

## **FOSTER FOR PLYMOUTH SUPPORT AND RETENTION OFFER TO OUR FOSTER CARERS 2024/2025**



### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Plymouth City Council held its first Fostering Summit on 31 January 2024 to consider and co-design our new and improved Support and Retention Offer to Our Foster Carers. The summit was attended by over 45 people with a wide range of roles and experience of fostering. It provided a valuable opportunity to hear Foster Carers' experiences, feedback and ideas about how we can best support them and attract more foster carers to Foster for Plymouth.

The key themes from the summit related to financial, practical and emotional support, perks and benefits, foster carer training, practice improvements and training for staff across Children's Social Care and Education, Participation and Skills.

The changes to the offer have been implemented in two phases, the financial offer which has previously been presented to Cabinet and the wider support and development elements of the offer which is presented today.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Plymouth City Council are committed to providing a robust, comprehensive, creative, competent and confident City wide fostering family. We know that our Support Offer to Foster Carers is at the heart of our mission to improve the lives of children in care and to support our compassionate and committed Foster Carers.

Plymouth City Council's first Fostering Summit was held in January 2024 to co-design our new and improved Support and Retention Offer with our Foster Carers. The summit was attended by over 45 people with a wide range of roles and experience of fostering in Plymouth including 18 Foster Carers and Connected Carers, elected members, the Director of Children's Services, Service Director, Head of Service and members of the Fostering Team and Fostering Panel. Foster Carers also represented their views via the Foster Carer Ambassadors.

The summit provided a valuable opportunity to hear Foster Carers' experiences, feedback and ideas about how we can best support them and the children they look after as well as attract more foster carers to Foster for Plymouth.

As previously presented, the new Financial Offer was implemented from 1st April 2024 and included:

- A 6% uplift to the fostering allowance with a commitment to an annual review of allowances in line with the financial year.
- Reward payments, which were previously less for children aged 0-10 than they are for those aged 11-17, equalised at the higher level.
- The Festival, Birthday and Holiday Allowances have been uplifted in line with the weekly maintenance allowances.
- The introduction of a Council Tax Allowance.

## **OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU: PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL'S SUPPORT AND RETENTION OFFER TO OUR FOSTER CARERS 2024/2025**

“Our Commitment To You: Plymouth City Council’s Support and Retention Offer to Our Foster Carers 2024/2025” has been co-designed with our Foster Carers to produce. The document is attached to this paper and the key areas of the commitment are as follows:

### **Training Our Workforce to Ensure Good Communication, Value and Respect**

Many of the issues and ideas raised by our Foster Carers relate to consistency and quality of practice across One Children’s Service and with partners. A range of commitments are made to improve quality and consistency of practice, with foster carers being key to the recruitment, training and development of our workforce.

### **Practical and Emotional Support**

This covers the commitments of the Fostering Service, Children’s Social Workers, the wider team within the Local Authority and our partners to respond in a timely way to our foster carers when they need advice or support and to always listen and hear the voices of our foster carers. This also covers how the Fostering Service will support the development of peer networks of support for all foster carers, alongside the development of the Mockingbird constellation.

### **Training for Foster Carers**

This includes ensuring that Foster Carers co-design the training offer based on their knowledge and skills.

### **Special Opportunities and Events**

Plymouth City Council commit to continuing to support the vital work of the social committee. Plymouth City Council will develop an increased range of activities for children, young people and foster carers with support from our partners, local businesses and establish a City wide response to supporting our fostering community.

## **THE VOICE OF OUR FOSTER CARERS**

Our Foster Carer Ambassadors fed back that the new Support and Retention Offer to Our Foster Carers 2024/2025 is a fair and comprehensive offer and shows exemplary intentions. They feel that this will ensure that support is implemented and enable them to hold the Local Authority and partners to account if this is not achieved.

They have also shared that through this process and in the implementation of the new financial offer as well as the support and retention offer, they have felt listened to, heard and respected. They have seen senior leaders and elected members take notice of their expert knowledge and make meaningful change as a result, for which they have expressed their thanks.

## **NEXT STEPS**

In consultation with our Foster Carers, we have agreed that the Foster Carer Summit will become an annual event to ensure regular review and co-design of the Support and Retention Offer. Summit attendees will include foster carers, connected carers, children, young people, staff from across One Children's Service and partners.

Alongside the annual summit, we will conduct an annual survey with all foster carers to ensure that every foster carer has the opportunity to feedback and input as well as consultation with children and young people in the review and further development of the offer an annual 'Our commitment to You.