



Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 6th July, 2022

To the Chair and Members of the CABINET

Additional Investment Children's Social Care

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Councillor Rachael Blake, Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care, Communities and Equalities	All	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Doncaster had seen a steady reduction in the number of children being looked after by the Authority, manageable number of children with a child protection plan and a relatively stable and sufficient number of in-house providers for foster care and residential home placements. However, over the last two years overall demand for Social Care Services has increased as has the complexity of needs that families are presenting with. This has led to more children needing to be assessed, protected and ultimately an increased number of children in care. The majority of this demand increase can be ascribed to the unintended consequences of COVID-19 but not all.
2. Recent inspection activity has concluded that there has been a decline in the quality of social work practice and it is important that this is arrested by the Council, DCST and the partnership. A comprehensive improvement plan is being finalised that is overseen by an Improvement Board and is accountable to a Transformation and Improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Executive of the Council and the Chair of DCST Board.
3. The Council has been committed, as the commissioner of Social Care Services, to ensure sufficient funding is available to address demand and quality pressures in the social care system as evidenced through one off investment in Autumn of 2019 and a significant investment during the budget setting for 2022/23 and previous years. The Council and DCST furthermore took a decision in March to start the process of transfer of children social care, back to the Council with a transfer date set for September 2022. However due to significant demand pressures, a rise in the complexity of presenting need, the fragile care market

and the decline in practice quality, it has become necessary to set out an improvement and transformation strategy to recover services to a good standard and beyond that will achieve better outcomes for children and evidence positive outcomes.

4. This report sets out the strategy and the investment required to stabilise the workforce and create the capacity for improvement. It also outlines the proposed changes to payments for foster carers to improve the in house offer and reduce the reliance on external placements.

EXEMPT REPORT

5. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Cabinet are asked to note the information in the report and approve the following:-
 - a) Allocation of £4.03m one-off non-recurrent funding, as detailed in the report to stabilise the workforce capacity and drive improvement.
 - b) Allocation of £0.84m ongoing recurrent funding for changes to foster carer payments, as detailed in report to improve the in-house offer and reduce the dependency on high cost independent foster care provision.
 - c) The proposed changes to the payments for foster carers, detailed in paragraphs 25 to 30 including the proposed additional skills payments to take effect from 1st September 2022; and
 - d) The financial handbook for foster carers provided at Appendix 2.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

7. The Council will continue to care for and protect the most vulnerable in society but it is inevitable that as the Council becomes a leaner organisation that citizens will see services delivered in new and different ways.

BACKGROUND

8. The demand for Social Care Services has historically been much higher in Doncaster than in comparison with our statistical neighbours, as detailed in the following table:

		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of Referrals	Doncaster	5798	6782	3725	4479	5275	5681	4781	4193	4870
	Statistical Neighbours	3206	3423.7	3753.2	3717.7	3317.3	3129.7	3256.7	3567	3069
Number of Referrals Rates Per 10,000	Doncaster	893.1	1043.8	571.5	685.6	804.1	862.5	719.5	626.6	723
	Statistical Neighbours	669.04	670.2	689.85	682.93	646.26	606.49	618.67	689.38	597.46
Children who are the subject of a CP Plan - Number	Doncaster	588	331	301	399	427	374	300	301	433
	Statistical Neighbours	205.2	252.8	245.3	251.8	270	297	312	334.2	297.1
Children who are the subject of a CP Plan -Rate Per 10,000	Doncaster	90.6	50.9	46.2	61.1	65.1	56.8	45.1	45	67.3
	Statistical Neighbours	42.57	53.93	49.03	52.13	56.51	60.2	62	67.41	59.4
Number of Looked After Children	Doncaster	500	502	479	484	514	568	532	506	547
	Statistical Neighbours	355	370.2	372.2	381.9	407.2	447.8	470.1	494.1	505.6
Children Looked After rate per 10,000 under 18	Doncaster	77	77	73	74	78	86	80	76	81
	Statistical Neighbours	696	72.5	73	75.8	82	90	95	100.8	101.7
children In Need rate per 10,000	Doncaster	509.4	344.6	356.1	381.1	403.4	441.3	408.4	364	368.5
	Statistical Neighbours	376.31	387.17	378.37	373.27	402.39	419.14	424.46	438.74	420.55
Open CIN Cases (excludes CP and CIC) as at 31st March	Doncaster			1345	1570	1606	1903	1716	1467	1350

9. During the autumn of 2019/20, the Council invested circa. £1m to meet the demand pressures identified on a temporary basis, which was effective for the period of the funding. It has been during this time that the Future Placement Strategy was also ratified to deal with increasing demand and ensure that the Trust and the Council draw upon the sufficiency statement to ensure appropriate capacity of placements (Foster Care/Residential Care; in-house/out of Authority) for our children becoming looked after. The Strategy has a focus on developing more in-house provision, i.e. recruitment of independent foster carers, residential homes and robust commissioning of placements for children with the most complex needs. However, there has been a change in the volume, profile and complexity of children coming into care, presenting at an older age with complex needs.
10. Recent years have presented children services within Doncaster with many challenges, not least the demand and complexity pressures as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This, coupled with a decline in management oversight, practice quality and home working has resulted in a workforce that needs support through building capacity to stabilise current demand pressures and build confidence through a strong emphasis on practice improvement.
11. The 2022/23 council budget approved included significant additional resources for Children's Social Care of £8.5m. This included funding for the estimated placements based on current demand, unachievable savings and delays in the delivery of the Future Placements Strategy. This was in addition to the funding allocated in previous budgets to meet demand pressures which have continued to increase.
12. In addition, there are also significant savings included in the 2022/23 budget of £7.6m over the period of the MTFs, with £2.9m in 2022/23. Starting from the revised financial baseline position based on current activity, working across a number of operational areas to reduce spend and achieve best value. The overall strategy is based on the following high level principles:
- Invest and champion prevention and early intervention.
 - Ensure that all partners play their part in prevention, early intervention and ultimately statutory safeguarding.

- Invest in the recruitment, retention and development of a permanent, high performing workforce who knows what good practice looks like.
- Support families to remain together for as long as possible.
- Ensure that children access high quality placements as near as possible to home. We can achieve this through having a healthy mixture of in-house and independent foster/residential placements.

13. The proposals covered through budget setting included the following areas:

- Continuing with the Future Placement Strategy and vision for all children to have a right to a family life and wherever possible they will be supported to live with their birth parents or family. Where this is not possible, they will live with nurturing and supportive families. If they cannot live in a family home, they will live in a Children's home, which replicates family life as closely as possible. It has the aim of increasing local foster care provision so we can keep children and young people closer to home and repatriated where appropriate as quickly as possible. Every effort will be made either to safely return children to their families or to ensure they have a permanent alternative family as soon as possible.
- Embedding Keys to your Future as we engage and support young people in preparing for adulthood, including supporting the transition to appropriate affordable accommodation and support with Education, Training and Employment (ETE)
- Improving quality and practice across our social care teams, reducing caseloads and improving referral pathways. As detailed in the budget proposals specific funding has been allocated for additional staffing to reduce caseloads and provide additional management capacity to give stability and drive the necessary improvement. The overall aim is to develop a learning organisation, with good oversight and practice, continuing the improvement journey with pace. Ensuring the practitioners have time and capacity to work with families, creatively and systematically, to support the change, which will also deliver savings
- Reducing the number of agency Social Workers by recruiting to vacancies and retaining our Social Workers, with particular emphasis on development, training, appropriate supervision and support. Continuing to develop the Social Care Academy is a key part of delivering on this aim
- Explore opportunities for alternative commissioning approaches, for example collaborating with neighbouring authorities to develop more specialist residential services where it makes sense. We will continue to support and challenge the independent market to achieve best value.

14. Since the budget was approved, good progress has been made in some of the above areas, for example the Keys to your Future. This project, a partnership with St Leger Homes, provides dual tenancies with a bespoke practice model designed for children leaving care. There are 8 properties planned in the first phase of the project, which will support 16 young people. 7 of which have already been secured, four of which are operational, with the remaining three in varying stages of refurbishment. So far the Keys project has supported eight young people to transition from care to independent settings. The combined previous costs of these young people's provision being £22k per week. It is envisaged that the project will be supporting its full allocation of 16 young people by the autumn.

15. However demand and complexity of need continues to be an issue nationally and

locally and further areas for practice improvement has come to light that needs close attention/intervention and urgent additional investment.

16. The LGA has provided a useful blue print for continuous improvement, which consists of 3 components, i.e. the enablers for continuous improvement; the characteristics of the improvement journey; and the practice conditions for success. These can all be found in Appendix 1 and forms the basis from which Doncaster's improvement plan is built out of. Out of the 7 key enablers for continuous improvement, 2 are relevant to this investment request:
 3. Engaging and Supporting the Workforce: change the rhetoric – avoid the 'blame game' and ensuing turbulence in staffing; articulate high expectations & ambitious goals; stabilise the workforce and develop from within.
 7. Judicious use of resources: ensure strategic and financial planning is aligned; invest where it is needed; sustain investment; and focus on long term priorities, i.e. as set out in point 12.
17. In order to improve practice (as set out in the conditions for success) a manageable case load for workers is important to ensure time can be spent with children, young people and families to fully understand their needs and to ensure effective, sustainable interventions improve the overall outcomes for children and young people. Small enough teams ensure that front line managers have good line of sight and know their workers and the families they work with well. Quality and improvement systems need to be robust and focused on cultivating a learning culture, supported by a relentless focus on recruitment, development and retention.
18. Foster Carers, Adopters and residential staff are an important component of the workforce. Good quality Foster Carers, Adopters and Residential Workers provide loving homes for our most vulnerable children and young people and therefore the offer to these cohorts need to be supportive and reflective of their importance. A review of Foster Carer allowances has revealed that further investment is required in this area, as detailed in paragraphs 25 to 30 below. It is also envisaged that the Adoption Allowance review will also require further investment, however this information is not available at this time and therefore will be subject to future reporting.

Improving quality and practice across our social care teams

19. A key element of the financial strategy for the 2022/23 budget, detailed above, is to ensure caseloads are manageable, with quality supervision and management in place to continue the improvement journey at pace.
20. The latest caseload data reveals that managers continue to oversee more cases than is reasonable, which in turn creates a culture where supervision is not driving outcomes for children and families at the necessary pace. In addition, some Social Workers are holding more than 25 cases, and this means that their ability to undertake meaningful direct work is significantly impacted, so to the quality of their assessments, plans and the overall quality of intervention.
21. Therefore additional one-off investment is essential to reduce social work caseloads, which is pivotal to the development of a relationship-based practice model and to enable improvement to be achieved at pace.
22. The aim is to achieve caseloads of no higher than between 16 and 18, with managers overseeing no more than 100 cases. There are a couple of exceptions to this, the Assessment service, for example, experiences regular variations in demand and as such, caseloads may sometimes be as high as 20.

The Inspiring Futures Team (IFT) also experiences variation due to Care Leavers over the age of 21 returning for short periods of support which can inflate caseloads for short periods. However, the overall investment will create manageable caseloads, allowing children and families to progress through the system more efficiently, thereby receiving the right support at the right time from the right team.

23. Unless, specifically highlighted, it is anticipated that the additional one-off investment for the following services is required for an initial period of two years. This will ensure additional capacity is provided to meet the current demand and immediate pressures. It will also enable further work to be undertaken to assess the future activity levels, including understanding the impact of the planned interventions.

- **Assessment Service £0.92m**– the current caseloads for the Assessment Service are significantly higher than required to drive improvement at pace. The Assessment Service is entirely demand led based upon referrals to MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub). Consequently, a reduction in caseloads in this area is contingent on a number of factors. Some of which are societal, for example, the pressure on families due to the cost of living crisis, the impact of COVID-19 and an overall increase in the complexities which families are presenting.

However, Early Help services throughout the borough continue to improve and the full implementation of the localities model will strengthen Early Help services further. Consequently, over time this should result in fewer children and families requiring assessment by statutory Social Care services.

The Assessment Service has benefited from a temporary fifth team (still in place) to support capacity issues and meet current demand. It is envisaged that retaining this additional fifth team will ensure caseloads remain manageable, and children are progressed in a timely way through the system.

- **ACPS (Area Child Protection Teams) £0.70m** – current demand has led to high caseloads and has impacted upon the quality of social work practice. Whilst there is work to be undertaken around internal threshold application, which has the potential to move some children to Early Help services, the overall demand, particularly in the South of Doncaster requires additional resource.

The 2022/23 budget included additional funding for three dedicated Team Managers, to enable management oversight to improve and smaller teams to be created. However, current caseloads require further resources to bring caseloads down to 16 per worker. This will support both recruitment and retention. It is also anticipated that the impact of more effective Early Help services and more timely intervention from the Assessment Team should have a demonstrable impact, reducing cases further.

It is proposed that a further new team is created in ACPS, which will ensure that caseloads are consistently maintained at between 16 and 18 children per Social Worker. This will allow for appropriate management support and oversight, which in turn will support better quality social work practice and improve the timeliness for children in terms of their journey through services.

- **Children in Care and Care Leavers £0.33m** – A key aspect of the improvement activity overall, is to instil a relationship-based practice model. This requires Social Workers having the time to build meaningful relationships

with children in order to help them achieve their full potential. The ILACS report indicates that weak management oversight and an absence of management challenge has resulted in poor quality planning for children in care. It was also noted that some children experienced frequent changes of social workers which means that they were not able to build meaningful relationships with their workers. To mitigate this, a new CIC team is required which will allow for caseloads of 16 children and appropriate levels of management oversight. This will ensure that the practice model can be effectively implemented, managerial oversight and challenge be consistently applied in all areas of the service and children's outcomes will be improved.

- **Inspiring Futures Team £0.37m** – Whilst support to Care Leavers was identified as an area of strength in the ILACS inspection, it was also noted that caseloads are too high for all Personal Advisors (PA's). A substantial number of PA's are holding caseloads more than 30 young people, many of which have significant needs.

In addition, Doncaster has seen a significant increase in the number of children in care, currently 592. It is estimated that the number of children supported by the Care Leaving service could increase by 100 in the next 2 years. This is without the increasing number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and without being fully cognisant of the impact of Ukrainian nationals relocating to Doncaster, some of which will invariably be unaccompanied and are also likely to be traumatised by their experiences.

Consequently, a new team needs creating to address this demand and to create manageable caseloads which will allow the good practice currently delivered within the service to be maintained.

- **Legal Services £0.38m** – the increasing demand also requires funding for additional posts to reduce caseloads. The current resource does not support the development of the service strategically and there is little or no resilience during periods of annual leave or sickness. This further impacts on the timeliness of children's proceedings. The additional investment will support improved timeliness and create the capacity to develop the service strategically.
- **Quality, Performance and Standards £0.33m** – The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service currently experiences higher demand due to social care practice within the system which does not support children leaving care, in a timely way when it is safe to do so. There is a need to bolster current capacity by increasing the number of IRO's, business support and introducing a dedicated Project Manager to oversee the production, revision and updating of policies and procedures. The IRO's are required for a period of 12 months to bridge the period when improvement activity is underway but has not yet led to the demonstrable reductions in the children in care population which is expected.
- **Centre for Excellence £0.22m** – This service is pivotal to the improvement journey. Increasing the management capacity will ensure there is adequate quality assurance and practice improvement capacity. There is also a requirement for short term capacity to support the implementation around the new supervision model. It is anticipated that following the initial training, it will

be necessary to undertake frequent Action Learning Sets to review the efficacy of the approach.

There is a demonstrable history of training being delivered without sufficient reviews of its impact. As an absolute key priority in the improvement journey, it is pivotal that the supervision model is successfully implemented and drives forwards outcomes for children and families. Consequently, dedicated Practice Development Social Workers will be recruited for a period of 12 months to support this activity.

- **Family Time Centre £0.10m** – Due to the increase in looked after children, contact services have also increased. Therefore, additional investment is required to increase the number of family time workers and reduce the caseloads, providing capacity to improve supervision and greater contact with families.
- **Specific Interventions £0.48m** – Additional investment for In-house therapeutic and psychological services, which will provide a better understanding of complex children and families through psychological formulation and assessment. The current service is highly over-subscribed and there are waiting lists for both cognitive functioning assessments and psychological assessments. This will involve the development of a new practice model which will effectively be a combination of a range of evidence-based interventions that are right for particular families at particular times. This includes systemic practice and without additional resource, it will not be possible to deliver these outcomes. It is also envisaged that this additional investment will enable future savings to be delivered on placements.

Additional targeted investment focused on working with girls who have had children removed before the age of 18.

The participation and advocacy offer also needs to improve as currently, capacity for this activity is challenging. The team currently fulfil all advocacy requests but participation activity is limited to a smaller group of well-established children in care forums such as Young Advisors, Children in Care Council and the Fostering Youth Club. Without further investment, it will be difficult to engage with children outside of these forums to better capture their voice and experiences of the greatest number of young people possible.

- **Investment in driving improvement £0.2m** – High quality managers who know what good looks like and have good leadership and management skills, is critical in driving improvement and evidencing positive impact on the lives of children and young people. It is therefore necessary to invest in the development of middle and senior management.

24. The overall cost of the above investment is estimated at £4.03m, which will be provided on a non-recurrent basis. This funding will be closely monitored to deliver the required improvements, evidence impact of the interventions and drive overall better outcomes for children and young people. Where funding has been agreed for a one-year period, the benefits will be assessed and future need identified.

Fostering Allowances

25. The strategy also includes increasing local foster care provision so we can keep children and young people closer to home and repatriated where appropriate as

quickly as possible. A review of child basic allowances and skills payment has recommended an increase in relation to these payments based on the rise in cost of living and ensuring competitive skills payments. This is an 'invest to save' strategy that will support better recruitment and retention of Foster Carers which achieves better value for money.

26. Foster carers are currently extremely dissatisfied with the current system of foster carer payments and enhancements. A full review has been undertaken in consultation with foster carers, as outlined at paragraphs 56 to 60, and changes proposed that will assist with retaining and attracting foster carers.
27. Details on the proposed changes are provided below, with the proposed updated arrangements outlined in the financial handbook at Appendix 2, which is a helpful format for stakeholders to refer to:

- a) Skills Based Payment Scheme – We need to ensure we have highly trained and skilled foster carers. Remuneration for carers is linked to their proven skills, experience and their training/qualifications. The scheme recognises that fostering is an increasingly professional task and is therefore designed to encourage and reward continued professional development. Connected persons foster carers are able to participate in the Skills Based Payment Scheme up to Level 2 subject to meeting the full criteria. Foster carers approved as specialist carers and Mockingbird Hub Carers will have their current skills fee honoured.
- b) The proposed changes to the additional skills payments for each level are detailed below (amounts shown per child per week):

Level 1	Current skills additional element per child	Proposed additional skills element per child
0 – 4	£0	£100
5 – 10	£0	£100
11 – 16	£0	£100
16+	£0	£100
Level 2	Current skills additional element per child	Proposed additional skills element per child
0 – 4	£16	£150
5 – 10	£22	£150
11 – 16	£44	£150
16+	£63	£150
Level 3	Current skills additional element per child	Proposed additional skills element per child
0 – 4	£118	£267
5 – 10	£149	£267
11 – 16	£197	£267
16+	£267	£267

- c) An additional fourth skill-based payment scheme is also proposed at £300 per child per week. The Level 4 scheme will include two new schemes, the first is parent & child assessment placements which span 12 weeks which currently are commissioned to external agencies. The outcome of the parent and child assessment placement is either that the parent moves into the community with their child, or the child is removed and placed with either connected persons or foster carers. The second scheme is an emergency/same day time limited

placement up to 28 days and will include a retainer of £100 paid to the foster carer when they have a vacancy to ensure the foster carer is on stand-by to accept a child/young person. This is an additional resource intended to prevent the use of unregulated and expensive externally commissioned placements for same day placements. There is interest and support from our foster care community for this scheme.

- d) The detailed criteria used when undertaking skills based assessments is set out in the proposed financial handbook for foster carers June 2022, provided at Appendix 2 at 2.5.2. These will be based on evidence provided in the carer's own portfolio and by the fostering team's assessment. The proposed assessment process to move up the skill levels is a marked change from current practice which is a discussion with unqualified staff and an advanced practitioner. Progression of foster carers in relation to skill levels is currently on hold as the current process is not robust enough and foster carers also do not feel this is a fair process.
- e) In addition, every foster carer must have an Annual Review chaired by an Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer (from the IRO service). Every three years this is presented to the Foster Care Panel and then to the Agency Decision Maker, however for the other two years this is presented straight to the nominated officer (Agency Decision Maker). In addition, the Service Manager will provide a Regulation 35 report on the Fostering Service and will add details on any movements between the skills levels. This report is submitted to Council management team and Corporate Parenting Board. Finally, the Fostering Service is required under law to provide an Annual Report of its activities so the quarterly information will be collated to provide a 12 month overview.
- f) Foster carers should be encouraging children and young people to develop a custom of saving money for their future life needs. Therefore in future foster carers will be expected to save £5 per week per child from the fostering allowance to be placed in a savings account. The payment can be added to the child's Share Foundation: Junior ISA <https://sharefound.org> if the child has been looked after for 12 months or more, or it can be set up as a separate Junior ISA. When children leave their foster carer, for whatever reason and regardless of the length of stay, their savings must transfer with them. The child/young person's social worker will support the foster carers, together with the Supervising Social Worker, to assist the child/young person to open a bank account in the name of the child/young person wherever possible.
- g) TSD payments – foster carers currently receive a training allowance payment of £25 per week per household, following completion of the Training Support & Development Standards (TSDS). With the proposed changes to the additional skills payments it is proposed to withdraw this specific training allowance payment.
- h) Travel costs – It is proposed to return to the previous policy for travel costs, where the carer must meet the first 50 miles travel per child from the allowance payments. Examples of travel costs which the foster

carer would be expected to absorb within the fostering allowances would include (new section to 2.5):

- i) Normal trips for medical appointments;
- ii) Transport to and from school where the school is less than three miles from the foster home for secondary school;
- iii) Transport to and from school and nursery where the school is less than two miles from the foster home for primary age and below children;
- iv) Attendance at reviews, case conference and other meetings in relation to the child/ren placed;
- v) Taking and collecting a child from social activities.

Examples of travel which may be supplement by the Fostering Service are:

- vi) Travel to and from school nursery. Foster carers may claim mileage in excess of the first six miles of each return trip for secondary age children and mileage in excess of four miles for primary aged children;
- vii) Family time and transitions i.e., moving children to their permanent placement;
- viii) The cost of travel to and from hospital where the child has frequent appointments with a hospital consultant or specialist, including parking costs.
- ix) The cost of travel to and from the venue for training events including parking fees.

Where public transport is used, the same criteria applies in relation to what is eligible to be claimed.

- i) Birthdays, Christmas and festival costs are significant and foster carers should take care to celebrate festivals appropriate to the children in their care. An additional payment of one week's age related fostering allowance is proposed for both birthday/name days and Christmas/festival which are to be spent on the child. Birthday payments will be made the month before the child's birthday and Christmas/festival payment will be paid with the first payment in December.
- j) Holiday Allowance - An additional payment of two weeks age related fostering allowance is proposed, to be made for each child placed with foster carers at the start of the school summer holidays. The payment relates to the financial year April – March. The holiday allowance is paid to allow foster carers to take a child on holiday or to be used for holiday activities. It is an expectation of the Fostering Service that every child will have at least one holiday a year with their foster carers.
- k) Spectacles and contact lenses – It is proposed to introduce a reimbursement for foster carers for the cost of spectacles for children up to the value of £100 and the monthly cost of contact lenses for young people.
- l) Equipment and furniture provision - It is expected that foster carers will provide a furnished, carpeted and curtained bedroom suitable for a

child/young person placed with them. The intention of the equipment and furniture budget is to support newly approved carers with initial set up costs for essential furniture and equipment. A set up payment for a newly approved foster is proposed up to £350.

- m) Out of Hours foster placements - Foster carers who offer beds to the Emergency Social Services Team will receive a one-off payment of £60 in addition to the pro rata skills-based payment and child's allowance.
- n) Payments to Foster Carers subject to Allegations, Complaints or Concerns - When foster carers are subject to allegations, complaints or concerns where children have been removed from their care, they will receive a payment of £200 per week for up to 12 weeks. Fostering allowances will cease from the time the children are removed from the foster carers care. Foster carers are advised to budget their skills fee to allow for such eventualities.

28. The overall additional costs of the above changes is estimated at £0.842m, with the breakdown per element below:

	£'000
Skills payment	862
Travel costs	-20
Training	-115
Holiday allowance	138
Allegations payments for foster carers	-6
Equipment purchases	-17
Parent & child assessment foster care placement 12 weeks	32
Emergency/same day placement scheme for 28 days includes retainer	64
Total gross cost	938
Transfer budget from external placements	-96
Net cost – additional ongoing funding required	842

29. Approach to implementation will be through information sessions with all foster carers to ensure they understand the expectations of them at every skill level. This will take place over the summer with a proposed implementation date of 1st September 2022. This will allow financial systems to be amended, the Financial Handbook to be presented through a workshop to all stakeholders, all forms associated with payments to be updated and issued to all foster carers by 31st August 2022.

30. At this time there are no proposals to review payments for Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order payments.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

31. Do Nothing – current budget remains in place, demand continues to increase which results in higher numbers of children and young people in care and greater pressure on finding placements. The need for high cost independent out of borough placements will increase.

32. Support the financial investment as set out above and changes to the foster care payments.

	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	
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RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

35. There is a risk that even if this investment is approved that the Council will not be able to fully recruit to level set out above. This is due to a national shortage of Social Care practitioners.
36. There is a risk that through the transfer of Trust employees to the Council a period of turbulence is experienced in the recruitment and retention of staff.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: NC Date: 16/6/22]

37. The proposals contained within this report will contribute to the Council's compliance with a range of statutory duties relating to child safeguarding and looked after children, including duties under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated Regulations.
38. With regard to the specific proposals in relation to foster carer fees, the Local authority has a primary duty under s22 (3) of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children. The Authority also has a duty to ensure that, so far as possible that its looked after children are placed near their home and that their education or training are not disrupted. It also has to meet the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services set by the Government and comply with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. To meet these requirements each foster carer should receive an allowance for the child which must be sufficient to cover the full cost of caring for each child placed with them and be reviewed annually.
39. With regard to the proposals for additional officers, section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows a local authority to appoint such officers as are necessary for the proper discharge of its functions, on such reasonable terms and conditions as it thinks fit. Salary grade should be determined by job evaluation. It is advisable to set up any temporary contracts for a fixed term.
40. It is important that sight is not lost of the Council's recruitment, retention, and vacancy management policies, which should be followed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: AB Date 15/06/22]

41. As detailed in the body of the report the overall cost of one-off non-recurrent investment needed to stabilise the workforce capacity and drive improvement is

£4.03m; of which £3.27m of the investment is for two years and £0.76m is for one year. Where funding has been agreed for a one-year period, the benefits will be assessed and future need identified. The costs of the investment need to be managed within the overall funding envelope.

42. The one-off non-recurrent investment of £4.03m will be funded from the remaining balance of the Council's Covid-19 Earmarked Reserve £3.37m and £0.66m from Council-Wide centrally held budget (contingency).
43. The proposed changes to fostering carer payments will require ongoing recurrent funding of £0.84m as detailed in the body of the report and summarised in the table in paragraph 27. The required recurrent funding of £0.84m will be permanently funded from Council-Wide centrally held budget (contingency).
44. The proposed changes to the fostering carer payments will help to deliver a £2.29m savings target for fostering over the next three financial years, 2022/23 – 2024/25, from reducing the number of Independent Fostering Agency placements (IFA's) and increasing the number of In House Fostering placements.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: KW Date: 16/06/22]

45. There are significant HR implications for the council arising from the report. As there is a proposed transfer of undertakings on 1st September 2022 all employees who were employed in the transferring services immediately before the transfer will automatically transfer from DCST (the transferor) to the council (the transferee) and the council will take over the rights and obligations arising from those contracts of employment. DCST will need to ensure that any appointments are reflected in updated due diligence information to the council. DCST will need to work with the council as to the timing of recruitment and terms on which posts are advertised and recruited to. All posts advertised from 1st July must be advertised on council terms and conditions and any recruitment of staff commencing after transfer must be offered and engaged by the council on its terms and conditions of employment.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: PW Date: 15/06/22]

46. There are no anticipated technology implications in relation to this report. However, any technology requirements to support the identified improvements would require further consultation with Digital & ICT.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: CW Date: 15/06/22]

47. Children who suffer adverse experiences are at increased risk of poor health outcomes in later life. It is well documented that looked after children in particular are more likely to suffer poor health and wellbeing outcomes than their peers. Several aspects of the proposed spend are likely to lead to better outcomes for children known to social care in general, but in particular those who require removal from the family home. Adoption can provide children with a stable home environment and trusted adults in their life, both of which are key to child development and to mitigating the effects of childhood trauma.
48. Other proposals to increase the therapeutic and psychological service offer for

families should be beneficial in addressing issues at a family level and provide children and families tools to navigate and build resilience to adversity.

49. Additional targeted investment focused on working with girls who have had children removed before the age of 18 should be linked closely with public health commissioned services to support the wider health and wellbeing of these vulnerable young women.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials FT Date 15/06/22]

50. In taking this decision, elected members are reminded of their obligations under section 149 Equality Act 2010. This section contains the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which obliges public authorities, when exercising their functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to: -

- a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct which the Act prohibits;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share relevant protected characteristics and those who do not; and
- c) Foster good relations between people who share relevant protected characteristics and those who do not.

51. Protected characteristics are age, gender, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy and maternity. Only the first aim of the PSED set out in paragraph (a) above applies to a further protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership. Having due regard to advancing equality involves: -

- a) Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristic;
- b) taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where they are different to the needs of other people; and
- c) Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

52. Elected members must consciously consider and have due regard to the three aims of the general equality duty when dealing with the recommendations contained within this report. The Council uses a simple due regard process to ensure due regard is considered and to support a transparent, effective process that is accountable to users and residents. Amongst others, the "due regard" will be informed by: -

- a) **Establishing the key equality issues across Doncaster (Equality Analysis)** – Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Framework sets out in one place our EDI objectives and arrangements for embedding equality into everything we do. It outlines our commitment to EDI, and links directly to our strategic ambitions. Our budget proposals seek to limit the impact of budget cuts on the most vulnerable; and
- b) **Prioritisation and Planning** – Our key strategic budget themes specifically prioritise the needs of the most disadvantaged in our communities.

53. Equality implications have been carefully considered for the proposed changes to the foster carer payment arrangements and the Due Regard Statement is detailed at Appendix 3.

54. The impact on individual payments will be positive for all carers. Foster carers

accept that those on Level 3 caring for 16+ young people are the only group who will receive a minimal increase, recognising that the current payment is competitive. Informal discussion with foster carers confirms the view of the Focus Group with no challenge made to Level 3 16+ payments.

CONSULTATION

55. Foster carers have been informing the management team that they do not feel valued and upon further exploration, this has been based on the financial reward they receive under their contract for services as self-employed persons. Foster carers have been explicit in some of their demands such as the return of the four weeks additional child's allowance a year broken down into two weeks for summer holidays, one week for Christmas and one week for birthdays. In addition foster carers want to be appropriately rewarded for their skills, experience and knowledge and wish to be proud to be a Level 1, 2 or 3 carer, rather than children be deemed to be a certain level which is not respectful to the child.
56. Discussions have taken place with foster carers about the proposed removal of the TSD payments of £25pw, they understand it is a requirement to undertake TSD in order to be a foster carer and the reward is to be able to move up to the next skill level. Foster carers understood that we wish to use these funds towards reinstating the four weeks additional children's allowances. Foster carers understand this and are accepting of this proposal.
57. In discussions with the Doncaster Foster Care Association, agreement has been reached regarding our proposal to move foster carers down a skill level if they do not undertake the required training and engagement with the Fostering Service. Foster carers tell us they want to be recognised for their commitment and they want the same rules applied to all, they acknowledge that this is what our proposals will do. A level 3 carer will receive the same payment whether they are caring for a premature baby receiving oxygen or a 16 year old who is missing from placement, this has been warmly embraced by the fostering community.

Focus Group Engagement

58. A focus group of nine foster carers was held on 14th June 2022 consisting of potential foster carers in assessment, newly approved foster carers under 1 year and carers at level 1, 2 and 3 to enable good feedback to be gathered on the payment changes. The group consisted of women aged between 26-64 years, the majority identified as white British and black British foster carers were also represented. Seven of the foster carers were either married/co-habiting with two foster carers being single. Areas discussed:
- a) Child allowance - age related
 - b) Skill fees -not age related: Level 1 newly approved foster carers, Level 2 foster carers who have achieved TSD workbook; Level 3 experience carers usually five years +.
 - c) No change to payment at top of level 3.
 - d) Progression route explained to move up the levels determined by foster carer evidence / portfolio of evidence to support that level of experience with interview with Team Manager & Service Manager for Level 2 and Service Manager & Assistant Director for Level 3. This will enable progression but also ensure carers are supported to progress through a fit for purpose training programme.
 - e) The additional benefits for carers include: 2 weeks allowance in the summer for holiday, 1 weeks for birthday /name days (age related), 1

week for Christmas/festivals. These additional allowances are for the child, to be spent on the child, to ensure that every child has a holiday with their foster carers every year, that they have presents of value on their name days/birthdays and at their cultural festivals during the year.

- f) Discussed other proposals including: Glasses / contact lenses allowance, Specialists schemes, Emergency/same day placement 28 day scheme, Parent and child assessment foster placements, Children with disabilities/complex needs and 7% increase already applied in 2022/23 for inflation responding to the increasing prices.
- g) Expectations were made clear to the focus group including:
 - i) Expectation that every foster carer has a Professional Development Plans to support and promote their development and this is linked to the levels.
 - ii) Training has been moved to the Panel Advisor who has capacity to develop a training programme which includes mandatory training for each level, including refresher training every year
 - iii) All approved foster carers in the household have to undertake mandatory and refresher training to remain at their skill level
 - iv) If standards are not met carer will be moved back down levels

59. Foster Carers Views and Feedback received as part of the consultation include:

- a) Foster carers were engaged and asked lots of questions; their feedback is
- b) Feel training not been good but knows this is being sorted
- c) Training is not challenging enough more tick box exercises
- d) Want more advanced training such as 1001 critical days – delivered by NHS
- e) Sounds good; the splitting of children's money and carer skills fee is great and this change is positive although now need to pay tax
- f) Foster carers would welcome a workshop covering tax and National Insurance
- g) Really good about spectacle allowances
- h) Training – needs to be more flexible... evening for example
- i) As a level 2 looking after a baby the payment from £16pw is a huge leap; so very pleased
- j) Expectations regarding carers commitment to training and also being ambassadors for the Council's fostering service, feel this is appropriate and feel this level of expectation is right
- k) Really pleased – will support foster cares more and make then stay
- l) Love level 2 – will make such a difference
- m) Like emergency scheme – develop 28 day emergency scheme
- n) Felt too good to be true – waiting for the catch!
- o) Happy to do more if they feel valued
- p) Like the fairness / previous experience could be variable

60. This report has significant implications in terms of the following: -

Procurement		Crime & Disorder	
Human Resources	X	Human Rights & Equalities	
Buildings, Land & Occupiers		Environment & Sustainability	
I.C.T.		Capital Programme	

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Revenue budget 2022/23 to 2024/25, Council 28th February, 2022
[Revenue budget 2022-23.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACPS – Area Child Protection Teams
DCST – Doncaster Children’s Services Trust
EDI - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
IFT – Inspiring Futures Team
LGA – Local Government Association
MTFS – Medium-term Financial Strategy
PSED – Public Sector Equality Duty
TSD – Training Support & Development
UASC – Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

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