



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

Date of meeting: 30 October 2024

Subject: Intensive Foster Family Bridging Care twelve month Pilot

Report by: Mark Jowett, Head of Children We Care For

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

Wards affected: All

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform the Lead Member of the proposal for a twelve month Intensive Foster Family Bridging care pilot and to seek funding approval.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Member approve the proposal as set out in the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 Nationally, there is a year on year increase in the number of children we care for¹ coupled with a national shortage of suitable homes. This shortage is hampered by high costs and private sector influence where the dominance of external providers has driven up costs. Some of these providers prioritise profits over the needs of children, resulting in mismatched placements and insufficient care.
- 3.2 The Department for Education has recognised the risk of market failure in children's care placements labelling it as "critical to likely". The government has allocated £259 million from 2022 to 2025 to increase capacity but challenges remain.²

¹ Statutorily known as Looked After Children, and also referred to as Children Looked After

² Community Care, 'Government should be required to ensure enough placements, says Children's Commissioner; January 28, 2022

4. Reasons for recommendations

Introduction

- 4.1 As part of Portsmouth's placement sufficiency strategy review, there is an identified need for children with complex backgrounds and high support needs to have a period of care with resilient, highly skilled trauma informed carers who are able to stabilise children reacting to significant trauma. Currently Portsmouth does not provide this resource and it usually results in an expensive bespoke spot purchase arrangement for a small number of our children.
- 4.2 Such care, results in vulnerable children being placed outside the city across the country away from family and networks which impacts further on their trauma, and it is a significant challenge for professionals to maintain those connections with the child and provide wraparound support.
- 4.3 In 2023/2024, seven children lived in such arrangements for a total of 44 weeks at a total cost of £435,942, an average of £9,908 per child per week. The highest cost arrangement was £17,656 and this lasted for two and a half weeks. In 2024/25 a child is currently in a bespoke arrangement costing £22,000 per week. Having reviewed the children, six would have met the criteria for the Intensive Foster Family Bridging Care. However, some of these overlapped the same time period so not all would have been able to have been supported by just one bridging home.

Proposal

- 4.4 Portsmouth Fostering Service will take the lead and work with colleagues across the service and partners including health, education, Police, to set up a twelve month pilot for short term 28-day Intensive Foster Family Bridging Care.
- 4.5 The purpose of Foster Family Bridging Care will be to provide care for 28 days (potentially more according to the child's needs) and successfully support the child's transition to a longer term home arrangement. The role and responsibilities of the foster family will be to provide a safe family base for children who have experienced disruption and trauma, culminating in their dysregulation. With the support hub they will provide trauma informed care.
- 4.6 The fostering family will be situated within the city or outskirts for children to maintain connections with family, those important to them, and access professionals and local education. The fostering family will have proven skills and experience of caring for/working with children with complex needs.
- 4.7 The fostering family will be a member of a support hub team comprising of fostering (including out of hours), the children's social worker and team, education, health (physical/mental), adolescent service, youth justice team, police and the adult family safeguarding team. The hub will work intensively together to prepare the child to move on to their next home which could be with family, another foster family or identified children's home.

- 4.8 Initial meetings have been held with most key stakeholders who are keen to support the pilot and will be part of the development work.
- 4.9 The outcomes we would want to achieve would be for:
- Children not to experience the trauma of being moved away from their hometown and community.
 - Children to begin to feel safe and develop trust with carers and support that is able to engage with them and have continuity in transitions.
 - Children to experience an environment which enables them to engage in 'normative' behaviours, build relationships, their interests, and talents.
 - Children to experience a smooth transition to the primary care they need.
- 4.10 The proposed remuneration for the fostering family will be a £1,000 per week skill fee, plus child related allowances. This amount was derived following conversations with Brighton & Hove, Gloucestershire and Hertfordshire who successfully run similar schemes. On the occasion when the home may be vacant, a 50% retainer of the skill fee (not including child related allowances) will be paid for periods when there is no child being cared for. Portsmouth City Council Payroll have sought clarity from their tax advisors who confirm that the intensive foster carer arrangement retains self-employed status, as with any other foster carers.
- 4.11 Therefore, the total cost would be £52,000 per year skill fee and approximately £14,000 for child related allowances depending on the age of the child (assuming full occupancy). The child related allowances would be paid in line with other Portsmouth foster carers.
- 4.13 In addition to the improved outcomes for children that are referenced in 4.9, the Intensive Foster Family Bridging Care pilot could make savings to the local authority. **On the assumption that the pilot had been in existence in 23/24, savings of £112,000³ would have been made.**
- 4.14 If the proposal is agreed, the Fostering Service would aim to identify an existing foster carer with the required experience and family set up. If an existing foster carer was identified, it is acknowledged that this would take a foster carer away from being able to support any other children. If the right Portsmouth foster carer is available and interested, it is anticipated that the pilot could commence in January 2025. If that did happen, grant money from the SE Fostering Hub could be used to contribute to the pilot for the remainder of the financial year (during which time the grant needs to be spent). This could reduce any financial impact of the pilot in 24/25. If an existing foster carer cannot be identified, then we would need to recruit a new foster carer who would not be assessed and approved until 01/04/25.

³ See 4.3 - £147,000 for three placements minus the Bridging Home fees and allowance £35,000 (cost of the pilot) = £112,000 (over 80 days)



5. Integrated impact assessment

5.1 An integrated impact assessment is not required.

6. Legal implications

6.1 There are not identified legal implications and nothing that would legally prevent using the funding as proposed. It will be important to make sure that the arrangements roughly follows the same line as the current foster carer provision and confirm that the additional funding is something that is specific to the high risk and intensive work required and that there is nothing within our current fostering policy that is fundamentally different.

7. Director of Finance's comments

7.1 Based on the data for the 2023/24 financial year, had the Intensive Fostering Family Bridging Home been in place, this could save around £100,000 less than having to get external provision, although this does depend on placements not overlapping, and the carer providing additional capacity to existing foster children.

7.2 The normal budget monitoring process would monitor the financial implications during the pilot and help inform the review of the pilot and how it could be funded after the pilot should it continue.

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Sarah Daly
Director – Children, Families and Education (DCS)

Appendices:

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
Intensive Foster Family Bridging Care (supplement to the Carers' Fees and Allowances Policy 2024/25)	Attached



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

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Signed by: