placements cost per week**
- **Total of £92,876 placements cost per week on average**

2.6 There is potential for cost avoidance in the region of roughly £21k per week on IFA placement fees, if the service were to achieve the 73%, or and greater if we were able to deliver the 85% foster care provision outlined in the fostering marketing and recruitment strategy. These objectives are underpinned by a new foster carer offer that encourages new carers into the role and ultimately supports the conversion of enquiries. It is therefore imperative that the financial offering to new carers is realigned and sits within the higher median for GMCA, in order to achieve 70-80 carers over the next 4 years.

2.7 There is a myth that private provider means better quality provision but this isn't necessarily the case if we get the support model right. There are a number of recommendations and proposals that are at no additional cost and are within our gift to implement but to really enhance the offer those other recommendations with some cost are really critical

2.8 There are too many children currently living in external children's homes because there wasn't a foster placement available for them, or because they have made progress in the home but there is not a foster family available for them to 'step down' too. Some of these children are very young to be in residential care and it is not the right environment for most coming into care from a family into a children's home. Average weekly costs for an external residential home is £237,728 per year based on 2020/21 figures. Therefore, we would only need to prevent three children entering this type of provision (whole year costs) for this to cover the costs of these proposals.

2.9 Additional to the cost issue, one of our corporate parenting priorities is about permanence, stability and security. This is more achievable within a family and that outlined within our permanence strategy as a priority.

2.10 This offer and proposals are about growing an internal resource and therefore the measure of success will actually be increases being required year on year, however, the other measure of success will be a reduction in spend on the external placement budget.

- 2.11 The projection for placement sufficiency of internal fostering is challenging with many constant variables making it difficult to predict accurate provisions for a given time, with fluctuation in placement supply and demand. However, projections will be made based on latest data, which will be reviewed throughout the year in line with the changing nature of the demand.
- 2.12 A report by Fostering Futures in conjunction with The Fostering Network^[1] suggests that 85% internal foster placement availability produces the optimum benefits from a mixed economy of provision.
- 2.13 Taking into account the previous year figures for Cared for Children in Tameside 2019/20^[2], out of the total 216 mainstream foster care placements, 110 are local authority recruited foster care placements, while 106 are private external fostering placements. This gives a percentage split of:
- 51% of placements provided by Local Authority
 - 49% of placements provided by IFAs
- 2.14 In order to reach the 85% benchmark for optimum internal foster carer provision, the current split of 110 in house placements and 106 IFA placements needs to be realigned by around 34% in favour of in house provision. This equates to in house provision for around 184 placements, based on us seeing similar trends of children coming into foster care.
- 2.15 Based on current figures, Tameside mainstream foster carers have the capacity to look after on average 2.3 children. Therefore, projections have been made based on the assumption that foster carer capacity is for 2.3 children in placement, meaning that the target of 70-80 new carers could potentially provide 161-184 placements for children, dependent on successful matching.
- 2.16 It's important that we also ensure retention of existing foster carers, however it's inevitable that there will be some level of deregistration's of existing foster carers through retirement and Special Guardianship. As mentioned, it's anticipated as part of sufficiency planning that over next three financial years, there needs to increase in the region of 70-80 new carers.

3. IMPACT OF NEW FOSTER CARER OFFER

- 3.1 The proposed new foster carer offer will shape, support influence the growth of the internal fostering service to provide fostering households for Tameside Cared for Children. The proposed offer is crucial to enable the service to deliver on the 3 year recruitment strategy that was presented at Childrens senior leadership team in January 2021.
- 3.2 Through a variety of marketing, recruitment & retention techniques, the aim is to support and grow our network of valued carers in Tameside. The number of cared for children in Tameside has been on an upward trajectory, so the need for high quality in-house foster carers is crucial. This approach includes the retention of existing foster carers, through implementation of the improvements to the foster carer offer, in addition to working closely with carers to listen to their views and consider them when building and implementing the strategy.

*Based on today's foster carer figures – this is dynamic and under constant review.

^[1] Source: Fostering Futures: Impower in consultation with the Fostering Network on behalf of DfE 2013

^[2] Source: Tameside Performance and Intelligence Service data. Provided for the report, November 2020

Tactical objectives;

- To increase in-house placement sufficiency in Tameside by 34%* over the next four years
- To retain existing foster carers and through support and training, enable them to take on more challenging placements;
- To implement the Marketing Plan for FY21/22 which has the primary aim of delivering the first steps towards the 34% increase target for foster carers (**plan to be updated each FY in line with optimisation approach**);

Strategic objectives;

- To support & retain existing foster carers through training & incentives and ensure they feel valued in their roles;
- To build a strong fostering identity that is recognisable and resonates with our carers and young people;
- To ensure all comms are consistent & aligned to enable strength in campaign messaging
- To raise awareness & consideration for fostering in Tameside (long term).

- 3.3 Tameside mainstream foster carers currently have the capacity to look after on average 2.3 children per household. Therefore, projections have been made based on the assumption that foster carer capacity is for 2.3 children in placement, meaning that the target of 70-80 new carers being recruited across a three year plan will potentially provide 161-184 new placements for children. This projection is underpinned by careful and considerate matching to the skills and knowledge of carers meeting the needs of the children requiring a fostering placement. It's important that we also ensure retention of existing foster carers, however it's inevitable that there will be some level of deregistration's of existing foster carers through retirement and Special Guardianship. As mentioned, it's anticipated as part of sufficiency planning that over next three financial years, there needs to increase in the region of 70-80 new carers. The targets for the next four years are broken down as follows:

FY20/21

- 3.4 The aim is to retain our current co-hort of foster carers. This will not deliver the growth that was planned at the start of year. This is due to changes and movements within the service following a period of instability and also the delay in recruiting to the vacant marketing and recruitment officer post. The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted on foster carer recruitment as the service has not been able to undertake recruitment events due to government restrictions in relation to social distancing. The service has completed digital media campaign, however since the appointment to the marketing and recruitment post in September 2020, there is evidence of increased activity. The maintaining of previous year figures will allow the service to create clear and strong objectives for the coming years while the groundwork is done to create successful recruitment and retention processes.

FY22/23: 7-10 new carers

- 3.5 The steady increase in target carer numbers reflects the start of the implementation of the Fostering Recruitment Strategy and the new Foster Carer offer. This will allow us to put the plans in motion, while building a stronger network of support and incentives for our existing foster carers. This will truly be a year of trial, test and evaluation of many different marketing techniques to find the best ways to reach potential carers in Tameside. We hope that the implementation of a clear offer and of the aims and objectives of the new strategy that existing carers will be receptive, and in turn aid the growth of our fostering network through word-of-mouth recommendation and involvement in key campaigns throughout the year.

FY23/24:12-15 24-28 new carers

- 3.6 This year will be the one in which our established marketing strategy enables us to 'ramp up' our recruitment position strengthened by the evaluation of key campaigns from the previous year. With a strategy tried and tested, and established foster carer offer meaning strength in

our fostering community, we will aim to double the foster carer recruitment figures from the previous year.

FY24/25: 24-28 14-20 new carers

- 3.7 We predict in the following year a natural slowing of the recruitment of carers due to the conversion of a large number of potential applicants in the previous year. However, this gives us the opportunity to increase our efforts in reaching more of our minority carers e.g. younger carers, career carers and find innovative ways to appeal to an even wider audience.
- 3.8 Effective foster care sufficiency planning along with targeted recruitment goes hand in hand with any new offer that is established. Greater emphasis on foster carer recruitment and retention strategies and active promotion of the new local offer, are a service priority. The role of the new Marketing & Recruitment Officer will encompass both recruitment and retention by creating and implementing a clear recruitment strategy, initially for a four-year period. The retention plan will promote the new offer, while continuing to listen to feedback using online surveys and focus groups with the aim to build and grow an engaged network of foster carers.
- 3.9 A combination of incentives and recognition schemes (including and in addition to those outlined in the new offer) will bring value to the role of foster carers and will form an integral part of the retention strategy. The recruitment element will include a clear and consistent Marketing & Communications plan with a multi-channel approach, Digital Marketing Campaign and Partnership with local and national organisations, community groups, schools and places of worship. Ensuring strength in both recruitment and retention is key to longer-term recruitment goals.
- 3.10 The human cost gain to this offer is that children will remain in Tameside, not just physically but all aspects of life remain in place for them; schools, health services, family and friends. Successful corporate parenting is more achievable when the partnership have existing relationships and children are accessing our own provisions. For those children who present with a level of risk or complexity of need it is much easier to manage risk and improve outcomes when children are within our own boundaries. Local placements will ensure that cared for children will have improved support from social workers and other professionals. Placing children within Tameside be reduce travel time to visit children and their carers by social workers, respond to any difficulties or crisis in a timely manner and will enable better relationships between young people and professionals in the network of support.
- 3.11 Increasing numbers of cared for children who need good local foster placements is putting pressure on local authorities, including Tameside, who are struggling to keep pace with growing demand.
- 3.12 A renewed and attractive foster care offer is one way to support the organisational goal of increasing the numbers of mainstream and connected carers, and make Tameside a place of positive choice to become a foster carer.
- 3.13 As part of the new refreshed offer to foster carers, it is proposed that there should be a financial uplift in level 2 skills payments that will shift Tameside into the top half of GM median entry-level skill payments to approved foster carers. As started in the independent report:
- 3.14 *'Tameside carers and social workers have consistently highlighted concerns during this review that level 2 payment for skills is simply not enough reward for the job that newer carers do... [it] **does not provide any incentive to choose Tameside to become a carer**'*
- 3.15 The current allowances are proving be a challenge in recruitment when outlining the offer to potential applicants. The January 2021 digital campaign has already brought in a significant number of new enquiries, almost four times the number of the previous few months, despite not yet reaching the month end (38 enquiries as at end of January 2021).

- 3.16 Five separate enquirers have shown strong interests in wanting to foster for Tameside, but on review of finances have explained that it is not a feasible option for them within the current Level 2 skills allowances that they would receive as a new carer.
- 3.17 This demonstrates the investment into Marketing & Recruitment is proving successful at generating new enquiries, but the current financial offer is **still a barrier in converting many of them**. It should be noted that each of these applicants had a spare room and relevant experience that would make them potentially strong applicants.
- 3.18 Some other crucial components of the new offer that would help to incentivise new carers include: Providing a start-up grant for all newly approved foster carers and establishing a cash scheme for the immediate purchase of essential, urgently required child specific items when an unplanned, emergency placement has been made.
- 3.19 A fundamental part of the proposed new foster carer offer is the impact on the retention of existing foster carers. Tameside Foster carers relationship with the department is described as being fragmented due to past decisions made and a distrust in the service to deliver on improvements stated by senior leaders in the service.
- 3.20 A key aim of the Marketing & Recruitment strategy is the retention of existing foster carers. While we aim to recruit 70-80 new foster carers over the next four financial years, it is vital that we reduce deregistrations of foster carers, and the only way to do this is to put value into the role of a foster carer. This means ensuring they are adequately supported financially, practically and emotionally, whilst providing with the best levels of training available to enable them to take on more challenging placements throughout their careers as foster carers. The recommendations outlined in this report to create a new and refreshed offer to foster carers will support the Local Authorities strategy to retain our existing foster carer community whilst providing them with the support and resources required to provide better quality fostering homes for Tameside cared for children.
- 3.21 Without these much-needed changes, we risk foster carers leaving the service, some of whom are already disillusioned with the service and are relying on a strong offer to place their trust back in the service.
- 3.22 Naturally, foster carer retention has a halo effect on recruitment, which is hugely important when enticing new carers and from word-of-mouth recommendations from current foster carers. Foster carers play a key role in recruitment, whether this is involvement in a case study for a news article, engaging with applicants to discuss their fostering experiences or becoming involved in delivering training. It is imperative that they feel valued and respected as part of a team along with professionals and the offer is paramount to achieving that.
- 3.23 The proposed foster carer offer has a focus on the training and development of new and existing foster carers. The proposal sets out an investment in foster carer training to enable a comprehensive and detailed programme that upskills foster carers whilst supporting children and young people in their care. There is also a proposal for a dedicated practice manager post to lead on the training and development plan and implement this within the foster carer community.
- 3.24 Through an improved foster carer training offer, it will enable us to stretch the capabilities of existing foster carers through offering training and support to take on children with additional needs, different ages to the children they have experience caring for and those with complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. Upskilling foster carers to Skill Level 4 will provide greater sufficiency to place cared for children with internal foster carers. This would therefore reduce the need to place cared for children within and IFA and external residential placements and therefore leading to potential cost avoidance.

- 3.25 Encouraging carers to gain new skills and experiences with an achievable aim to get to skill level 4 will offer our children and young people more options, and the better chance of an in-house placement. We therefore aim to recruit flexible carers, who are open to the varying needs of children irrespective of age, and appeal to carers who have the capacity to take on sibling groups. While prospective carers will have an age group in mind, we will work with them to understand their skills and strengths, and that many children requiring care could be well matched to them despite them being slightly older/younger.
- 3.26 In September 2020, the fostering service launched an interim training programme which has been met with positive feedback from foster carers on engaging and relevant topics, content and delivery. An accompanying brochure to bring the courses to life & help them to feel engaging for foster carers. Carers have also reacted positively to the brochure and its contents.
- 3.27 A Foster Care Training and Development Task and Finish Group has been set up to oversee, monitor and track progress of the new two year training pathway. This is one of the proposed recommendations in the offer that has already been implemented. The Task and Finish Group has representation from the foster carer community, education, health and from within the fostering service. It offers both support and challenge in respect of foster carer training programme and will ensure that the delivery of the programme for April 2021 will be achieved. The group will remain in place to review the programme on a quarterly basis. This blended learning approach will further support the carer categorisation process and will enable better matching based on skills when combined with our growth aspirations. The growth in internal capacity will increase our placement options thus reducing the need to outsource. It will also improve outcomes through developing a skilled foster carer community to meet the needs of our cared for children.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 During the review the independent author carried out a range of consultation opportunities with the foster carer community as part of the review last year. This included a survey monkey that was sent out to over 160 carers. 35 completed returns (22 %) were received. There was also a cross section of 16 Tameside carers who took part in three separate group consultations. Feedback from these consultations was factored in the initial report and forms the basis of the recommendations.
- 4.2 There will be further consultation with foster carers around the outcome of this proposal subject to approval.
- 4.3 We are developing a consultation plan that will take place over 6-8 weeks. We plan to send a survey monkey out to all approved foster carers followed by two consultation events that would be held via zoom.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 An implementation plan will be developed to ensure that recommendations agreed as part of the offer as implemented in a timely manner. It is proposed that the implementation plan is presented to board within 12 weeks of the recommendations being agreed. This will ensure that recruitment and retention of foster carers can take place at pace to provide more stable and secure fostering placements for Tameside children. There are a number of recommendations that have already been implemented within the service.
- 5.2 The implementation of the revised offer to foster carers will be reviewed on an annual basis. The review will look at its success in relation to recruitment and retention of foster carers, but also to ensure cost efficiency. The review of the implementation will also consider the staffing

structure and if there is a need to consider increase in the number of fostering social workers to ensure that all foster carers receiving high levels of quality of support that is required to retain foster carers. It's estimated that each fostering assessment and approval costs the Local Authority to be approximately £8,248¹, so therefore retention of foster carers needs to be a priority and the appropriate staffing structure needs to reflect this.

- 5.3 There will be a post implementation review after 12 months (subject to approval). The success of the carer offer will have measurable quantifiable outcomes that can be reported on which will evidence 'what is working well' and what may need to be revised. If we achieve our foster carer recruitment targets, we will have to further explore caseloads to ensure they are manageable. This will be balanced against the reduction in cared for children through discharges relating to Special Guardianship Orders.

6. PROPOSALS

- 6.1 The report will detail each recommendation and the response from the service in terms of whether they are being put forward as a proposal to this board. Out of the 27 recommendations there are 16 recommendations with costs attached.
- 6.2 **Recommendation 1 – Outlines the need for all Foster Carers have an entry level of skills level 2 payments.**

Currently connected carers enter on skills level 1 at approval (Agency Decision Maker approval) and can only progress to level 2 payments once they have completed Training Support and Development Standards. Most main stream foster carers following the initial Form F assessment are assessed as reaching skills level 2 and thus start as foster carers at level 2 on entry to the fostering service. We are proposing that all foster carers both connected and mainstream following assessment have an entry level of skills level 2 on approval.

We are currently undertaking concurrent planning with regards to permanency and Special Guardianship Orders will be sought if appropriate. A recent audit of all children in connected carer placements identified that 32 out of 80 are ready for discharge, a further 40 require further work to prepare for discharge. Cases are presented to Permanence Panel where decisions are ratified and plans are put in place to discharge orders. We cannot pre-empt the court decision, however the implementation of a new permanency pathway ensures that the plans are rigorous and robust. We have invested in a dedicated team who will offer post order support. This approach places achieving legal permanence for our cared for children at the center of practice. This will have an impact in reducing our number of cared for children numbers in a safe way and most importantly we will be prioritising what is in the best interests of our children. There will also be a reduction in caseloads for Child's Social Worker, Supervising Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer, managerial oversight, etc. Although this will not reduce staffing costs, it will drive improvements in practice and support staff retention as they will have more manageable caseloads.

All foster carers will have the opportunity to progress through the skills levels regardless of how they have become foster carers.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

¹ Independent report Foster care in England - Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers's independent review of the fostering system in England with recommendations to the government about improving foster care.

The change of payment to connected carers, moving to skills payments 2 and then where appropriate onto level 3, will need to be assessed before they progress. The cost will depend upon the carer cohort, it is estimated the cost of this will be £351,964.

6.3 Recommendation 2: Increase pre - approval connected carer allowances by 25%

This recommendation is in relation to the temporary approval of a connected carer where an immediate placement is required. The assessment and approval of these arrangements are defined by Regulation 24 of the care planning, placement and review regulations 2010. They are referred to as Reg 24 foster carers. The recommendation outlines an increase in the allowances paid to carers who are in this temporary approval status but that this reduces back to the set allowance upon approval.

This recommendation was made to consider the additional costs associated with looking after a child or children in immediate circumstances.

Upon review of this recommendation it is noted the rationale behind this is understood by the service however this makes the management of payments more complicated and it is also the that this is in contradiction to the above recommendation where we are trying to equalise allowances and therefore this is not a recommendation that is accepted. All assessments of prospective carers consider financial stability and therefore there would always be an expectation that applicants can afford to look after children before they would be approved as carers.

Proposal;

Recommendation not accepted and not taken forward with the associated costs

Costs:

Not Applicable

6.4 Recommendation 3: Provide 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

As part of the review the project lead researched across Greater Manchester authorities and also Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA'S) from the external market. The findings are that at the higher level payments Tameside is competitive for those experienced carers from an allowance perspective. At the lower levels we are not as comparative and feedback from carers is that it is not an attractive offer when compared to other organisations. All local authorities and IFA's in Greater Manchester recruit from the same pool of people in the community and therefore Tameside have to be part of a competitive market.

The summary of the findings is that current allowances to level 2 Tameside foster carers is in the middle of the scale of other LA allowances but to increase this payment of £30 per week per child move us into the top median and immediately makes the payment offer more attractive to anyone looking to be a foster carer.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

The increase in costs for existing carers and those carers who will move to skills payment 2 as a result of recommendation 1 is £178,329.

6.5 Recommendation 4: Increase Level 3 skill payments by 10% (£15 per week per child)

This recommendation is for the same reasons as above.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Cost:

The increase in costs for existing carers and those carers who will move to skills payment 3 as a result of recommendation 1 is £78,214.

6.6 Recommendation 5: Provide a start-up grant for all newly approved foster carers

This recommendation is to provide a supplement payment to assist all newly approved carers in starting up. This would be a payment of £150 for the carers of 0-10 year olds and £250 for those caring for 11- 17 year olds. It would be expected that this is not to cover all costs of setting up but is a supplement for equipment.

This is common practice across other local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies and is currently a gap in Tameside.

The fostering service have provided monies for equipment but on a case by case basis. Foster carers who took part in the review did provide feedback that sometimes there was no consistency to decision making and so this recommendation really assists with having a clear position and offer.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

60 new carers (connected and mainstream) were approved in 2018/19 if they had children ages 11-17 placed with them the annual cost would be £10K

6.7 Recommendation 6: Introduce a referral fee to local approved foster carers who introduce new carers to Tameside

This recommendation is where existing approved Tameside foster carers refer a family member, friend, neighbor or work colleague to become a foster carer for Tameside. If the person they refer successfully becomes an approved foster carer following an assessment they would receive a one off payment.

This recommendation is described in the full report as a 'golden hello' however the service review of this recommendation concluded that this is more a referral fee and is in line with a lot of the IFA's, and indeed other organisations that generate business through this type of method. The review report recommends that this is a £500 amount split into 2 parts - £250 at the point of the applicant being approved at panel and £250 after 6 months of a successful first placement.

The service response to this is that splitting a payment becomes very difficult to manage and track and also whether a placement is successful or not isn't in the referrers control and therefore if it is a genuine offer to generate new business. The view of the service is that this should be a £300 one off payment at the point a referred applicant is approved following a full assessment, approval at the fostering panel and ratification of approval by Agency Decision Maker

Proposal

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

It is expected that Golden Hellos are only likely to happen on the implementation of the new foster care offer and will grow in line with the growth in new carers maximum cost expected is in 2024-25 being £3,600.

6.8 **Recommendation 7: Establish a gift voucher scheme for the immediate purchase of essential, urgently required child specific items when an unplanned, emergency placement has been made**

The report outlines that carers are sometimes placed in a position of caring for children in emergency situations. This can sometimes mean that children are moved without any notice and arrive at their placement with nothing. These occasions are usually when it is urgent and out of hours. This leaves the foster carer having to provide clothes, toys etc. but obviously will not receive their allowance for the child until the next payment date. The recommendation from the review is for us to establish a gift voucher scheme so we can provide this upon the placement of a child for items to be purchased.

The view of the service is that this becomes difficult to manage as we would need to decide on a voucher that might not suit all carers given the size and demographics of Tameside. As already noted in an above recommendation, foster carers are assessed financially and therefore there would be an expectation that they would be able to cover the costs of basics until the allowance payment was made. It is accepted that this might not be the case all of the time and where there is a larger sibling group being placed and therefore this payment should be consider but in cash rather than a gift voucher. This is for the service to manage.

The service is clear that there is a difference in unplanned and emergency placements. There should be an expectation that unplanned moves are still supported by social workers on making sure clothing etc. moves with the child.

Proposal;

Recommendation not accepted and not taken forward with the associated costs

Costs:

Not Applicable.

6.9 **Recommendation 8: Introduce a paid 5 day carer placement break for all organised LA planned placement changes over 3 months duration**

This recommendation has been made in response to feedback from foster carers where they have had placement breakdowns and then taken another placement as they have needed to continue their income from the allowances. This doesn't allow any time for reflection or recovery from what is described as a grief experienced by the carers. The recommendation is to implement a 5 day paid break for carers to allow this recovery time without the carer being without an allowance. This is detailed within the recommendation as for planned placement endings only.

The service have reviewed this and whilst the rationale is understood and noted, we are not in a position to implement this at the current time. We already have too many children in external placements and until we grow the internal resource then this is not going to allow us to deliver on the ultimate priority which is to have Tameside children with Tameside carers.

The service accepts that on a case by case basis this might be the absolute right thing to do for children and carers depending on the circumstances of the ending of the placement and we would always want to consider these however to make this part of the general offer will be at significant cost.

Proposal;

Recommendation not accepted and therefore not taken forward with the associated costs

Costs:

Not Applicable

6.10 **Recommendation 9: Review foster carer allowances and fees annually in consultation with foster carers**

This recommendation is very clear and speaks for itself however the view of the service is that the critical bit is not necessarily the consultation with foster carers but more that we are reviewing the allowances in line with rates of inflation.

This is proposed to be at budget setting times of the year and should be next be considered in Oct 2021

Proposal;

That the recommendation is noted but that the service proposal is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

Any proposed increase in allowances and fees will be quantified and reported on annually.

6.11 **Recommendation 10: Clarify and notify all foster carers of allowances, fees and grant entitlements in a refreshed Foster Carer Handbook**

This recommendation is as a result of feedback from foster carers stating that they haven't always received clear information about fees and entitlements etc.

The service accepts this recommendation. There is no associated cost and this is in the gift of the service to communicate the revised offer once agreed.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

There is no direct additional costs as a result of this recommendation.

6.12 **Recommendation 11: Introduce a foster carer out of hours telephone advice service**

A key finding from the review of the offer has been that foster carers hold an equal importance to the support they receive to that of the allowances they are paid. Some carers give this more importance and it is often the difference between carers being recruited to an IFA rather than to Tameside.

Foster carers look after cared for children 24/7 and whilst there is a children's out of hour's emergency social work service, often foster carers are looking for advice and support rather than social work intervention. It also needs to be taken into consideration that the out of hour's service is set up to cover only emergency safeguarding matters for Tameside on a rota basis.

Foster carers also need people at the end of the phone who understand fostering and the responsibility this brings as it's a specialist area and requires specialist support.

The recommendation of an out of hours fostering support line is therefore wholeheartedly accepted by the service and we would want to implement this. Other authorities who operate this model see a positive impact on placement stability as the support is instant and responsive rather than placements breaking and then the service has to react. Independent Fostering Agencies offer this as standard in their support package. The costs associated are for the standby fees as this would be managed by existing staff within the service.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

The service would look for social workers to voluntarily go onto a call out rota to provide this support which is expected would cost £20,005 per annum.

6.13 Recommendation 12: Introduce new support role of foster carer coach

This recommendation is a build on the support model to foster carers by experienced foster carers and the notion also comes from a principle of using the knowledge and experience to help strengthen the quality of foster care in Tameside as key stakeholders.

The report and recommendation outlines an idea to have 12 foster carers recruited from level 3 & 4 foster carers to become coaches/mentors to other carers and for them to be remunerated for this at a cost of £1.3K each per year (total for the year £15.6K)

The service has carefully considered this recommendation and the supporting evidence and whilst the rationale is noted, this does create an exclusivity to foster carers and the principles for the service as, outlined in this report, is to value all carers and actually be inclusive to all. The proposals of the service is for level 4 carers to act as mentors to less experienced carers and this is a model much more widely used across local authorities. This would require us working with level four carers on a new ask for them but the positive feedback from carers is that they want to be a part of helping and for us to use their talents.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is noted but that the service proposal is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

Not Applicable.

6.14 Recommendation 13: Formalise expectations & responsibilities of the current foster carer mentor and co - trainer role, with QA standards introduced

This recommendation is linked to recommendation 15 below – see comments and proposal

Proposal;

Recommendation not accepted and therefore not taken forward with the associated costs

Costs:

Not Applicable.

6.15 Recommendation 14: Establish a foster carer training and development pathway that provides universal, targeted and advanced practitioner training

In line with the support and training feedback from carers, supervising social workers and research into the offers other LA's and IFA's have in place it is critical that we have an established training offer to ensure that carers have the knowledge and skills to care for our children. It is important to build confidence and resilience in our carers in order to promote stability and good quality care for children.

6.16 The service has started to build this but this needs to be very clear in the revised offer to foster carers. The annual costs for training are in line with other authorities

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

Annual cost £20,600 per annum. Value for money needs to be achieved in the training delivery model, partnership models should be considered as part of this assessment.

6.17 Recommendation 15: Introduce the role of Fostering Development Co-ordinator

In order to deliver on the training package to foster carers it is usual for local authorities and IFA's to have a dedicated role within their organisations/services to co-ordinate this. We have reviewed the information in the report and the recommendation and the service view is we would like to expand on this role.

There is an apparent disconnect between our foster carers and the service and it is a priority for us to build relationships with carers and make them feel a part of something bigger and most importantly feel valued.

Therefore our proposal is for a Training and Engagement Officer to be a dedicated role within the service. The recommendation identifies an additional role within service at a cost, however we had already identified this as a need within service and would propose to use a vacant Social Worker post to convert this in a new role with an uplift in grade from social worker to practice manager. The role would have greater responsibilities than that of a social work post and therefore it's agreed that this post needs to be at the level of practice manager. We would need to complete job evaluation on a job description to ascertain the grade through the correct HR process.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

The services anticipates the grade of the post to be Grade I+, the service has existing budget of Grade H+, therefore the increase in budget required would be £13,360.

6.18 Recommendation 16: Introduce a Therapeutic Fostering Social Worker role

This recommendation again builds on the support offer to carers and the service accepts that this is a good offer to make to carers. However 2 therapeutic Social Workers have already been agreed as part of the 7 projects for Cared for Children sustainability and currently there are discussions with the Commissioner in the CCG about the whole offer the Cared for Children and that the 2 therapeutic SW's integrate into this model. The view of the service is that carers and supervising social workers should be able to access this service as the beneficiaries are the children that are being looked after in foster placements. Therefore the service is of the view that there are no additional costs as this isn't an additional post into the service.

Proposal:

That the recommendation is noted but that the service proposal is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

There are no further financial implications

6.19 Recommendation 17: Introduce an 'Every Carer Counts' incentive/well-being package

This recommendation is based on valuing our foster carers and therefore supporting the retention priority. The proposal is for an estimated £250 annual cost per carer (less than £5 per week) to cover costs of gym/leisure memberships, annual social events; long service award costs amongst other rewards that could be developed as part of this package. This should be available to all approved carers

The service has considered this recommendation and accept this as a good addition to the offer. However at the current time and the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has, its accepted that the use of the public funds in this way should be re-considered at a time the Council is looking to find efficiencies. This is a recommendation that the service may wish to consider in the future.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is not accepted at current time, but will be revisited during future reviews.

Costs:

Not applicable.

6.20 **Recommendation 18: Establish a Tameside Foster Carer Forum**

This recommendation is accepted by the service. Foster carers have to have a mechanism to share their views and integrate into the service that is responsible for them. The recommendation is that this is a formal arrangement with foster carer representatives and the fostering service management representatives to have a business meeting to ensure that the offer is being delivered and what the impact is for carers and ultimately children.

This is at no additional cost and is standard practice for a fostering service

The service proposes that the Training and Engagement Officer would lead on the co-ordination and management of these regular meetings

Proposal;

That the recommendation is noted but that the service proposal is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

There are no financial implications arising as a result of this recommendation

6.21 **Recommendation 19: Establish a Tameside Foster Carer Association**

This recommendation is accepted by the service as a really positive way forward to again, promote the value, importance and inclusivity of our carers. This will give carers a sense of belonging to something much bigger and the rewards of organising social events to acknowledge and celebrate the work that they do. This will be an additional way for carers to network with other carers and therefore have more informal approaches to support.

This is minimal cost in the scheme of things and the service proposes this as part of the revised offer.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

A budget of £5,000 is requested with the expectation this will fund costs of facilitation of meetings and engagement.

There is an expectation that the Foster Carers Association actively explores sponsorship opportunities in the borough where big local providers are known to support community initiatives to contribute to the cost of the running and events.

6.22 **Recommendation 20: Introduce a 'How Did We Do' annual foster carer survey**

This is at no cost as is standard practice for fostering services as our carers are our stakeholders. This will also ensure that we are measuring impact of the implementation of the revised offer and therefore reviewing value for money and delivery.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

There is no direct financial implication as a result of this recommendation.

6.23 **Recommendation 21: Establish a Tameside Fostering Training and Development Steering Group (T&DSG)**

In the lifetime of the review of the offer, this was already acknowledged in service and had already been established. This is at no additional cost and is standard practice for a fostering service.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

There is no direct financial implication as a result of this recommendation.

6.24 **Recommendation 22: Provide an integrated approved foster carer and supervising social worker induction training programme**

In the lifetime of the review of the offer, this was already acknowledged in service and had already been established. This is at no additional cost and is standard practice for a fostering service.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

There is no direct financial implication as a result of this recommendation.

6.25 **Recommendation 23: Introduce foster carer placement matching profiles and stretch targets into the annual review process**

This recommendation is outlining the need for all fostering households to have a pen picture that can be shared with children as part of the plans for them to move to the identified foster carers. This is to support introductions so that children have some information from the carers directly about where they are going to be living and what it is like before they move there. This is good practice and has been standard practice in a lot of fostering services for a number of years. The service fully accept the recommendation and are already working on this. There is no cost to this and this is about service improvement.

The annual review process is currently being reviewed in terms of process and decision making. This is for service improvement rather than part of the offer.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and for this to form part of the service improvement plan

Costs:

There is no direct financial implication as a result of this recommendation.

6.26 **Recommendation 24: Review Tameside Fostering Handbook and local fostering standards, policies and protocols**

This is accepted as required however the review of the offer needed to take place before any policies, standards and the handbook were refreshed.

The governance and decisions need to conclude on the offer before this recommendation can be actioned

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented as part of the agreed offer

Costs:

There is no direct financial implication as a result of this recommendation.

6.27 **Recommendation 25: Establish a set of supervising social worker professional practice standards that are specific to fostering**

In the lifetime of the review of the offer, this was already acknowledged in service and had already been completed. This is at no additional cost and is standard practice for a fostering service.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and is implemented as part of the revised offer

Costs:

There is no direct financial implication as a result of this recommendation.

6.28 **Recommendation 26: Establish annual supervising social workers stretch targets**

As a service we have recognised that there are improvements to be made in terms of compliance, quality of practice and development within the service. This is less about the offer to foster carers but of course if the quality of service offered is better then it is obvious that carers are going to reap the benefits of this.

We have implemented a Quality Assurance and Performance approach within the service and are of the view that this recommendation for service planning rather than the review of the offer to foster carers.

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and for this to form part of the service improvement plan

Costs:

There is no direct financial implication as a result of this recommendation.

6.29 **Recommendation 27: Introduce a 'Commitment to Practice' Statement of intent**

This recommendation relates to the foster carer agreement that carers sign as part of the offer and the foster carer handbook. This is their contract with Tameside to say that they accept the expectations and standards and that we confirm the offer to them.

This will need to be completed when the offer is agreed and final details are known. The handbook will need to be updated and launched as part of the revised offer. The agreement can then

Proposal;

That the recommendation is accepted and implemented when the offer is agreed

Costs

There is no direct financial implication as a result of this recommendation.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are a number of financial implications arising from the decisions outlined within the body of this report all are brought together in the table below for clarity. The costs have been phased over anticipated years on implementation.

7.2 The estimated costs of the revised fostering offer is £686,072. The details of the recommended changes are outlined in section 6. There is a small residual budget set aside from the 7 strands sustainability projects to support changes in fostering of £33,700 and an existing budget of £8,000 for training which would reduce the ongoing fostering costs to

£644,372. These costs are based on current fostering numbers of 200 in terms of current in house fostering capacity.

No	Recommendation	£	Type of Cost	Year 1	Year 2
1	Equalise foster carer skills payments and standards between connected and recruited carers	£351,964	Direct Cost	£234,643	£351,964
3	Provide 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	£178,329	Direct Cost	£107,936	£178,329
4	Increase Level 3 skill payments by 10% (£15 per week per child)	£78,214	Direct Cost	£43,018	£78,214
5	Provide a start-up grant for all newly approved foster carers	£15,000	Direct Cost	£15,000	£15,000
6	Introduce a referral fee to local approved foster carers who introduce new carers to Tameside	£3,600	Overhead	£3,600	£3,600
11	Introduce a foster carer out of hours telephone advice service	£20,005	Overhead	£20,005	£20,005
14	Establish a foster carer training and development pathway that provides universal, targeted and advanced practitioner training	£20,600	Overhead	£20,600	£20,600
15	Introduce the role of Fostering Development Co coordinator	£13,360	Overhead	£13,360	£13,360
19	Establish a Tameside Foster Carer Association	£5,000	Overhead	£5,000	£5,000
	Total expected cost of new offer	£686,072		£463,161	£686,072
	Existing budget to support	(£41,700)		(£41,700)	(£41,700)
		£644,372		£421,461	£644,372
	Impact on the Special Guardianship payments of Point 1, 3 and 4	£475,800	Direct Cost		£475,800
	Total Continuing costs	£1,120,172		£421,461	£1,120,172

7.3 Of the fostering costs £623,507 (£581,807 less existing budgets) are direct costs that would go to the foster carers, an average annual increase of £2,242 per child (£2092 mitigated) and £62,565 of overhead (£225 per child), these functions would be providing a better offer of support and training for foster carers that is similar to external organisation's offers.

7.4 The increased offer will also have an impact on the Special Guardianship budget, there is likely to be additional ongoing costs for existing Special Guardianship carers where a connected carer has transferred over to Special Guardianship on a skills level 1 payment. If they can demonstrate they had passed the skills assessment before transferring to Special Guardianship. It is difficult to accurately state the amount this would cost as the Special Guardianship's skills level is not easily identifiable in Softbox (the Council's social care payment system) and would require an individual manual case review for each Special Guardianship carer. An estimate of costs has therefore been made on the maximum cost to the Council, which equates to £475,800, the actual amount is likely to be less than this due to the Council's non-detriment policy that protects Special Guardianship carers so that foster carers would not end in financially worse situations as the permanency of placement of the child occurs. Consideration will need to be given as to what assessment process is needed

to award costs legitimately and appropriately, it is very unlikely every carer would qualify for an increase.

- 7.5 The proposals are aimed at making fostering a more attractive offer within Tameside so that foster carers are recruited and retained and are effectively supported. The impact of the uplift in fostering allowance results in an initial increase in the total cost of providing in-house fostering of £623,507 direct costs (£581,807 after existing budget applied) based on current numbers. However, the costs of engaging with in-house foster carers is still significantly cheaper than other forms of care provision. The average cost for each type of placement is shown below, which demonstrates, that even with the increased cost per placement, the internal foster care provision is still the most cost effective option currently open to us.

Placement Type	Average Full Year Cost per child
Revised Internal Foster Care payments	18,554.11
Current Average cost of IFA	44,029.66
Current Average cost of Residential	237,728.00

- 7.6 Whilst there are complexities involved in moving individual children between care settings. The recruitment and retention of in house foster cares will reduce the need to place in the Independent Foster Care Agency or Residential settings. In order to cover the increased costs of in house fostering allowances a transfer of 27 children from the Independent Fostering Agencies in to in house fostering care would cover the increased costs represented in this proposal, or only 3 children from residential care into in house fostering.
- 7.7 A post implementation review is recommended in the report which is fully supported. The financial implications can be revisited at the time, as this offer beds in and the growth is confirmed. There are longer term impacts of the growth, which potentially includes the number of social workers that would be needed to support increasing numbers of foster carers. This should be looked alongside the rest of the service as this proposal is providing additional sufficiency in borough and reduce the external provision.
- 7.8 It is recommended that targets are established against which to assess the impact of these changes in the recruitment and retention of in house foster carers as it forms a key part of the Children's Services Directorate's plans in reducing the overall cost of care and numbers of children in care.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 As at the front of the report.