

Notice of Non-key Executive Decision

Subject Heading:	Council tax support for Havering foster carers residing outside of Havering.
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Robert Benham, Deputy Leader, Lead Member for Children and Learning. Councillor Roger Ramsey, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property
SLT Lead:	Robert South, Director, Children's Services
Report Author and contact details:	Tara Geere Assistant Director – Children's services Tendai Dooley- Head of Care Resources Tendai.dooley@havering.gov.uk
Policy context:	Ensuring sufficient in-house foster care for children in care
Financial summary:	The current estimated cost of the proposal is £50k annually, initially from the business risk reserve.
Relevant OSC:	Children and Learning OSSC
Is this decision exempt from being called-in?	No

Non-key Executive Decision

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Communities making Havering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Places making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connections making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part A – Report seeking decision

DETAIL OF THE DECISION REQUESTED AND RECOMMENDED ACTION

Background

The borough recently published a new corporate parenting strategy, a key priority in which is to keep children in our care within, or as close to the borough as possible. Our “in-house” fostering provision is central to our aims to secure the best possible outcomes for children in our care, regardless of whether they are cared for outside of the Havering footprint. We currently have a number of foster carers who reside outside of Havering this includes 17 mainstream carers, 5 Connected carers and 6 Regulation 24 carers; who are looking after 26 Havering children.

Children are placed with carers based on their needs and in turn carers are provided with a weekly allowance dependent on need (on a four point scale) and age (0-10 and 10s and over). Alongside this, carers with an active placement are exempt from paying council tax within Havering. The enhanced fostering allowance has been very well received.

However, Havering carers who live outside of Havering have now both individually and collectively raised concerns about discrimination and the lack of support around council tax payments as follows:

1. They are not being equally valued as their peers in Havering despite offering the same service
2. They are providing good quality care, including in some instances driving children to and from Havering to support family time (contact arrangements), health appointments or to maintain educational attendance to not disrupt children’s education attainment.
3. There is an inequality of Corporate support for carers out of borough. They are of the view that council tax support should be offered to all active carers.

The financial request is to support this initiative from the business risk reserve by £50K per annum to fund the council tax exemption for Havering registered foster carers who live outside of the borough. The £50k will cover the cost of the current cohort of out of borough carers. As the number of foster carers increases, the additional council tax support will come from the reduction of spend on IFA’s.

Although we have limited number of carers living outside of Havering (27 households at the 5 November 5, 2021), they play a significant role in reducing the use of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA’s) for those children who require a home outside of their local authority boundary. This can be for a number of reasons including safeguarding and exploitation concerns.

The options available when a child under 10 years of age comes into care include:

- Friends and Family Support (Connected Carers), this is often a preferred option because this delivers better outcomes for the child, who remains with relatives connected to the family, while accessing support and training via the Fostering team. The number of family and friends placements has increased this year from 25 to 30.
- Independent Fostering placements are commissioned using a Pan London Framework, where base rates have been negotiated. We have successfully reduced our use of IFAs over the last three years, largely connected to the Face To Face Pathways programme. Alongside this, the spend on IFA placements has decreased by a third in the last three years.

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We have seen an increase in the number of over 13 year olds placed in IFAs in the last year, as in-house options have decreased, in part impacted by carers supporting young adults post 18 years under Staying Put Arrangements.

- Residential care is required where there are greater needs, a specialist assessment is required, or there is not appropriate availability in other types of provision. Again, the average age of children in residential care is now approximately 13-15 placements and our use of residential has increased during this year, at a significant cost to the authority.
- In house fostering, overseen by the borough Fostering Panel is the preferred option but options of in-house care have been limited due to numbers of carers entering into fostering, the aging cohort of existing carers and those carers exiting fostering for a number of reasons. In spite of a concerted effort to improve the offer to carers, some fostering families choose to no longer care for children and the Covid pandemic has had a profound effect.

The number of carers in April 2020 was 79 and whilst the service did recruit 13 new carer households, a number of households were de-registered and a number of households could not foster due to the number of children who stayed beyond 18yrs in staying put arrangements. Therefore the net figure remained the same in December 2020 at 79.

On top of this 25 fostering households are no longer available to foster, due to supporting Staying Put arrangements for care leavers who post 18 require ongoing family support. The success and need for Staying Put arrangements is likely to increase and continue to impact on fostering household numbers.

The borough is now faced with a challenging scenario of fewer foster families, in spite of a recruitment campaign over the summer which saw a high enquiry rate compared with previous years. We have also seen a decline of "in-house" carers (aside from family and friends carers which have increased). The borough is not unique; Ofsted published a report in November 2020 noting that recruitment of in-house carers was a significant difficulty for all the local authorities and agencies used in their study. The shortage of suitable carers was the most significant barrier to making a good match with the child and ultimately a successful placement. Within Havering, we would like to actively recruit carers not only within Havering but from neighbouring boroughs or further afield in order to have greater sufficiency to provide placement stability and opportunities for all looked after children.

There are 108 Looked After Children placed out of borough at 15.10.21 broken down into the following placement types.

■ Independent Fostering Agency - 37

■ Semi Independent - 23

■ Residential - 18

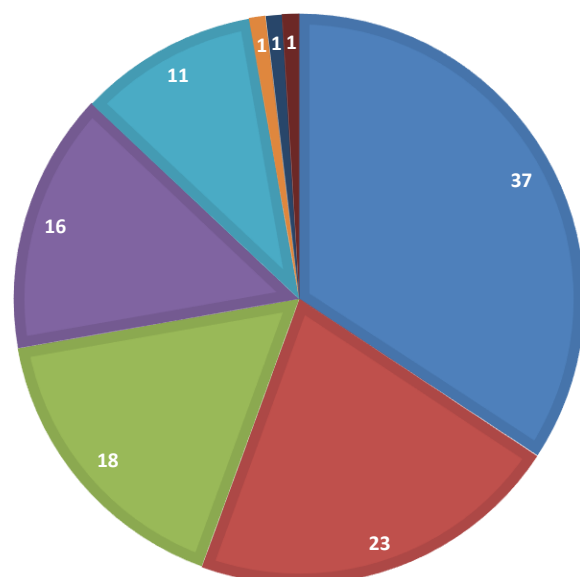
■ In House Fostering - 16

■ Connected Persons - 11

■ Placed With Parent - 1

■ NHS - 1

■ Secure - 1



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Costs accrued so far this financial year:

IFA	Semi-Ind	Res	In-House	Connected Carers	P with Parent	NHS	Secure
£1,116,600	£701,523	£1,415,261	£1,004,140	£375,566	£0	£0	£60,853

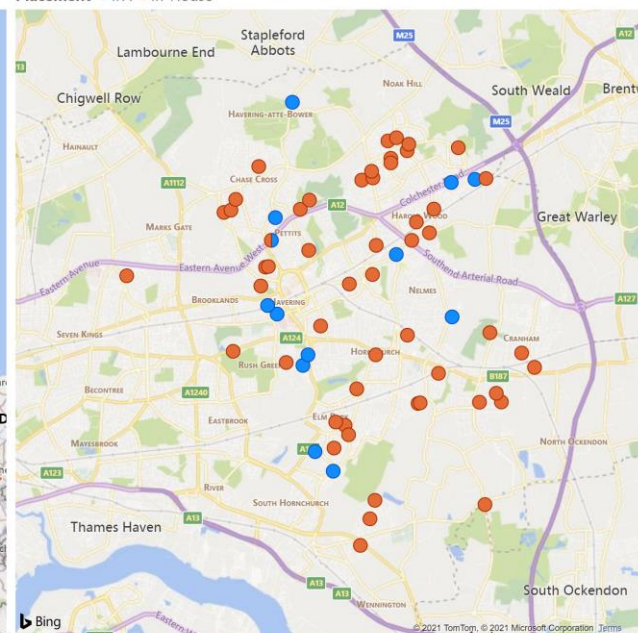
Out of borough IFA and In-House placements by postcode

Placement ● IFA ● In-House



In borough IFA and In-House placements by postcode

Placement ● IFA ● In-House



Current In House Fostering Resource at 15.10.21

	Total	Live In Borough	Live OOB	Live OOB but within less than 20 miles
Mainstream	74	57	17	13
Connected Persons	13	8	5	1
Regulation 24 Carers	9	6	3	0
Total	96	71	25	14

Looked After Children currently placed in an in house resource at 15.10.21

	Total	Live In Borough	Live OOB	Live OOB but within less than 20 miles
Mainstream	75	59	15	12
Connected Persons	20	13	7	1
Regulation 24 Carers	15	11	4	0
Total	110	83	26	13

By offering Havering approved foster carers residing outside of Havering financial assistance with council tax, this will prevent mass resignation of these carers; encourage and support recruitment through word of mouth and continue to offer stability of a home to Havering looked after children.

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COVID-19 has resulted in disruption to fostering recruitment process and we have seen a larger than usual number of placement moves since April 2020. We currently have a critical shortage of fostering placements available in spite of an increase in enquiries. Due to a lack of capacity of in house carers, children are placed with IFAs and this on average results in an additional annual cost of £24,284 per child (based on average data from 2019-20 financial year). As such, an increase of in house capacity of 10 new carers would result in a minimum yearly cost avoidance of £242,840 (as carers may be eligible to care for more than one child), or a reduction in cost if young people are moved from IFA arrangements to in-house carer families. However our progress to recruit in-house carers (other than Family and Friends) has not enabled us to achieve these goals.

Council Tax Exemption

Foster carers play a vital role in our communities providing loving and supportive homes for our children and young people. Support with council tax exemption will help ease financial pressure, show our appreciation for the work they do, and encourage more people to consider taking the first step to becoming a foster carer.

Consistent with our Corporate Parenting responsibilities it is proposed that Havering registered in-house foster carers, with children placed with them residing outside of Havering are supported to meet council tax payments. This would encourage more carers to join Havering and reduce the IFA bill.

Currently there are 27 in-house foster carers who live out of borough. It is proposed that the additional £50K will support carers with their council tax bills capped at the Havering equivalent band rate i.e. a non-resident carer will receive the council rate actual costs if lower and costs will be capped to Havering council tax rates if their rates are higher. This will provide stability of accommodation to our looked after children.

Wrap-around Support

Alongside the allowances and financial incentives discussed above, we are confident that our support package to carers remains amongst the most competitive in the country. We have adopted systemic practice training for carers and a dedicated support group for the "Pathways Carers" who care for those children with the most need is in place. We are implementing non-violent resistance training for carers and there are two Advanced practitioner supervising Social Workers supporting carers and a dedicated Family therapist.

Other planned developments include: 24/7, 365 days per year out of hours support, engagement activities for households via the Havering Foster Carers Association, training and support with professional development and support in meeting the multicultural/religious needs of children.

Recruitment of IFA carers with children already placed from other Local Authorities into Havering can generate an income of approximately £250 per child (after foster carer allowances have been paid) per week.

AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE

The Director as a member of SLT has the following relevant powers under Part 3 section 3.4 As follows:

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- (a) To take any steps necessary for proper management and administration for their allocated portfolios.
- (b) To exercise all the powers delegated to relevant staff members where circumstances require, so far as legally permissible. Exercise of such powers should be recorded. Where possible, a Second Tier Manager should give notice to a relevant staff member that he or she intends to exercise a specified power that is delegated to that staff member.
- (c) To manage buildings and facilities under their control including letting, hiring or otherwise permitting the use of such premises and property for occasional purposes...
- (d) To be responsible and accountable for all health and safety matters.

STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECISION

1. This decision proposes to improve our offer to prospective and existing foster carers, by offering council tax support to carers who reside outside of Havering borders. The proposals in this report will enable the borough to compete better in the foster carer market and make the borough a destination of choice for local foster carers, whilst reducing the threat of foster carer resignation for those carers outside of Havering.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Other options considered:

Option 1 - Do nothing.

This option is not recommended as doing nothing will mean fewer in-house carers and higher reliance on IFA placements. IFA placements cost considerably more meaning costs will rise and MTFS target will not be met. Havering could face mass resignation of carers residing outside of the borough with significant negative impact on recruitment.

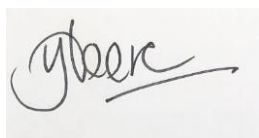
PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION

N/A

NAME AND JOB TITLE OF STAFF MEMBER ADVISING THE DECISION-MAKER

Name: Tara Geere

Designation: Assistant Director – Children's Services



Signature:

Date: 16th November 2021

Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Council may use its powers under section 1 Localism Act 2011 (General Power of Competence) to pay an allowance to its in-house foster carers.

The proposed decision will ensure so far as possible that there is equal treatment of in house foster carers inside or outside of Havering. This will enhance the ability of Havering to recruit in house foster carers to fulfil their duties under the Children Act to looked after children and obtain best value for these services.

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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The required funding of £50k is to fund the current cohort of 27 out of borough foster carers. Any new out of borough carers that will join the scheme will get the cash funding automatically but its financial impact will be offset against the savings generated. Currently, on average an in house foster carer generates c£24k yearly savings due to lower costs than IFAs. A yearly average £2,000 council tax funding per case will reduce the delivered savings to c£22k.

It is important to emphasise that future council tax fluctuations in the respective Boroughs where these carers reside will fluctuate the funding amount requires. In turn, the net savings will fluctuate. As there is a tendency by LAs to increase the council tax so will be the amount of funding required which in turn translates into a small reduction in savings delivered.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS (AND ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS WHERE RELEVANT)

The recommendations made in this report do not give rise to any identifiable HR risks or implications that would affect either the Council or its workforce.

EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

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Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex/gender, and sexual orientation.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

This decision is likely to have a positive impact on fosters and the children they care for. It will help reduce financial concerns which will support the mental wellbeing of fosters. This in turn will ensure that they are better able to meet the needs of the children in their care which will have impacts on those children's mental and physical health.

It is also the case that placement breakdowns will increase the number of different people children end up in contact with and so avoiding them through increasing fostering support will help protect children from COVID-19.

This decision is likely to have a positive impact in the health and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the borough.

Foster carers have a crucial role in supporting our most vulnerable youngsters.

This decision will serve to maintain the current pool of foster carers and thereby avoid unnecessary disruption to established fostering arrangements which could potentially harm the wellbeing of the children affected.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Increased Fostering Rates Business Case
Council Tax Exemption Business Case

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Part C – Record of decision

I have made this executive decision in accordance with authority delegated to me by the Leader of the Council and in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

Decision

Proposal agreed

Delete as applicable

Proposal NOT agreed because

Details of decision maker

Signed



Name: Councillor Robert Benham

Cabinet Portfolio held:

CMT Member title:

Head of Service title

Other manager title:

Date:

Lodging this notice

The signed decision notice must be delivered to the proper officer, Debra Marlow, Principal Democratic Services Officer in Democratic Services, in the Town Hall.

For use by Committee Administration

This notice was lodged with me on _____

Signed _____

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