

North Tyneside Council

Report to Director of Children's Services

Date: 20 May 2025

Title: Foster Carer's Accredited Fee Increase

Portfolio(s): Supporting and Protecting Children		Cabinet Member: Cllr Peter Earley
Report from Service Area: Children, Young People and Learning		
Responsible Officers:	Mary Connor, Head of Safeguarding and Children's Services	Tel: (0191) 643 1454
	Jackie Ingram, Senior Manager Children in Care	
Wards affected:	All	

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Director of Children's Services to the proposed recommendation contained in paragraph 1.2 of this report.

All uplifts in the Accredited fee will take effect from 1 June 2025

1.2 Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Director of Children's Services: -

- (1) Agrees the increase to the current Accredited Foster Carers' fee as set out in paragraph 1.7 of this report;

1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty-eight days notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 17 April 2025

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report relates to the following priorities in the 2021/25 Our North Tyneside Plan:

A caring North Tyneside:

Our People will be cared for, protected and supported if they become vulnerable including if they become homeless.

We will provide great care to all who need it.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

1.5.2 The Authority has pledged to the families of children and young people of the Borough that children will only be brought into the care of the Authority after having first worked tirelessly to keep children safe within their family home. The Authority successfully delivers on this pledge and hundreds of children remain within their family home and connected to their community because of the help and support that the Authority and its partners provide to make it safe for them to do so.

1.5.3 When it is absolutely necessary for a child or young person to move from their family home to keep them safe, the Authority will try to place a child or young person in the care of someone known to them and part of their family and friends' network. Such care arrangements minimise the impact on children and young people having to leave their own home. At the current time there have been approximately 120 children helped in this way, living in approximately 56 Kinship fostering households. These are known as Kinship foster care arrangements.

1.5.4 Where the network of family and friends around a child or young person is not able to care for them, the Authority aims to secure mainstream Foster Carers – residents who provide homes to a child or young person in need of love and care. At any one time, approximately 130 children and young people for which the Authority is responsible are cared for in

Foster Care in approximately 80 fostering households. Accordingly, all of the Authority's accredited Foster Carers make an extraordinary and important contribution to the life of the community in North Tyneside.

- 1.5.5 Nationally, there are too few Foster Carers for the number of children and young people requiring care. This is also the situation locally. The Authority has faced significant challenge in recruiting sufficient numbers of Foster Carers to meet the needs of the Borough, in particular Foster Carers skilled at caring for teenagers, and Foster Carers who are skilled at caring for sibling groups. Set against this challenging need, the Authority is recruiting in a competitive marketplace where Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA'S) are also actively recruiting residents within the Borough.
- 1.5.6 Demand sadly continues to outstrip the resources available both internally and externally. A refresh of the Fostering Strategy was completed in 2022-2025 to ensure we were offering a competitive financial package of support by aligning the Authority's fostering allowances to the Governments recommended levels. This refresh also introduced a second child fee of £75 for carers to support them to care for more than one child and for each child thereafter.
- 1.5.7 Whilst the refresh as above, provided additional financial support in caring for children (the allowances are for the everyday expense of looking after a child or young person) there was no review of the current fee banding. The Authority's accredited Foster Carers are paid a fee in line with the Skills to Foster framework. All Foster Carers are set within a band linked to their demonstrated skill, experience and training which is reviewed annually, at their Foster Care Review. Below sets out the fees payable and the banding criteria within the fees for NTC carers.

1.6 Current Fostering Fees in North Tyneside 2024/2025

1.6.1 Table 1 current banding

Band Levels NTC	Authority fees	Number of carers in each banding bracket (note only paid once regardless of how many children)
Band 1 – Pre-Accredited	£0	0
Band 2 – Accredited Carer	£110.00	21 Mainstream 56 Kinship
Band 3 – Advanced Carer	£380.00	41 Mainstream
Band 4 – Specialist Carer	£550.00	17 Mainstream

Pre-Accredited Carer – This is where a child is placed under a Regulation 24 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (England) 2011. There is no fee, but carers receive a weekly fostering allowance for each child in their care.

Accredited Carer – This is the first level once approved as a Foster Carer in accordance with Regulation 27 of the Fostering Services (England) 2011. This band applies when new carers have completed the relevant skills to Foster Training and fulfilled other requirements detailed for this banding.

Advanced Carer – This applies to Foster Carers who have attended training and are assessed as having demonstrated their ability to offer care to children and young people assessed as having complex needs, including (not exclusively) UAS children, children with complex health and/or behavioural needs.

Specialist Carer – This applies to Foster Carers who have attended training and are assessed as able to demonstrate their ability to meet the needs of children and young people who may display significantly challenging behaviour or needs that might otherwise require residential child care.

1.6.2 Within the structure as highlighted above, carers, upon approval and following completion of the relevant training, receive £110 fee per week. With time, as they develop their skills and abilities, carers can progress up the banding scales, to the Specialist band, receiving £550 per week which is a significant difference to carers who are Accredited.

1.6.3 The Authority has carers on the Accredited band who have voiced their frustration about the amount of fee paid to them. The Authority has had 2 carers who have left fostering for full-time paid employment as the £110 per week fee was considered by them not to be viable. The Authority has also had enquiries where the fee is explained and then individuals have stated that they cannot pursue fostering as the level of fees on offer means that fostering is not a viable option for them, more so if they are intending to give up their notes to foster.

1.6.4 The Authority has 79 current mainstream fostering households; 14 of these have indicated they may either retire this year or decide not to take any additional children. There are currently six assessments underway for new mainstream foster carers.

1.6.5 A comparative analysis of fees has been undertaken with some local authorities in the region:

	Accredited fee/Level 2 band	Per child	Post TSDS completion
NTC	£110	No	
Durham	£188.65	Yes	Rising to £277
Stockton	£125	Yes	N/K
Newcastle	Unknown/unclear	Yes	
Middlesbrough 2 tier as they consider newly approved	£175 first child new approved £275 when progressed to level 2	£100 for subsequent child newly approved. £200 when at level 2	Some training likely to progress to level 2
Northumberland	£183.47	£91.77 for subsequent child	N/K
South Tyneside	£250	Unclear if per child	

1.6.6 The above information shows that the Authority pays the lowest band 2 fee but also, it highlights in the main that other local authorities pay per child which lessens the financial burden on foster carers in these local authority areas. Previous bench marking has been completed and if the Authority were to pay a fee per child on current fee bands, this would be an increase of £1,120,360 annually for carers with one than one child.

1.7 Proposed Fostering Fees to be paid in line with the proposal.

1.7.1 The proposal is to align the level 2 fee from £110 to £220 per week. This would bridge the gap between the Pre accredited zero payment and the Advanced banding and be more attractive when recruiting new carers as below:

		Current carer households on accredited band 2	Weekly cost	Costs if aligned to £220 weekly	Difference annually (56 weeks)
Band 2 Mainstream	21		£2,310	£4,620	£129,360
Band 2 Kinship	56		£6,160	£12,320	£344,960
Totals	77		£8,470	£16,940	£474,320

1.7.2 The Authority has needed to consider the accredited fee impact for some time. The Authority is part of the regional Foster with North East (FWNE) hub, which is now in its second year since its launch in September 2023. There has always been an ambition to consider each Local Authority's fee payments to foster carers and to consider having one fee structure, that is consistent across the region. There is some merit in having one structure as people who enquire to foster through FWNE, will not be influenced by the different financial offers.

1.7.3 However this has proven to be a challenge due to the variation that is in evidence across the region. Discussions are now taking place with the Fostering network to help the North East consider this in more detail. This work may take a further 18 months to complete meaning our £110 fee will impact further on our recruitment and retention capabilities.

1.8 Decision options:

The following decision options are available for consideration by the Director of Children's Services:

Option 1

To accept the recommendations set out in paragraph 1.2 of this report.

Option 2

Not accept the recommendations in paragraph 1.2

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.9 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

1. The Authority will remain competitive in the recruitment and retention of foster carers with other local authorities.
2. There would be reputational risk to the Authority by paying less than its competitors in neighbouring authorities and private fostering agencies.
3. There is less financial risk to the Authority by investing in the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Commented [JB1]: Do you mean to be saying this? Are you saying there will be reputational risk by paying less than our neighbours?

1.10 Appendices:

None.

1.11 Contact officers:

Mary Connor, Assistant Director Children and Safeguarding: Tel (0191) 643 1454

Jackie Ingram, Senior Manager Children in Care

Colin Strutt, Business Process manager, ASC Finance (0191) 643 7767

1.12 Background information:

The following background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author:

1. National Minimum Rates published by the Department for Education.

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

Recommendation one to endorse the proposed increase to the Accredited fostering fee has been built into the Medium Term financial Plan. Not only do these care arrangements provide the best outcomes for our children in care, they also provide best value.

2.2 Legal

The Director of Children's Services provides strategic leadership on the development and delivery of Children's and Young People's services. The Director is responsible for the delivery of the relevant Authority Policies (e.g. Foster Carers' Policy) and any relevant statutory duties as well as leading on performance, financial issues, which would include the payment of Fostering fees, such as the Fostering Strategy, and Adoption Order Allowances etc.

The Director of Children's Services was given a specific authority by Cabinet on 28 November 2022 in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning, the Director of Resources and the Assistant Chief Executive (now Head of Law) to review the Fostering Strategy and to make any amendments to the Strategy as appropriate.

In addition to the above specific authority, the Director has a General Delegation (GD6) in common with all Directors to: -

"To take decisions on behalf of the Authority on all matters where they have managerial or professional responsibilities for their service areas."

As stated above, the scope of the Director's responsibilities includes responsibility for the delivery of Children's and Young People's Services which includes foster care arrangements, and the other types of arrangements for the care of children as appropriate. The Director is also responsible for "financial issues" which would include reviewing the types of fostering fees as referred to in this report and, if considered appropriate, uplifting said fees having regard to the recruitment and retention of foster carers by the Authority.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

2.3.1 Internal Consultation

The Children and Young People Senior leadership team have been consulted and agreed with the recommendations set out in paragraph 1.2 as above. The Cabinet Member for Supporting and Protecting Children has been consulted and is in agreement with the proposal.

There has been consultation with Senior managers for Children's Social Care at the Senior Management Team who agreed with the recommendations set out in paragraph 1.2 above

2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement

Consultation with foster carers took place during the review of the Fostering Strategy in March 2022 in which the Local Authority pledged to recruit 30 additional fostering households. This was agreed by those foster carers who attended consultation meetings. Informal consultation with foster carers continues on an annual basis and the Authority seeks continuous feedback regarding their financial support and other support services during reviews, from surveys and meetings with their supervising social workers. Potential new foster carers who have indicated a wish to pursue fostering have told our officers that they are not able to leave their current employment due to the low Accredited fee they would receive from North Tyneside. Several of our current foster carers have said they intend to leave the profession due to the low fee.

2.4 Human rights

In supporting and caring for children who cannot safely live at home with their parents, the Authority is aware of the requirements placed on it under human rights legislation, that state that children should be cared for within local communities who can support their religious and cultural identity in accordance with Article 8 (a right to respect for private and family life) and Article 9 (right of thought conscience and religion) of the Human Rights Act 1998.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

The proposal ensures our most vulnerable children are provided with opportunities and sufficient means to live comfortably in foster care and kinship arrangements. This proposal will support the recruitment and retention of foster carers allowing

more children who are unable to live with birth parents to be cared for in caring foster and kinship households.

2.6 Risk management

The revised fees will support the drive to further attract, retain and develop foster carers. There is a risk that in increasing the Accredited fee paid to our kinship foster carers that we are disincentivising carers stepping forward for other types of legal order which would enable children to leave our care. There is a risk that our children in care numbers will increase on this basis. If we do not adopt this proposal there is a risk that we will be unable to recruit and retain foster carers increasing our use of Children's homes both in North Tyneside and out of borough. This carries financial risk to the Local Authority as the use of Children's homes are a more expensive option. In addition, a family-based care arrangement will, for most children and young people, provide the best outcomes in terms of education and emotional wellbeing.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications arriving from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no environment and sustainability implication arriving from this report.

PART 3 – SIGN OFF

- Interim Chief Executive

☒

- Director of Service

☒

- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)

☒

- Chief Finance Officer

☒

- Monitoring Officer

☒

- Interim of Director of
Corportate Strategy
& Customer Service

