

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Cabinet Member for Children and Families
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	20 March 2020
<b>Subject:</b>	Allowances and Skill Fees Annual Review
<b>Report from:</b>	Sarah Daly - Deputy Director of Children and Families Services
<b>Report by:</b>	Danielle Tully - Head Looked After Children Services
<b>Wards affected:</b>	All
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Full Council decision:</b>	No

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## 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Cabinet Member with an update, following a review of the allowances and skills fees for foster carers, Staying Put, Family Link and Lodgings-Plus carers; and to seek approval to implement the revised policy (which includes the scale of allowances and fees table) at Appendix 1.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member approve the revised policy (Appendix 1) with effect from 01 April 2020, and specifically note the following key changes:

**2.1.1. The proposal for Hub home carer payments under the pilot Mockingbird Programme.**

**2.1.2. The proposal to increase the Introduction Fee from £250 to £500.**

## 3. Background

- 3.1. In line with the 'National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering Services'<sup>1</sup> (NMS), the Council is required: *'to ensure each foster carer receives at least the national minimum allowance for the foster child, plus any necessary agreed expenses for the care, education and reasonable leisure interests of the child, including insurance, holidays, birthdays, school trips, and religious festivals etc., which cover the full cost of caring for each child placed with her/him'*.

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<sup>1</sup> Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, Department for Education

- 3.2. In addition, the NMS requires the Council to have a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers, which sets out the criteria for calculating payments and distinguishes between the allowance paid and any fee paid.
- 3.3. There is a statutory requirement to annually review allowances and fees and to consult with carers and inform them of any changes.
- 3.4. Developing from the Stronger Futures Excellent Care Board (now merged with the Corporate Parenting Operational Group) Portsmouth City Council has signed a contract to deliver The Fostering Network Mockingbird Programme. This is an evidenced based programme with evaluated positive outcomes including improved stability of fostering placements and strengthened relationships between foster carers, fostered children, fostering services and birth families. Mockingbird is an innovative method of delivering foster care which centres on an extended family model which is based on a constellation, with one foster home that acts as a 'hub' offering respite/sleepovers, advice, training and ongoing and emergency/crisis support to up to 10 'satellite' fostering families. The recruitment of a suitability experienced and skilled 'home hub' carer is crucial to the successful implementation and roll out of the programme within Portsmouth City Council. This is a pilot project and will be reviewed at the end of the first year. The contract to deliver the programme commenced November 2019, however the review will need to be a year following the launch of the first Hub to analysis the effectiveness and benefits of the service in June 2021.
- 3.5. In addition to having suitable skills and experience a hub home carer must have and maintain two vacant fostering beds which will be used to provide regular sleepovers for children within the constellation. In accordance with the Mockingbird principles the level of sleepovers the home hub carer facilitates will depend on the constellation, the needs of the satellite carers and the looked after children within the constellation. This will replace the need for respite arrangements with carers outside the constellation. Providing stability and 'normalisation' for the children within the constellation.
- 3.6. In line with the statutory requirement to annually review allowances and fees, a consultation on the proposals contained within this report was undertaken with carers via representation on the Mockingbird Implementation Working Group. There was unanimous agreement from carer representatives to the proposed Hub home carer payments.
- 3.7. In line with existing Cabinet Member agreement the Deputy Director of Children's Services in consultation with the S.151 officer has adjusted Standard Fostering Allowance (and any allowances which are directly related to these rates), Staying Put, Family Link and Supportive Lodgings Allowances in line with the percentage change to the relevant Government Minimum Fostering Allowance - South East effective from 01 April 2020.
- 3.8. The proposals contained within this report seek to ensure that the recruitment of foster carers, staying put carers, family link and supportive lodgings carers for Portsmouth children and young people, continues to be effectively

promoted by approving a legally compliant and competitive financial support package; ensuring Portsmouth City Council remains competitive in the market place. The full policy is attached at Appendix 1.

#### **4. Proposed Changes**

- 4.1. The key changes proposed to the Allowances and Skill Fees policy is explained in the sections below.

#### **5. Hub home carer payments**

- 5.1. Within the Mockingbird Model there is no nationally set structure for defining the payments of Hub home carers. However there is clear guidance from The Fostering Network which has been followed in drawing up PCC Mockingbird proposed payments. This includes: paying hub home carers through a combination of fostering fees and allowances when hub home carers provide respite and sleepovers; typically paying the equivalent of a services 'top tier/level' foster carer with two full time placements; paying an additional budget to cover the cost of social events and hub activities; keeping payment schemes as simple as possible and in line with the service's existing Fostering Financial Scheme.
- 5.2. In line with the above principles and guidance the proposed Mockingbird payments are linked to PCC existing Fostering Service Financial Scheme. Hub home carers will be recognised as level 3 carers and, relating this to the Financial Scheme, they will receive a Mockingbird payment which is the equivalent of two level 3 fees. This will ensure that there is no financial disincentive to skilled and experienced foster carers putting themselves forward to become 'hub home' carers.
- 5.3. In addition it is proposed that the 'hub home' carer will be paid per child at the age related nightly fostering allowance rate and level 1 fee when providing sleepovers/respite care. Satellite carers will continue to receive the fee and allowance payments relevant to their skill level during respite/sleepover periods. This is in line with existing respite payment arrangements and the principles of the Mockingbird Programme which promotes 'sleepovers' as an effective means of supporting placement stability, retention of carers and meeting a child's identified needs.
- 5.4. Hub home carers provide a 24/7 support service to the satellite carers and children within their constellation. In order to provide this level of care and support breaks are essential under the Mockingbird Programme. It is proposed to provide hub home carers 28 days paid annual leave per year. During this period hub home carers will continue to receive the Mockingbird fee payment.
- 5.5. It is proposed that £50 per week activities allowance will also be paid for hosting social events and activities and for providing ongoing and emergency support to satellite carers. It is proposed that this will continue to be paid during leave period as costs will be averaged out over the year.

- 5.6. The proposed payment scheme was presented to the Mockingbird Implementation Working Group on 10 January 2020 and was accepted as a viable payment proposal.
- 5.7. This is a pilot project and the project, and hub home carer payments, will be reviewed after a year to see if they are set at an appropriate level.

## **6. Introduction fee**

- 6.1. There is a great deal of information from research about effective recruitment of foster carers. A key message throughout is that success is often related to the use of 'word of mouth' by existing foster carers as effective recruiters.
- 6.2. To encourage and reward Portsmouth City Council foster carers who recommend Portsmouth Fostering Service to someone they know, who later become an approved foster carer, Portsmouth Fostering Service have a well-established and effective Introduction Fee scheme in place.
- 6.3. In 2019 it was identified by the Fostering Marketing and Communication Officer that our main competitors, Hampshire County Council and Southampton City Council, were paying a higher monetary reward to their foster carers who recruited a friend.
- 6.4. To remain competitive, and to ensure that Portsmouth City Council foster carers feel valued in their role as effective recruiters, Portsmouth Fostering Service has increased our Introduction Fee from £250 to £500 in line with Hampshire County Council and Southampton City Council.
- 6.5. 'Word of mouth' from existing Portsmouth City Council foster carers remains an effective recruitment tool and agreement is therefore sought to for an increased Introduction Fee.
- 6.6. In addition newly approved foster carers recommended by existing foster carers are generally better informed and supported in their introduction to the fostering task through their connection with an existing foster carer. The Introduction Fee is therefore offset by both the positive benefits of increasing the number of in-house carers and the skill base and experience of new carers recruited via 'word of mouth'

## **7. Reasons for recommendations**

- 7.1. The recommendations contained within this report, seek to ensure that the Council has a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers, which sets out the criteria for calculating payments and distinguishes between the allowance paid and any fee paid, in line with the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.
- 7.2. In addition, the proposals seek to ensure effective implementation of the Mockingbird Programme within Portsmouth City Council by establishing a clear and attractive payment package for Home hub carers that will ensure the recruitment of effective Home hub carers by appropriately recognising the

skills and experience required for the role. This is a pilot project and the payment package will be reviewed as part of the overall review of the Mockingbird Programme following implementation as per the Contract in place between PCC and The Fostering Network.

- 7.3. These proposals seek to ensure that Portsmouth City Council Fostering Service remains competitive in order to encourage maximum recruitment of new carers via 'word of mouth' among existing foster carers.

## 8. Integrated Impact Assessment

- 8.1. An integrated impact assessment is not required as the recommendations do not have a positive or negative impact on communities and safety, regeneration and culture, environment and public space or equality and diversity.

## 9. Legal implications

- 9.1. The Council is under a legal obligation to review the level of foster carer's allowances to ensure that it is in line with the Government published minimum allowances.
- 9.2. The Council also needs to consider the minimum standards published by the department of Education. These minimum standards are used by Ofsted when inspecting fostering services. Minimum standards do not mean standardisation of provision. The standards are designed to be applicable to the wide variety of different types of fostering service. They aim to enable, rather than prevent, individual providers to develop their own particular ethos and approach based on evidence that this is the most appropriate way to meet the child's needs.
- 9.3. The minimum standards should ensure that foster carers are clear on the expectations on them, and on the Council to provide support and training for them to meet those expectations. When it comes to finances standard 28 states:  
  
*"Criteria for calculating fees and allowances are applied equally to all foster carers, whether the foster carer is related to the child or unrelated, or the placement is short or long term"*
- 9.4. The aim is to achieve a situation where payments are fair and paid in a timely way and foster carers are clear about the fostering services payment structure and the payments due.
- 9.5. This report and consultation results identify that foster carers do have concerns about the payment structure. Whilst there will always be a risk of challenge to a payment structure or level, the consultation process and continued alignment with the minimum allowances the risk is minimised.
- 9.6. With regards to the Mockingbird Pilot, the report identifies support for the proposal by foster carers through consultation and the fee level's payable remain in line with minimum allowances as required.

## **10. Director of Finance's comment**

- 10.1. The Mockingbird pilot is part of the Stronger Futures 2 Strategy. This should reduce costs as more children will be able to be able to be looked after in in house foster care or potentially returned home, and it should reduce the use of Independent Fostering Agencies. The costs of the project have been built into the budget. The fostering budget already pays on average for 10 nights of respite care per child, and the level of respite offered as part of the Mockingbird Model will need to be monitored during the pilot.
- 10.2. The additional costs from the introduction fee will be met from the in house 2020/21 fostering budget.

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Signed by: Sarah Daly, Deputy Director of Children's Services

**Appendices:**

**Appendix 1 - Portsmouth City Council - Fostering, Staying Put, Family Link and Lodgings Plus Allowances (LAC) for 2020-2021**



Allowance Policy  
2020-2021.docx

**Appendix 2 - Person Specification - Mockingbird Hub Carer Role**



Person  
Specification - hub I

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
Fostering Services - National Minimum Standards, Department for Education	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards</a>
Allowances and Skill Fees Financial Modelling	Children's Finance Team

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

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Signed by: