

**Title of meeting:** Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education

**Date of meeting:** 7 December

**Subject:** Fostering Allowance - One off payment

**Report by:** Sarah Daly

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Suzy Horton, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education

**Wards affected:**

**Key decision:** Yes/No

**Full Council decision:** Yes/No

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## 1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Cabinet Member with an update on the proposal to provide a one off payment to carers in 2023/24.

## 2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Member:

2.1.1 Approves the one off payment to eligible carers as set out in this report

## 3. Background

### National Context

3.1 Nationally foster carer shortages are deepening in England with one in eight fostering households having quit, and more leaving than joining. The most recent fostering statistics (DfE) showed that in 2021-22, 5,435 mainstream fostering households deregistered compared to 4,035 that were approved to care and still active as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. Those deregistering represented 13% of all those who had been approved during 2021-22<sup>1</sup>.

3.2 This was combined with 2021-22 seeing the lowest number of applications to foster in several years, at 8,280. The number of newly approved mainstream households still active as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 was 18% lower than in 2018, while there were 4% fewer such households, and 5% fewer available places for children, than four years prior.

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<sup>1</sup> [Fostering in England 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022)

- 3.3 In its final report, published in May 2022, the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care<sup>2</sup> urged the government to recruit 9,000 more foster carers over the next three years, to tackle “an immediate and pressing shortage”.

### **Local context**

- 3.4 Portsmouth has a strong and thriving fostering community and has been able to recruit and retain foster carers consistently, and we want to continue to support this. As at 31 March 2023 , Portsmouth had 225 fostering households, with 283 (73%) children in our care living with our own fostering family households.
- 3.5 In May 2023, Ofsted completed an inspection of Portsmouth’s Children’s Services which was judged as ‘good’. The inspection included the fostering service which was highlighted as a strength. In summary, the report highlighted that children coming into care benefited from effective foster carers and stable homes<sup>3</sup>.
- 3.6 Foster carers of Portsmouth provide high quality care and support, and a review of the policy is being undertaken to ensure the remuneration levels reflects this.
- 3.7 The work was originally anticipated to be completed to take effect in the 2023/24 financial year, but the current policy is complex and changes will need to be consulted on before being brought to a future Cabinet Member Decision day for approval. A revised implementation date of 7 April 2024, to coincide with the changes to the standard allowance changes.
- 3.8 Whilst work is continuing on the review, it is proposed to make a one off payment per household in December, which will be in addition to the payments Portsmouth City Council makes per the current policy in Appendix A. This payment will be applicable to all households who meet the below criteria:
- They have been fully approved at fostering panel and includes carers for Fostering, Staying Put and Supported Lodgings
  - They have been actively caring within the last six months prior to 1 December and the plan is for them to continue.
- 3.9 We anticipate that this payment will relate to approximately 220 carers and will cost in the region of £200,000. If this one off sum is approved, it will be paid to carers before Christmas.

## **4. Reasons for recommendations**

- 4.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a rationale for the one off payment to carers in the year 2023/24 in order to reflect the value and commitment of our current foster carers, whilst the new rates are being finalised.

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<sup>2</sup> [Independent review of children's social care: final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/111111/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-final-report-2022.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [50221956 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/50221956)

**5. Integrated impact assessment**

5.1 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 of equality and diversity.

**6. Legal implications**

6.1 The law relating to this area is the covered by the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and provides that reasonable fees should be paid to foster carers in order to allow them to carry out their duties as carers. There is nothing that prevents the Council from enhancing these fees by a one off payment to help supplement their fees in order to assist carers with increases in costs of living.

6.2 It is reasonable to limit this to fully approved carers and those with children who are currently in their care. This would exclude those carers for whom payments were made under the SGO policy for a period of 2 years but for whom they are now outside of that period. This is because they are no longer considered foster carers as they are already full time SGO carers and therefore do not fall within the scope of the payments.

**7. Director of Finance's comments**

7.1 The report details the one off financial cost to the council in 2023/24, and whilst the exact figures are not yet known, information for the year suggests that any adjustments to these figures will be manageable in the budgets for this area.

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Signed by:

**Appendices:**

Appendix A

Table of Allowances and Fees 2023-2024

Allowances and Skills Fees Annual Review - see link below

<https://democracy.portsmouth.gov.uk/documents/s26638/Allowances%20and%20Skill%20Fees%20Annual%20Review.pdf>

**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:

Title of document	Location

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

.....  
Signed by Councillor Suzy Horton, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education: