



FOSTER FOR PLYMOUTH

GIVE LOCAL CHILDREN A BRIGHT FUTURE

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

2024/2025



PROVIDING HAPPY HOMES FOR
CHILDREN ACROSS PLYMOUTH

1. Introduction

In January 2024, Plymouth City Council hosted their first Foster Carer Summit to consider and co-design our new and improved Support and Retention Offer to Our Foster Carers. This is our commitment to you as Our Foster Carers and will be available to inform individuals who are considering Fostering for Plymouth. When we refer to Foster Carers in this document, this includes our Connected Carers who have been approved through Fostering Panel.

There were some key themes from the group discussions which relate to financial support, practical and emotional support, perks and benefits, foster carers training, practice improvements and training for Children's Social Care and Education, Participation & Skills.

The changes to the offer have been implemented in two phases to ensure that Foster Carers received the enhanced financial support in a timely way.

This document summarises the key elements of the new offer while the detail is provided for our Foster Carers (including our approved Connected Carers) in the following documents:

- Foster Carer Financial Support Offer: Payments and Allowances 2024/2025 (previously known as the Financial Handbook)
- Foster for Plymouth Statement of Purpose
- Foster for Plymouth Charter

2. Financial Support Offer

The enhanced package of financial support, allowances and additional payments for all Foster Carers was implemented in April 2024. The Foster Carer Financial Support Offer: Payments and Allowances 2024/2025 (previously known as the Financial Handbook) details all payments and allowances that Foster Carers can expect from Foster for Plymouth.

2.1 Commitment to an Annual Review and Increase In Allowances

Plymouth City Council has given a commitment to our Foster Carers that their payments and allowances will be reviewed with them at an annual summit held in January each year ahead of the annual review of the offer.

Plymouth City Council has given a commitment that an annual uplift will be agreed to ensure that our allowances, before the addition of the reward element, remain at least in line with the national minimum or recommended allowance for foster carers for each age band.

2.2 Key Changes in the Enhanced 2024/2025 Financial Offer

Fostering Allowances for Plymouth City Council Foster Carers (Including Connected Carers)

All Foster Carers receive a weekly allowance based on the child's age and assessed needs.

Your fostering allowance is comprised of a weekly maintenance allowance (age related) and a reward element (needs related).

The weekly maintenance allowance remains within age bands, as per the national guidance. This has been uplifted by at least 6% from 1st April 2024.

Every Foster Carer will receive a reward element for each child they care for. Following consultation with Foster Carers at the 2024 Fostering Summit and in recognition of the skills, experience and

commitment of Foster Carers caring for all of our children and young people; the reward element is now the same across all age bands. The reward elements were also increased by 6% for 2024/25.

Council Tax Allowance

The Council Tax Allowance was approved by Cabinet in July 2024 and will provide an additional allowance to cover the cost of your Council Tax where eligibility criteria are met. This is in addition to payments of Fostering Allowances and will be reviewed annually.

The process by which Council Tax Allowances is being implemented and eligible Foster Carers will be reimbursed for payments already made in the 2024/2025 financial year.

Council Tax Allowances will be available to those Foster Carers living in Plymouth or outside of Plymouth, with different processes required for those outside of the Plymouth City Council area.

Birthday, Festival and Holiday Allowances

Birthday and festival allowances have been uplifted to the equivalent of the new weekly maintenance allowance only not including the reward element.

Day care costs for children excluded from school (All Foster Carers except Band 4 Carers)

Where a child is excluded from school during term time for a period of 10 school days or more and no alternative full time package has been arranged, an increased allowance of £25 per school day is payable.

Disturbance Allowance

Placements made by the Out of Hours Service between 10pm to 6am will be supported by an increased payment of £50 for disturbance, in recognition of the time and inconvenience incurred.

Prom Allowance

The contribution to the cost of clothing or other items to enable each young person to attend their prom to celebrate finishing statutory education has been increased to a maximum of £175.

3. Our Support and Retention Offer to Our Foster Carers - Our Commitment To You

Following the Foster Carer Summit and subsequent discussions and consultation with foster carers we have developed the wider support offer and commitment to our Foster Carers which sits alongside the financial offer.

Our Foster Carers told us that the support that makes the biggest difference to them and the children they care for is how we all communicate with them, how they are treated, valued and respected. Therefore, there are elements of the new offer to our foster carers which relate to practice improvements and training for Children's Social Care, Health and Education, Participation and Skills.

The other key areas of the improved offer relate to practical and emotional support, perks and benefits and foster carers training. These commitments to our foster carers are set out in full within our Foster for Plymouth Charter and Statement of Purpose.

Training Our Workforce to Ensure Good Communication, Value and Respect

We note that 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. The following commitments within our offer will improve quality and consistency of practice:

- The updated One Children's Service Induction will include a session/workshop with Foster Carers for all new staff across Children's Social Care and Education, Participation and Skills.
- The ASYE program will include workshops with Foster Carers for all new staff.
- Operational and strategic leaders from Children's Social Care, Health (including CAMHS) and Education, Participation and Skills will attend the quarterly Foster Carer Forum Events.
- Representatives from each key partner, including Social Workers, Virtual School, education providers, health and community connections will attend the Foster Carer annual summit to share their views, learn together and co-design the annual reviewed offer.
- Social Workers and IROs will book their next visit to their child or young person with the Foster Carer before leaving the current visit. Foster carers understand that this may need to change but this enables them to plan and prepare the child or young person.
- Social Workers will ensure that where there are any proposed changes to a child or young person's care plan; the foster carer(s) are involved in the discussions/meetings or at least informed immediately by them of the change.
- Social Workers will always provide feedback to the Foster Carer's Annual Review, sharing this with the Foster Carer in advance.
- If it is necessary for a duty worker to attend a planned visit instead of the allocated Social Worker, the foster carer will be informed in advance so that the child can be prepared.
- Where a child or young person is moving to another placement or being placed for adoption; every effort will be made for this to be completed by the allocated Social Worker or an agreed person who knows them well. If this is not possible, it will be discussed in advance with the foster carer.
- Foster Carers will be encouraged to provide 360 Feedback for the Annual Performance Reviews of Plymouth City Council staff.
- The Fostering Team will work with the Recruitment Team to ensure that Foster Carer representatives will be invited to participate in interview panels for key recruitment positions to include Social Workers, social work management posts, Virtual School and SEND.
- The recruitment team will arrange a quarterly coffee and cake morning to welcome new foster carers to our fostering family and enable networking.
- The allocated social worker will ensure that a child/young person's passport is ordered at the beginning of the child's journey, so as not to create issues when a holiday is planned. The IRO will commit to discussing this at the initial and subsequent Statutory Reviews.
- Social Workers, Supervising Social Workers and Team Managers will ensure that the foster carer is provided with accurate, detailed information before a child is placed, provide a signed medical consent and delegated authority form on the day of placement and that the Placement Planning Meeting is always held within 5 working days.
- Where additional support packages are offered by the Social Worker, Supervising Social Worker or Team Manager; they will ensure that this has been agreed at the correct level of financial delegation and is confirmed in writing.

Practical and Emotional Support

- We will continue to provide and support 2 Foster Carer Ambassadors to represent all Foster Carers and ensure a close link with the fostering team and with senior leadership.
- Where a child, young person or foster carer requires support with education; the Virtual School and SEND Team (as relevant), will commit to make contact with the Foster Carer within 5 working days of a query being raised. Where this relates to suspensions, exclusions, non-attendance or a concern about the school the response will be within 24 hours.
- Where a child, young person or foster carer requires support with health; the Child in Care Nursing Team will commit to make contact with the Foster Carer or young person within 5 working days of a query being raised.
- Where a child, young person or foster carer requires urgent and immediate support in relation to the child/young person experiencing a mental health crisis; the foster carer can call the First Response line to access immediate support. Livewell Southwest's First Response Service (NHS 111 and select the mental health option) is a 24/7 crisis line providing advice, support and signposting for people experiencing mental health difficulties.
- Where a child, young person or foster carer requires support in relation to the child/young person's mental health; the Fostering Team will ensure that a consultation is held with the Children in Care CAMHS Team, Foster Carer and Supervising Social Worker within 7 working days of a query being raised with the CAMHS Children in care Team. The consultation will offer support and advice on how best to support the young person. It may be agreed that a referral should be made by the social worker or supervising social worker for further assessment. Foster Carers can also make contact with the team themselves on 01752 435125 (option 7).
- We recognise that there are times when Foster Carers need support to manage the competing appointments and transport requirements of the children and young people in their care and their own commitments. We will actively encourage a network of peer support so that foster carers can support each other and we will provide financial support to enable this if required. This will include:
 - A list of carers with an education background who are willing to offer to support children who are excluded, on reduced timetables, awaiting a school placement or in need of additional support.
 - A list of carers who are willing to offer day care to support other carers to attend training, meetings or have some down time.
 - A list of carers who may be able to share transport to specific schools or support another foster carer with transport
- Some children, young people and foster carers benefit from a pattern of regular sleepovers with a familiar person (respite) to support everyone. We commit to ensuring that where this is an assessed need, we have sufficient respite carers to provide this, not just for those who are supported through a Mockingbird constellation.
- Where it is necessary, a simple mobile phone can be provided to foster carers to use just for family time arrangements and calls.
- Where a Foster for Plymouth Foster Carers requires support from Out of Hours, they will be afforded a consistent, respectful and timely service.
- Foster carers are able to access Fit & Fed for any child in their care.
- Plymouth City Council are a Fostering Friendly Employer, so if you are also employed by Plymouth City Council, you will benefit from paid leave to attend training, meetings relating to your role as a foster carer or meetings for the children you care for. This can also include dates for your assessment as a foster carer and attending Fostering Panel if you are a PCC employee and considering becoming a foster carer. The details are set out in the PCC Foster Carer Leave Arrangements Policy.

Training for Foster Carers

- The Fostering Reviewing and Training Officer will gather feedback from all Foster Carers through Annual Reviews to co-design the training offer.
- The Fostering Reviewing and Training Officer will attend the annual Foster Carer Summit to consult with Foster Carers on any changes required to the training offer.
- Bespoke training will be made available alongside the mandatory offer; foster carers are able to raise any identified needs through their supervising social worker or at their annual review.
- To ensure attendance at training, a list of carers who are willing to offer day care to support other carers will be created.
- Foster Carers will be part of the review and delivery of all Skills to Foster courses to ensure that learning is based on experience alongside theory.
- Connected carers will be provided with a handbook and trauma training from placement start, so that this is available in the assessment phase not just when approved.

Special Opportunities and Events

- We commit to continuing to support the vital work of the social committee as well as developing an increased range of activities for children, young people and foster carers with support from across Plymouth City Council and our partners (for example – activities through the National Marine Park, the British Firework Championships, theatre tickets and the Summer Sessions).
- Foster for Plymouth will work with the Plymouth City Council Events Team and our partners to increase opportunities for free and reduced price access to local events for our Foster Carers.

Future developments to explore

- While we are not currently in a position to provide an in house team of therapists or mental health professionals; we commit to undertaking a review of the CAMHS offer and to consult with foster carers throughout that process.
- We will work with our partners to explore the provision of bespoke holiday clubs for cared for children and young people.