

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	11 th March 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Payment to Foster Carers, Adopters, Kinship Carers & Associated Costs
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/20/232
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Angela Maitland
TERMS OF REFERENCE	Remit 1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. This report seeks agreement to increase the allowances paid to foster carers, adopters, kinship carers and carers who provide supported lodgings and is also proposing a new Payment for Skills levels scheme for foster carers. It also sets out proposals to increase the fees paid to Curators-ad-litem, Reporting Officers and Panel Chairs.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 Committee is asked to approve the following:
- (i) A new Payment for Skills Levels scheme (3.1)
 - (ii) With effect from 1st April 2021 a 1.5% increase in the level of:
 - Fostering Allowance (3.2)
 - Adoption Allowance (3.3)
 - Kinship Allowance (3.4)
 - Supporting Lodgings Allowance (3.5)
 - (iii) An increase in the level of fee charged for Inter-Country Adoptions (3.6)
 - (iv) An increase in the fee paid to Independent Chairs of Adoption and Permanence/Fostering Panels (3.7)
 - (v) With effect from 1st April 2021 a 1% increase in the fees paid to Curators-ad-litem/Reporting Officers (3.8)

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Payment for Skills

- 3.1.1 Fostering over the decades has changed as society has changed. Fostering is increasingly viewed more in terms of a vocational job or career and as such it is proposed that the carers fees should reflect this. It is important to note that foster carers are self-employed and not employees of the Council. Aberdeen City Council currently pays its foster carers a fee for the services provided by foster carers. It also pays an allowance for each child placed with foster carers.

The Fostering Network for Scotland recently indicated that there was a national shortfall of circa 800 foster carers. The impact of this is keenly felt locally. In view of this and the financial costs to the local authority it is important that Aberdeen City Council's Payment for Skills scheme remains current and attractive. The current Payment for Skills scheme came into effect in 2003. This gave a clear progression path for carers who wished to enhance their knowledge and practice with a reward of higher payments. Although the scheme has undergone some minimal change it is recognised that after almost 20 years it is not meeting the needs of the service or is in line with our service development plan. Central to this is the aim to reduce the number of children placed out with the city.

- 3.1.2 At present the majority (circa 63%) of children requiring a foster placement are placed with external fostering agencies, in most cases, placed out with the Aberdeen area. Over the past year in collaboration with foster carers the Fostering Service has undertaken a review of the Payment for Skills structure. This recognised the current Payment for Skills Scheme requires to be more competitive and financially viable for carers.
- 3.1.3 It is anticipated that the revised scheme will attract individuals that have wanted to foster however were not in a financial position to stop working. It is hoped that the service will be able to recruit from different racial, economic, social and cultural backgrounds. We also recognise that fostering, in the current economic climate, will present opportunities to some who have previously not considered this option.
- 3.1.4 The service is working hard to ensure staff and carers have the skills, knowledge and understanding of the effects of trauma on children and how best to support children and young people who often display complex social and emotional behaviours through therapeutic parenting. The new proposal recognises that payments to carers should both match their level of experience and the needs of the child to achieve the best placement match and improve outcomes for children.
- 3.1.5 Foster carers provide children of Aberdeen City with a dedicated and committed service. They provide care and stability 24 hours per day, supporting many children who present complex and challenging behaviours. In addition, they actively contribute to the planning for the child's future needs. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 now permits looked after and accommodated young people to remain in their care placement up to the age of 21 years, receiving "continuing care" from the age of 16. This provision has seen an increasing number of young people remain in their foster placement beyond the age of 18 years. It has clear benefit to the individual young people, but it has a significant financial impact for Aberdeen City Council.
- 3.1.6 The benefits for the young people cannot be underestimated. It is enabling them to remain in safe, supported environments until they are ready and equipped to make the transition into independent living. It is however having an impact on the availability of foster placements given that young people can now remain for up to 3 years longer, compounding the shortage of local foster placements.
- 3.1.7 The fostering service operates in a competitive market with prospective foster carers increasingly approaching several agencies before making a definitive

approach. It is therefore important that Aberdeen City Council's fostering service remains competitive both in terms of the fee paid as well as the standard of service/support provided to its foster carers. Over the past two years six carers have moved from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) to register with Aberdeen City Council. Since doing so all have spoken favourably of the support and training they have received. The financial arrangements paid by IFA's preclude many others from considering this option. This has been a major driver in the overhaul of the current Payment for Skills structure.

- 3.1.8 A dedicated team focuses on the recruitment and assessment of carers (adopters and foster carers) to ensure the local authority is well placed to meet the needs of children who cannot be cared for by their family. A yearly Recruitment strategy is developed which incorporates nationwide annual activity such as Fostering Fortnight and Adoption Week as well as identifying local needs and having a more targeted approach. Recruitment does remain challenging; relatively high employment levels and the cost of property are factors which contribute to the level of recruitment. Additionally the recruitment undertaken by IFA's as well as the financial impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic have a bearing. The development of the service specific portal at <https://aberdeen-adopt-and-foster.mylifeportal.co.uk/home/> has also ensured another route of contact for prospective carers.
- 3.1.9 The cost of placing a child with an IFA varies from £55,000 - £85,000 per annum and these costs are significantly higher than the costs associated with placing a child on an in-house basis. It is not only the financial costs that are significant but the emotional impact to children being relocated in some cases far from their home, families and communities are also significant and it is this 'cost' which is at the core of the review of the payment for skills scheme.
- 3.1.10 One of the key recommendations of the Independent Care Review is to reduce the distance which children are placed from their home area. This is an aspiration that Aberdeen City Council are keen to achieve for the children we care for.
- 3.1.11 Currently there are 172 Aberdeen City Council children placed with IFA's. It is therefore important that the Fostering Service continues to develop its service to allow more children to be placed locally and hence it is hoped by offering a more attractive payment scheme for carers will allow us to achieve this.
- 3.1.12 As part of the review process the service looked at examples from other Local Authorities, (Aberdeenshire, Angus and Fife) as well as IFA's (National Fostering Agency, Barnardo's and SWISS). These were used as a benchmark when completing our proposal. The review took into consideration recruitment and looked at possible ways to increase carer capacity. In recognition of the financial pressures on the local authority and also a need to remain competitive it is recommended that the proposed new Payment for Skills scheme is adopted. Although there will be an increased cost, it is anticipated that there will be a 'spend to save' benefit.
- 3.1.13 Objectives of the proposed new Payment for Skills Scheme include:
- To recruit more foster carers.
 - To offer competitive rates to attract carers wishing to transfer from IFA's.

- To provide incentives to carers to provide additional placements especially to sibling groups where there is currently an acute shortage.
- To reduce the number of IFA placements.
- To reduce the number of children being placed out with the city

3.1.14 The advantages and disadvantages of the proposed new Payment for Skills scheme include:

Advantages:

- More effective matching of children's needs with carers experience, knowledge and skills.
- Additional payments for multiple placements to increase placement availability and provide more sibling placements.
- Carers who have met the requirements can move up and down the levels to reflect the care they can provide. ie, if a carer is wishing to care for a child with a low level of need they can move to level 1 or if a carer has the skills and experience to care for a child with a high level of need they could move from level 1 to level 2.
- Enhanced payments can be paid to carers if the needs of the child/ren in placement prohibits them from taking another placement. This prevents carers being disadvantaged and lessens placement breakdowns.

Disadvantages:

- Carers' payments can fluctuate and not remain constant. This will be through the carer's choice rather than dictated by the service.
- Whilst the proposed scheme has different rates based on the number of children in placement, this will be subject to assessment and registration of the carers.

3.1.15 Foster carers have been fully consulted on the new Payment for Skills Scheme. Foster carers had the opportunity to attend information sessions where the proposal was explained. There was also an opportunity for discussion and questions. Feedback forms were also made available to carers should they not want to speak openly within the meeting. Three sessions were offered on different days and times to try to get as many carers as possible to attend, including one evening session - this led to approximately 40% of our carers attending in person. Additionally Supervising Social Workers discussed the proposals within their supervision with foster carers to give them an opportunity to provide feedback.

3.1.16 Overall the carers believed that the proposal was fairer. The main area where a few carers, approximately 5% of carers, raised a concern was in relation to the proposed reduction in respite provision from 4 weeks to 2 weeks. The majority of foster carers who raised this concern voiced that whilst they understood why the service was proposing the change they also felt that there were times when additional respite was appropriate. It should be noted that although the current scheme permits carers 4 weeks respite very few of our carers use this in its entirety. Carers recognise that respite can often be confusing, unsettling and detrimental to the child.

3.1.17 Following this feedback the Fostering Service has revised the proposed respite element and have proposed that when it is assessed that a child's needs would benefit from additional respite the Independent Looked After Review can agree additional respite, up to a maximum of four weeks annually.

3.1.18 The new Payment for Skills scheme will ensure improved matching in terms of the child's needs with what the foster carer is equipped to provide. Some of the children have experienced extensive trauma which results in a higher level of need hence the intention is to consider how the child's needs can be best met and not to overwhelm the foster carer.

3.1.19 The new proposal is outlined in Table 2 (a) & 2 (b) below. For comparison the current Payment for Skills scheme is outlined in Table 1 and includes a 1.5% increase.

Table 1 – Current Payment for Skills Fees

	Number of households	2020/21 Fee(p/a)	Annual amount	2021/22 Fee(p/a) with 1.5% increase	Annual amount
Level 1	10	8,525	85,250	8,652	86,528
Level 2	38	12,786	485,868	12,977	493,156
Level 3	18	17,051	306,918	17,306	311,521
Level 4	8	21,075	168,600	21,391	171,129
ARC	2	28,627	57,254	29,056	58,112
Other	3	N/A	181,840	N/A	184,567
Total	79		1, 285,730		1,305,017

Number of households per level as of November 2020.

3.1.20 Based on the number of foster carers in Table 2 a 1.5% increase will increase spend by **£19,287**.

Table 2 (a) – Proposed Payment for Skills Fees

	1 child in placement (p/a)	2 children in placement (p/a)	3 children in placement (p/a)
Level 1	12,977	15,977	18,977
Level 2	17,306	20,306	23,306
Level 2 (Enhanced)	20,376	23,376	N/A
Level 3 (ARC)	29,056	N/A	N/A

Table 2 (b) - Proposed Payment for Skills Fees based on current provision.

	Number of carers	Annual cost per carer	Annual cost
Level 1 with 1 child	38	12,977	493,156
Level 1 with 2 children	10	15,977	159,777
Level 1 with 3 children	0	18,977	
Level 2 with 1 child	10	17,306	173,067
Level 2 with 2 children	8	20,306	162,454
Level 2 with 3 children	0	23,306	
Level 2 (enhanced) with 1 child	5	20,376	101,880
Level 2 (enhanced) with 2 children	3	23,376	70,128
Level 3 (ARC) with 1 child	2	29,056	58,112
Other	3		184,567
Total	79		1,403,145

Number of Households /placements November 2020

3.1.21 Based on the number of foster carers in Table 2 (b), the new Payment for Skills scheme represents an increase of **£98,128**.

3.1.22 In line with many other local authorities and IFA's it is proposed that in conjunction with the introduction of the new Payment for Skills scheme the respite allowance should be reduced from 4 weeks per year to 2 weeks per year. Whilst the proposal for reducing the number of 'respite' days for Foster Carers to 2 weeks it falls in line with practice across Scotland and lessens the transient experiences for children and promotes stability, predictability and continuity in their care. The proposal will help encourage Foster Carers to provide children with a greater sense of belonging and inclusion within their family, thus helping to ensure children do not experience feeling fearful or rejected. The proposal is also better aligned to our policy of encouraging Foster Carers to first look within their own family and friends' resources to normalise children's experiences when they are away from their foster home.

3.1.23 We strive to engender a culture where the child's experience, needs and preparedness are at the forefront of Foster Carers' thinking when seeking time to themselves and this is embedded at various levels, including, within the 'Skills to Foster Training', foster carer supervision and fostering support groups. As noted earlier, the Service ethos regarding Foster Carers seeking a 'short break' away from a child in their care is allied to the Independent Care Review report '**The Promise**', which contends that 'respite' foster care should not feel like a "dumping ground" when Foster Carer's feel they cannot cope. We believe 'Respite breaks' or 'short breaks' should be positive and meaningful for the child and not just the foster carer or the foster family, of which that child is a member.

3.1.25 Whilst the focus of 'short break' planning will be around the needs of the child, arrangements will be individualised and take into account issues which might impact the stability and security of the placement. However, alternative foster care provision should always be the last consideration. There is recognition that additional respite may be required where the assessment of need indicates. The current cost of respite is **£93,326 per year**; the proposed restructuring of respite provision will cost **£54,807 per year** a saving of **£38,519**.

3.1.26 Taking this into account the cost of implementing the new Payment for Skills scheme will cost **£59,609 (£98,128 – £38,519)**. In effect this represents the cost of placing one child with an Independent Fostering Agency.

3.2 Fostering Allowances

3.2.1 Aberdeen City Council pays foster carers a fostering allowance to cover the costs associated with caring for a child and a fee in recognition of the service they provide.

3.2.2 The Scottish Government have indicated during the Independent Care Review report – '**The Promise**' their intention to revisit how fostering allowances are determined including whether this should be determined on a national basis.

3.2.3 In recognition of the continuing increase in the cost-of-living Aberdeen City Council has in recent years approved year on year increases to the level of allowances/fees paid to foster carers. It is recommended that a similar approach is agreed for the coming year and that an uplift of 1.5% is made for the coming year. This reflects the increase in cost of living. The rates are payable over 56 weeks to enable the equivalent of 4 weeks allowances to be paid as holiday, Christmas/Religious festival and birthday allowances.

Table 3

	No of Children	2020/21 Rate	2020/21 Cost	2021/22 rate (with 1.5% increase)	2021/22 Cost
0 - 4	33	135.41	248,389	137.44	253,989
5- 10	8	154.24	69,099	156.55	70,134
11 - 15	22	192.01	236,556	194.89	240,104
16 -18	14	233.55	183,103	237.05	185,847
Continuing Care	4	226.75	50,792	230.15	51,553
Total (per annum)			787,940		801,628

3.2.4 Based on the number of children in a foster placement in Table 3 a 1.5% uplift represents an increase of **£13,688**. (As the number of foster carers grow the number of children receiving this allowance will also grow.)

3.3 Adoption Allowances

3.3.1 It is recommended that for the year 2021/22 adoption allowances receive an uplift of 1.5%. Adoption Allowances are paid on a 56-week basis to allow for holidays, birthdays and Christmas/religious festival celebration. Adoption

allowances are paid having considered the needs of the child and the financial circumstances of the adopters.

3.3.2 Enhancements are currently paid for 4 children reflecting the complex/life limiting needs of the children or the circumstances by which adoption could be achieved. In the latter cases this was seen as a “spend to save”, removing children from a high cost out-of-authority care placement.

3.3.3 Children placed with prospective adopters on a fostering basis receive an allowance equivalent to the adoption allowance pending the conclusion of legal proceedings. This reflects the task the prospective adopters have assumed and allows for consistency in allowances paid. There is no Payment for Skills fee in respect of adoptive or prospective adoptive parents.

3.3.4 The Adoption & Children (Scotland) Act 2007 recognised that for some children who cannot be returned home, given their life history and the secure attachments they have formed with their foster carers, adoption can be hard to achieve. It however recognised that for these children adoption still offers the most positive outcome. The 2007 Act made provision for foster carers to continue to receive their fostering fee for a period when they adopt the children they are caring for.

3.3.5 Over recent years there has been a small but noticeable increase in the number of foster carers claiming through adoption the child/children they are caring for. While these offer the best outcome for the child it requires a continuing financial commitment by the local authority to support these placements.

3.3.6 The resultant costs are detailed in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Age Group	No of Children	2020/21 Rate	2020/21 Cost	2021/22 rate (with 1.5% increase)	2021/22 Cost
0-4	8	78.46	35,150	79.64	35,678
5-10	31	97.39	169,069	98.85	171,603
11-15	23	121.21	156,118	123.03	158,462
16-18	8	159.29	70,309	159.29	71,361
Cost Before Child Benefit Deduction			430646		437,106
Less Child Benefit Deduction*			-52,736		-52,736
Total (per annum)			377,910		384,370

**The current estimates for Child Benefit Deductions are based on the latest adoption payment run for period up to 22nd January 2021.*

3.3.7 Child benefit is deducted from this allowance prior to payment in acknowledgement that adopters are eligible to claim this universal benefit .

3.3.8 Based on the number of children identified in Table 4 a 1.5% uplift represents an increase of **£6,460**.

3.3.9 Adoption is a private legal action and not something the Local Authority can be party to. The Service encourages prospective adopters to seek independent legal advice or consult with the Sheriff Clerk. Adopters can claim a Legal Expenses Allowance up to £600.00 to contribute towards the legal costs involved in adopting a child. However, due to escalating costs resulting from protracted contested adoptions, where a prospective adopter chooses to seek legal assistance to submit the adoption petition or it is anticipated the adoption will be contested, then a referral will be made to Aberdeen City Council's Legal Services who will put the individual piece of work out to tender within a 'Framework of Solicitors'.

3.3.10 Legal Services will then recommend a Solicitor based on value for money. Should the prospective adopter choose to retain the Solicitor recommended by the Council's Legal Services, then the Council will meet the associated legal costs. Should the prospective adopter choose to retain a Solicitor of their choice, then the financial assistance provided to them will be capped at the costs indicated by the preferred Solicitor within the 'Framework of Solicitors', and therefore the adopter will be responsible for any costs over the capped figure. The level of financial assistance provided by the Council replicates practice in neighbouring authorities. The costs associated with this allowance will be met from within the existing budget available to the Adoption Service. There are occasions where the financial contribution exceeds this amount as a result of contested legal applications, these are approved by the Chief Officer.

3.4 Kinship Carer Allowance

3.4.1 Kinship Care is the term used to describe the placement of children with extended family members or friends where they cannot live with their parents. In October 2015 the Scottish Government announced that Kinship carers who were caring for a child who had previously been looked after or placed with involvement by the Local Authority but were now subject to a Section 11 Order under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 were entitled to receive a Kinship allowance on parity with the allowance paid to foster carers. The Local Authority only has responsibility for children it places with family members and/or are subject to statutory orders. The Service does not have responsibility for arrangements which family members independently make.

3.4.2 In June 2015 Committee agreed to increase the level of allowance paid to approved kinship carers to equal that paid to foster carers.

3.4.3 Kinship carers are supported by Citizens Advice Bureau to maximise their income for the child via Department of Work and Pensions i.e. child benefit, Tax Credits etc. Having done so the Local Authority "tops up" this income to ensure

parity with the allowance paid to foster carers. (Foster carers cannot claim these state benefits.)

3.4.4 This approach ensures parity for kinship carers. It will also mean that the amount the Local Authority pays each kinship carer will differ according to their individual circumstances.

3.4.5 At present there are 285 children in a kinship arrangement. This is only a percentage of our Looked After population but recognises the priorities laid out in both legislation and the Independent Care Review which highlights the need for family placements to be supported. It is, therefore, a priority to work towards identifying kinship placements at the earliest point when it is assessed as not being safe for a child to remain with their birth parents.

3.4.6 Table 5 below details the costs associated with this allowance.

Table 5

Age Group	No of Children	2020/21 Rate	2020/21 Cost	2021/22 rate (with 1.5% increase)	2021/22 Cost
0-4	39	135.41	29,5735	137.44	300,168
5-10	116	154.24	1,001,943	156.55	1,016,948
11-15	98	192.02	1,053,805	194.9	1,069,611
16-18	28	233.55	366,206	237.05	371,694
19-21	4	233.55	52,315	237.05	53,099
Cost Before Child Benefit Deduction			2,770,005		2,811,522
Less Child Benefit Deduction*			-490,659		-490,659
Total (per annum)			2,279,346		2,320,863

**The current estimates for Deductions are based on payments at 30 November 2020, estimated at £9,435.75 per week.*

3.4.7 Based on the number of children identified in Table 5 a 1.5% uplift represents an increase of **£41,516**.

3.5 Supported Lodgings Scheme

3.5.1 The Council runs a Supported Lodgings scheme that is accessible to vulnerable young adults (from aged 16 to 21) who have previously been looked after and

who would benefit from living with a family or single person. The person providing the lodgings (the carer) is paid a weekly allowance.

3.5.2 It is proposed that the fee of £211.68 is increased by 1.5% to £214.85 in order to attract and retain carers.

3.5.3 The Service user is expected to make a small contribution towards part of this cost.

3.6 Intercountry Adoptions

3.6.1 As well as receiving applications from people interested in adopting a local child the Local Authority has a legal duty to consider applications from people interested in adopting a child from overseas. Unlike other adoption applications the legislation allows local authorities to charge a fee for undertaking the necessary assessment and work associated with an Inter-Country Adoption (ICA) application.

3.6.2 The standard of assessment in an ICA is no different from other adoption assessments. What is different is the work associated with placing a child from overseas. Immigration issues are often time consuming and complex. Consequently, there is a need to communicate regularly with Scottish Government officials to progress an adoption once the assessment has been concluded.

3.6.3 In addition countries have different expectations on the local authority once a child is placed with adopters. Some countries require regular and detailed updates for up to three years post placement giving feedback on the welfare of the child.

3.6.4 At present Aberdeen City charges ICA applicants £5,000 to cover the costs associated with this work. The number of ICA applications in Aberdeen City is relatively low (often no more than 1 or 2 per year). Having bench marked with other Local Authorities the level of fee charged is no longer consistent with many other authorities and it is proposed therefore an increase to £5750. This will bring us into line with neighbouring authorities.

3.7 Fee Paid to the Independent Chairs of the Adoption/Permanency and Fostering Panels

3.7.1 In line with Scottish Government guidance and consistent with the practice of most Local Authorities the chairs of Aberdeen City Council's Adoption & Permanency Panel and Alternative Family Care Panel (2 Panels) are independent of the Local Authority. These appointments promote the independence and scrutinising role of the Panels. Due to the need to retain an Independent Chair of both Panels an allowance is paid.

3.7.2 These Panels fulfil a statutory function and meet on an alternate weekly basis. The time involved in attending and preparing for each panel is approximately 10/15 hours per panel.

3.7.3 In 2015 Aberdeen City Council agreed to increase the level of payment to panel chairs to £250.00 per panel, which represented an annual cost of £11,000 (based on 44 panels/year).

3.7.4 In view of the fact that there has not been any uplift in the fee paid to the Independent Chair since 2015 it is recommended, that from the 1st April 2021 the payment to Panel Chairs is **£275.00 per panel**. This change represents an annual cost of **£12,100** (based on 44 panels per year) an increase overall of **£1,100**.

3.8 Curators ad-litem/Reporting Officer Fees

3.8.1 In 2007 Committee agreed the levels of fee paid to Curators-ad-litem/Reporting Officers. The fee set was in recognition of the difficulties in recruiting officers to produce such reports. Work was undertaken with Aberdeenshire Council and Moray Council to ensure a consistency of fee across authorities given that the three authorities tend to access the same Curators and Reporting Officers

3.8.2 The three authorities are proposing a 1% increase to the level of fee paid to Curators ad-litem and Reporting Officers for the coming year.

3.8.3 Aberdeen City Council along with all Local Authorities has a statutory duty to recruit Curators ad-litem and Reporting Officers who are in turn appointed by the Courts to report on certain cases involving children. The Local Authority has no control over the volume of work undertaken by Curators ad-litem and Reporting Officers. The fee structure is detailed in table 6 below.

Table 6

	2020/21 FEES	2021/22 FEES
CURATOR AD LITEM REPORTS:		
Appointment by Court	£267.77	£270.48
Second & subsequent children	£133.89	£135.29
JOINT CURATOR AD LITEM AND REPORTING OFFICER REPORTS:		
Appointment by Court	£401.65	£405.67
Second & subsequent children	£200.82	£202.83

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The full year additional costs, based on the number of children looked after as at November 2020, for the proposed increases to the Fostering, Kinship, Adoption Allowances along with the new Payment for Skills scheme, is **£121,273**. These additional costs will be met from within the budget agreed at Council on 10 March 2021.

4.2 The focus for the Children's Services is to provide early and preventative support to children and their families which prevents an escalation of need and the requirement for statutory measures of intervention. In delivering this intention, Children's Social Work on its own and in collaboration with partners has taken a number of steps aimed at supporting more children to remain within their family. This includes but is not limited to:

- Development of Fit Like – Family Wellbeing Hubs

- Recognising the strong correlation between poverty and children experiencing neglect/harm via provision of hardship funding to support families.
- Service redesign to aligning more resource to support children and families to stay together.
- Increasing the capacity of the Kinship Team
- Develop/build on the use of digital support to children, young people and their families.

4.3 As a result of the above the number of children who have become looked after for the first time in the past year has significantly reduced. We want to build on this work but also recognise the challenges the COVID pandemic will have imposed on families will continue to be felt in the coming years. The service will continue to ensure it remains focused on supporting families to stay together where it is safe to do so.

4.4 There will however always be instances when social work staff need to intervene to safeguard children who cannot be cared for by their parents. As Corporate Parents the Council has a legal duty to ensure that support provided to carers/adopters enables them to meet the needs of children and young people in their care.

4.5 The proposed total increase circa £140k amounts to two out of authority foster placements or 50% of the annual cost of an out of authority residential placement. Focusing on building in house foster capacity remains a priority. The recruitment of kinship and in-house foster parents remains the best value option to provide for children and young people. It therefore remains essential to have an appropriate scheme that is attractive to new carers and competitive with Independent Fostering Agencies. Over the past year 6 families who have offered permanent care to our looked after children have decided to transfer to Aberdeen City Council. All of these carers have spoken positively of their move but in addition this has resulted in a saving of approx. **£68,000 p.a.**

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Aberdeen City Council has a statutory duty to provide care to those children who cannot be looked after in parental care and provide allowances to those who care for children who cannot be cared for by their parents.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	Unable to fulfil strategic objectives in regard to maintaining Aberdeen	M	A more attractive and competitive Payment for Skills scheme will aid the recruitment and retention of foster carers and reduce the need to

	city children within their own area.		utilise expensive independent fostering services. Significantly it will maintain children in their local area and fulfil the strategic objectives of the Council.
Compliance	We have a responsibility to provide a statutory service for children who require to be accommodated. We would be in breach of our Statutory duty.	M	Increased resources and capacity would better enable us to meet our statutory duty.
Operational	Staff currently travel across the country to make statutory visits to children we are unable to place locally. Children placed out with their communities don't have access to families and support systems as readily as they would if accommodated locally.	M	Utilising staff efficiently and more cost effectively. Reduces the impact of children and young people being away from their community network, activities, schools and families. These losses associated with being accommodated out with the authority may impact on mental and physical health wellbeing.
Financial	Revising the allowances and introducing the new Payment for Skills structure will increase expenditure and this exceeds the current budget. Currently it is challenging to compete against Independent providers.	M	An increase in the allowances and a new Payment for Skills structure will aid recruitment which will reduce expenditure and the need to use Independent Fostering agencies which is cost effective.
Reputational	Not viewed by our customers as being able to provide the level of service expected. As a regulated Service this approach may improve our quality indicators which demonstrates robust service delivery.	M	Improved relations with existing carers. Will make it a more attractive option for prospective carers. This makes Aberdeen City Council a competitive and reliable choice.
Environment / Climate	N/A		

7. OUTCOMES

Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	The function of our Kinship, Fostering and Adoption Service is central to supporting and assuring that we deliver on the outcomes of the LOIP Prosperous people - Children are our Future and that they have "the best start in life"; they are "Safe and responsible"; and "protected from harm". Children who are adequately protected from

	threats to their health, safety and economic wellbeing are more likely to prosper than those who are not.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	Children who grow up within their local community have an increase sense of identity which can help provide opportunities and mitigates the risk of harm

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Full impact assessment not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Independent Care Review - The Promise - <https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Promise.pdf>
<https://thepromise.scot/>

10. APPENDICES - Recruitment Strategy

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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