

Appendix B

Response to the Recommendations from the Scrutiny Review – Fostering recruitment and retention

Children and Families Select Committee recommendation	Cabinet Decision (Accept/Not accept)	Action to be taken (if any) and timescale for completion
<p>1. That to further raise the profile of fostering, and to encourage more initial enquiries from potential foster carers to be made, that the Council through Foster for East Midlands Councils:</p> <p>a) looks to carry out further large scale awareness raising marketing and advertising activity in areas with high public visibility.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Foster for East Midlands Councils has been agreed further funding for 2025-2026 by the Department for Education and all four regional Local Authorities (Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, and Nottinghamshire (D2N2)).</p> <p>There is an agreed marketing campaign in place led by Derby City Council's Marketing Department and regular joint-local authority meetings take place. This campaign includes plans to build upon large scale awareness and increase the numbers of enquiries for new foster carers throughout 2025-2026. Further exploration will take place around the potential for continuation of the D2N2 Foster for East Midlands Councils initiative and financial support after April 2026.</p>
<p>b) explores the possibilities of working in partnership with other large employers to promote fostering and how these employers can be worked with to encourage and support their employees to consider becoming foster carers.</p>		<p>Two Business Breakfasts (funded by D2N2) took place in June 2025 one at Pride Park, Derby and one at Meadow Lane, Nottinghamshire to promote Foster for East Midlands Councils across businesses and organisations who identify as "fostering friendly" through the Fostering Network, as well as those who have links to the four local authorities of D2N2. Over 4,500 businesses were invited to attend. Turnout was low but as a result three businesses have linked with the Fostering Network to explore becoming Fostering Friendly with one regionally employing over 15k staff and one being a multi-national organisation with over 330k employees. There is now follow up plans of doing a virtual briefing for businesses and targeting those 4,500 contacts over the next 12 months. Further exploration is required around including our corporate parenting principals and foster carer recruitment support within future NCC tenders and contracts. Any recommendations to be presented by March 2026 to the Fostering Improvement Board.</p>

2.	<p>That to further improve the Council's payment and benefits package for foster carers, and to encourage more people for foster with the Council, that consideration should be given to:</p> <p>a) increasing the rates of the fees and allowances that are available for providing foster care.</p> <p>b) putting processes in place that enable the additional allowances (such as at birthdays and Christmas) that foster carers are entitled to be paid to automatically.</p> <p>c) the introduction of additional payments to foster carers in recognition of starting or continuing to provide this essential service.</p>	Accept	<p>The Basic Fostering Allowance for 2025-2026 has increased by the national recommendation of 3.55%. This has been across all four age categories from 0 – 18 years. The additional level payments have not increased. Future project work and exploration will take place as Nottinghamshire are part of the D2N2 Foster for East Midlands Councils and there is an aim to align foster carer payments across D2N2. Any recommendations around the level of allowances will be presented by December 2025 to the Cabinet Member for Children and Families in preparation for the new financial year 2026-2027.</p> <p>Automatic payments are now in place for foster carer allowances and overseen by the Fostering Service. Birthday allowances for children will be paid automatically 3 weeks before the child/young person's birthday. Holiday allowances will be paid automatically in June (from 2026) and festivities in December (from 2025). There is also flexibility around allowances to meet specific needs for children and young people (and foster carers). There is still admin oversight with these payments due to the system only working until the young person's 17th birthday, as well as the risk around overpayments, but this has moved from Children's Social Care to the Fostering Support Officer oversight.</p> <p>There has been previous "thank you" payments to foster carers, but nothing identified for 2025-2026 financial period. The Local Authority currently recognises continuing service with the following:</p> <p>5 years – certificate and flowers + £50 10 years – certificate and flowers + £100 15 years – certificate and flowers + £150 20 years – certificate and flowers + £200 25 years – certificate and flowers + £250</p> <p>There are no current "golden hellos". The Local Authority will reward current foster carers with £1000 for referring a friend to fostering (paid once they have been agreed at fostering panel). Further exploration is required and comparison with other local authorities will be carried out on what "worked" in their areas to see how a scheme could be designed and delivered in Nottinghamshire. To be completed by October 2025 as any increases in recognition and reward payments would have budget</p>
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			<p>impact and so would require preparation for the new financial year 2026-2027.</p> <p>Nottinghamshire County Council offers IFA carers the option to move to the local authority and remain paying at their receiving fostering allowances for the children already in their care, whilst they continue to care for the same children. There have been no IFA transfers for several years until recently where we have five IFA transfers currently in the assessment and panel process. Policy around IFA transfers to be developed, updated, and implemented by the Fostering Service as part of the Fostering Improvement Board by October 2025.</p>
	d) enabling more foster carers who currently foster with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to continue to receive the payment rates offered by their current provider (for as long as they continue to care for the same child/ren) if they become a foster carer with the Council.		
	e) how a form of pension provision for foster carers could be introduced.		Further exploration will be required around pension provision, whether this is viable and the cost / implementation of this. Any recommendations will be presented by December 2025 to the Cabinet Member for Children and Families in preparation for the new financial year 2026-2027.
	f) the possibility of providing a form of health insurance for foster carers.		Further exploration will be required around health insurance, whether this is viable and the cost / implementation of this. Any recommendations will be presented by December 2025 to the Cabinet Member for Children and Families in preparation for the new financial year 2026-2027.
3.	<p>That work should be carried out with the District and Borough Councils in Nottinghamshire to explore how foster carers could be offered:</p> <p>a) a reduction in their Council Tax liability.</p>	Accept	<p>There has been consultation with the Chief Executive of Ashfield District Council (who was representing all seven district and borough councils in Nottinghamshire) in relation to local authority foster carers having exemption from Council Tax, mirroring the offer current in place for Nottinghamshire Care Leavers. Follow up on the progression of this will take place over summer 2025 and any updates will be presented to the Fostering Improvement Board by December 2025.</p> <p>Further exploration required around this being adopted across Derby, Derbyshire and Nottingham so that it is a D2N2 agreement for all local authority foster carers as part of the D2N2 project work around fostering. Update on this status to be ready by January 2026.</p>

			<p>Nottinghamshire has approximately 50 foster carers' who reside outside of the Nottinghamshire border, these would not benefit from any Council Tax Exemption if just the seven Nottinghamshire District and Borough Councils agreed this. For this to be an equitable offer to all Nottinghamshire foster carers, an additional budget of £120,000 would be required for the Fostering Service to ensure that no Nottinghamshire foster carers have to pay Council Tax. Further exploration is required around budget pressures and cost implications (even as a temporary measure until D2N2 councils have all agreed exemption for local authority foster carers).</p> <p>Any financial implications to be presented by October 2025 in preparation for any budget pressures report required for the new financial year 2026-2027.</p>
	b) concessionary/reduced rates when accessing leisure and other council services.		<p>Further discussions and exploration will take place with the Nottinghamshire District and Borough Councils around other offers they could put in place for local authority foster carers.</p> <p>Any recommendations to be presented to the Fostering Improvement Board by March 2026.</p>
4.	That the Council's Human Resources policies and practices should be reviewed to ensure that they are fully "Fostering Friendly".	Accept	<p>Nottinghamshire County Council are producing a HR policy to better support employees who are or wish to be local authority carers (including foster carers and kinship carers) and sharing this with partner organisations to encourage their adoption of this policy approach. A draft of the revised policy is scheduled to be completed by September 2025.</p>
5.	<p>That to further improve the Council's current offer to foster carers, that consideration should be given to providing:</p> <p>a) foster carers with laptop or tablet to support and enable them to carry out their role effectively and efficiently.</p>	Accept	<p>This is supported by the Digital Development Board, ICT and Information Governance as being a solution to the increasing demands of the use of ICT as a foster carer. This will also help reduce risk around data breach and information management as secure routes of sharing information will be in place which currently are not and heighten risk around data breach.</p>

			<p>Initial set-up costs to provide similar ICT equipment that is provided to employees of County Council for the current 160 fostering households would equate to a one-off additional expense of £150,000 for the Fostering Service.</p> <p>Ongoing ICT support, replacement equipment and licensing costs would then require an annual additional budget from 2026-2027 of £30,000 for the Fostering Service.</p> <p>Further exploration of what equipment would be required, and the cost of this implementation is required. Once identified, ICT equipment would be purchased, prepared and provided to foster carers within 3 - 6 month' rolling out period, so that all foster carers were set-up by March 2026.</p>
	<p>b) foster carers access with a corporate email address.</p>		<p>A corporate NCC email address will enable foster carers to join online meetings easier, more efficiency around case recording and administration linked with being a foster carer, as well as identify them as being a 'professional' as part of the team around the child which at this present time, has been identified as an issue of concern for foster carers. The corporate email would also enable foster carers to sign up for employee benefits via Viv-Up which is currently being explored by HR as part of the fostering friendly review. Once identified, ICT equipment would be purchased, prepared and provided to foster carers within 3 - 6 month' rolling out period, so that all foster carers are set-up by March 2026.</p>
	<p>c) a 'Foster Carer portal system and/or App for use by foster carers.</p>		<p>Provision of ICT equipment would enable foster carers access to SharePoint/intranet and other applications that may be useful (including training resources). This would be at low/minimal cost as the systems already exist within the local authority.</p> <p>Further exploration around the development of a portal/app is required as this would have additional cost implications.</p> <p>Any recommendations will be presented by December 2025 to the Cabinet Member for Children and Families in preparation for the new financial year 2026-2027.</p>

6.	That the Fostering Service should host a variety of high-profile recognition events to further champion and publicise the vital role and achievements of foster carers across Nottinghamshire.		<p>Following consultation with foster carers through a survey, conference feedback and via the Fostering Liaison and Action Group (FLAG), more celebration and recognition days were requested. A Christmas Party was held in December 2024 which received positive feedback. A summer fete event took place in August 2025 as part of a celebration and recognition event for Foster Carers, followed by the planned Fostering Conference in Oct 2025 where a high-profile celebrity speaker (with life experience of fostering) will be attending, speaking and then presenting some recognition awards.</p> <p>Foster for East Midland Councils hosted two business breakfasts in June 2025 to explore working with businesses and organisations in the East Midlands to promote fostering and encourage support for employees to explore fostering opportunities.</p> <p>Further exploration around the value and impact of any high-profile recognition and celebration events to encourage retention of foster carers in Nottinghamshire will be carried out for 2026 – 2027. Continuation of regular high-profile events will require an additional annual budget for the Fostering Service.</p>
7.	That the Council engages with other local authorities who are undertaking transformation activity, and that have shown improvements around the recruitment and retention of fosters to consider any further measures or approaches that could also be used effectively in Nottinghamshire.	Accept	<p>Nottinghamshire’s fostering service are linked closely with Derby, Derbyshire and Nottingham City as part of D2N2 and sharing good practice, initiatives around retention and recruitment, and exploring better and more efficient ways of working together (including joint training, joint conferences etc.). There is an ask to the Foster for East Midlands Councils Board around further exploration of working together and objectives for 2025 – 2026 and beyond.</p> <p>This includes scoping the cost of the continuation of the Foster for East Midlands Councils project due to the removal of government funding after April 2026.</p> <p>Links have also been developed with other neighbouring East Midlands local authorities as part of listening and learning from their actions and identifying what works. Recommendation for project work and exploring ‘what works’ and learning from other local authorities is required. Any recommendations to be presented to the Fostering Improvement Board by December 2025.</p>

			<p>Although identified as a Fostering Hub (Foster for East Midlands Councils), there has been attendance and engagement with Fosterlink as a national project supporting many other hubs and local authorities across the UK around recruitment and retention of foster carers. There are further opportunities for the local authority to explore its tenders and contracts and whether requirements to promote and support the recruitment and retention of local authority foster carers could be a condition/expectation for businesses and organisations wanting to work with the local authority. Further exploration of this as an option will be required within the local authority. Initial recommendations should be presented to the Fostering Improvement Board by January 2026.</p> <p>Further exploration and consideration of any transformation activity by Nottinghamshire will be of interest and could have an impact on Derby, Derbyshire and Nottingham local authorities as part of the D2N2 Foster for East Midlands Councils.</p>
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