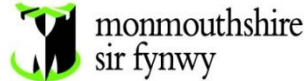


Public Document Pack



Neuadd y Sir
Y Rhadyr
Brynbuga
NP15 1GA

County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Tuesday, 14 May 2024

Dear Councillor

INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

Notice is hereby given that the following decisions made by a member of the cabinet will be made on Wednesday, 22 May 2024.

1. **COLLECTION OF MONIES SECURED UNDER A LAND CHARGE REGISTERES AT UPPER HOUSE FARM, MONMOUTH IN CONNECTION WITH URGENT WORKS NOTICE SERVED AT ALLT Y BELLA** 1 - 58

Division/Wards Affected:

CABINET MEMBER: County Councillor Paul Griffiths

AUTHOR: Amy Longford – Heritage and Development Management Area Manager

CONTACT DETAILS:

E-mail: amylongford@monmouthshire.gov.uk

2. **IMPROVING THE OFFER TO MONMOUTHSHIRE FOSTER CARERS** 59 - 82

Division/Wards Affected: All Wards

CABINET MEMBER: County Councillor Ian Chandler

AUTHOR:
Charlotte Drury

CONTACT DETAILS

E-mail: charlottedrury@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Yours sincerely,

Paul Matthews
Chief Executive

CABINET PORTFOLIOS

County Councillor	Area of Responsibility	Ward
Mary Ann Brocklesby	<p>Leader Lead Officer – Paul Matthews, Matthew Gatehouse</p> <p>Whole Authority Strategy and Direction Whole authority performance review and evaluation Promoting localism within regional and national frameworks Relationships with Welsh Government, UK Government and local government associations Regional Relationships with City Regions and Public Service Board Strategic Procurement Local Food production and consumption, including agroforestry and local horticulture</p>	Llanelly
Paul Griffiths	<p>Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development Deputy Leader Lead Officer – Frances O'Brien</p> <p>Economic Strategy Local development plan and strategic development plan including strategic housing sites Homelessness, affordable housing delivery and private sector housing (empty homes, leasing scheme, home improvement loans, disabled facilities grants and adaptive tech) Supporting Town Centres including car parking and enforcement Development Management and Building Control Skills and Employment Broadband connectivity Car parks and civil enforcement trading standards, environmental health, public protection, and licencing</p>	Chepstow Castle & Larkfield
Ben Callard	<p>Cabinet Member for Resources Lead Officers – Peter Davies, Frances O'Brien, Jane Rodgers</p> <p>Finance including MTFP and annual budget cycle Benefits Digital and information technology Human resources, payroll, health and safety Land and buildings Property maintenance and management Emergency planning</p>	Llanfoist & Govilon

Martyn Groucutt	<p>Cabinet Member for Education Lead Officers – Will McLean, Ian Saunders</p> <p>Early Years Education All age statutory education Additional learning needs/inclusion Post 16 and adult education School standards and improvement Community learning Sustainable communities for learning Programme Youth service School transport</p>	Lansdown
Ian Chandler	<p>Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services Lead Officer – Jane Rodgers</p> <p>Children’s services Fostering & adoption Youth Offending service Adult services Whole authority safeguarding (children and adults) Disabilities Mental health and wellbeing Relationships with health providers and access to health provision</p>	Llantilio Crossenny
Catrin Maby	<p>Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment Lead Officer – Frances O’Brien, Ian Saunders</p> <p>Decarbonisation Transport planning, public transport, highways and MCC fleet Active travel Waste management, street care, litter, public spaces, and parks Pavements and back lanes Flood alleviation, management and recovery Countryside, biodiversity, and river health</p>	Drybridge
Angela Sandles	<p>Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement Lead Officers – Frances O’Brien,, Matthew Gatehouse, Jane Rodgers</p> <p>Community inequality and poverty (health, income, nutrition, disadvantage, discrimination, isolation and cost of living crisis) Citizen engagement and democracy promotion including working with voluntary organisations Citizen experience - community hubs, contact centre, and customer service and registrars Leisure centres, play and sport Tourism Development and Cultural strategy</p>	Town

	Public conveniences Electoral Services and constitution review Communications, public relations and marketing Ethics and standards Welsh Language Rights of Way	
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Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

Our Purpose

- to become a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life.

Objectives we are working towards

- Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced;
- Green place to live and work with reduced carbon emissions and making a positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency;
- Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres and where businesses can grow and develop
- Safe place to live where people have a home where they feel secure in;
- Connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued;
- Learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential

Our Values

Openness. We are open and honest. People have the chance to get involved in decisions that affect them, tell us what matters and do things for themselves/their communities. If we cannot do something to help, we'll say so; if it will take a while to get the answer we'll explain why; if we can't answer immediately we'll try to connect you to the people who can help – building trust and engagement is a key foundation.

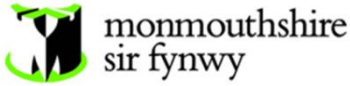
Fairness. We provide fair chances, to help people and communities thrive. If something does not seem fair, we will listen and help explain why. We will always try to treat everyone fairly and consistently. We cannot always make everyone happy, but will commit to listening and explaining why we did what we did.

Flexibility. We will continue to change and be flexible to enable delivery of the most effective and efficient services. This means a genuine commitment to working with everyone to embrace new ways of working.

Teamwork. We will work with you and our partners to support and inspire everyone to get involved so we can achieve great things together. We don't see ourselves as the 'fixers' or problem-solvers, but we will make the best of the ideas, assets and resources available to make sure we do the things that most positively impact our people and places.

Kindness: We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.

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SCHEDULE 12A LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 EXEMPTION FROM DISCLOSURE OF DOCUMENTS

MEETING AND DATE OF MEETING: 17th April 2024

TITLE OF REPORT: Collections of monies secured under a land charge registered in connection with an Urgent Works Notice.

AUTHOR: Amy Longford

I have considered grounds for exemption of information contained in the report referred to above and make the following recommendation to the Proper Officer:-

EXEMPTIONS APPLYING TO THE REPORT:

The report relates to the personal property and circumstances of an individual residing in the County. It specifically refers to their personal finances and property. With this in mind it is considered that the report should be exempt under Part 4 Sch 12A of the LGA 1972 (paras 12, 13 and 14) as it refers to the personal finances of an individual.

FACTORS IN FAVOUR OF DISCLOSURE:

Full transparency in decision making

PREJUDICE WHICH WOULD RESULT IF THE INFORMATION WERE DISCLOSED:

The disclosure of personal financial and individual circumstances could result in a data breach and non compliance with GPDR Regulations.

MY VIEW ON THE PUBLIC INTEREST TEST IS AS FOLLOWS:

That the risk of non disclosure is limited and that the risk of disclosure is considerable.

RECOMMENDED DECISION ON EXEMPTION FROM DISCLOSURE:

To consider the full report including all appendices as exempt.

Date: 13.05.2024

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'AEL'.

Signed:

Post: Development Management Area Manager

I accept the recommendation made above

Proper Officer: _____ 

Date: 14th May 2024

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SUBJECT:	Improving the Offer to Monmouthshire Foster Carers
DIRECTORATE:	Social Care & Health
MEETING:	Individual Cabinet Member Decision
DATE:	22nd May 2024
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	All

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to present the case for providing Monmouthshire County Council foster carers with a subsidy on their council tax.
- 1.2 Whilst this report deals specifically with the provision of a council tax subsidy for Monmouthshire County Council foster carers, it also sets out the need to undertake a review of the wider offer to foster carers in order to support the on-going work to recruit and retain Monmouthshire carers.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To award foster carers with a 30% council tax subsidy to support the recruitment and retention of Monmouthshire County Council foster carers who care for Monmouthshire children.
- 2.2 To review the wider offer to foster carers to ensure it meets the needs of foster carers and offers a package that is competitive within the region.

3. KEY ISSUES

The Case for A Council Tax Subsidy for Monmouthshire Carers

- 3.1 As part of Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) Children Services Fostering Strategy 2023 – 2025, the fostering service has been working to improve MCC's

offer to foster carers in order to recruit and retain foster carers and reduce MCC's reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). This is in the light of both the financial burden of the cost of these placements on the local authority and the imperative created by the Welsh Government policy to eliminate profit from the care of Children Looked After (CLA), referred to here as the Eliminate agenda.

- 3.2 The support offer to foster carers provides both practical support (e.g. supervising social workers, out of hours support and a psychology and therapy service) and a level of financial remuneration through fees and allowances to ensure fostering is financially viable. Having a considered, sustainable, and attractive package of support will, it is hoped, encourage more people to consider fostering, promote foster carer retention, encourage the conversion of IFA carers to Monmouthshire carers (where we have children placed), and to make Monmouthshire a local authority of choice for foster carers. This is critical if we are to get close to achieving placement sufficiency, eliminate our reliance on IFAs before 2027 (when the regulations are expected to change) and reduce the need for high-cost placements.
- 3.3 Prior to undertaking a wider review, it is proposed that a subsidy on council tax for foster carers would be an immediate and affordable next step to increase the overall offer.
- 3.4 Council tax subsidies are currently offered in Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wrexham CBC, Ynys Mon CC and Flintshire CC. Local authorities in Merthyr Tydfil, Ynys Mon and Flintshire offer a council tax subsidy of 50%. Wrexham CBC offers a council tax subsidy of 75%.
- 3.5 Given the current financial climate, although there is a strong financial case to be made for the importance of recruiting and retaining additional foster carers, this has to be balanced against the loss to MCC of the council tax revenue and therefore, two options have been proposed, a 50% subsidy in line with Merthyr Tydfil, Ynys Mon and Flintshire, and a more modest, yet still attractive subsidy of 30%.

- 3.6 A flat fee of £1,000 subsidy to council tax bills was considered. This would have equated to a £61,000 cost. However, this was discounted partly due to the difficulties of applying a fixed amount subsidy for the team who would be required to do this, it would also have introduced the issue of an annual inflationary uplift causing additional work and would have given some foster carers a significantly higher subsidy (in a few cases in excess of 100%) than others. This was therefore discounted as being inequitable and impractical.
- 3.7 Any council tax subsidy awarded will be based on the net council tax after any reliefs and exemptions have been applied (e.g. Council Tax Reduction Scheme – CTRS). This will reduce the forecast spend however, without looking at each account separately, it has not been possible to forecast by exactly how much.
- 3.8 In order to calculate the costs of the proposed subsidy, we have looked at the Council Tax costings for all MCC foster carers. For the 19 foster carers living outside MCC, whilst these figures have not been validated by finance, the figures were arrived at by using the government website Check your Council Tax band - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) website <https://www.gov.uk/council-tax-bands> to get accurate bandings for each address. Local authority websites were then checked to get accurate costings for each property. Not all councils have given the rates for 2024/25 and so we have uplifted each amount by 5% to give an approximate figure for 2024/25.
- 3.9 If a percentage subsidy was used comparable with the other Welsh authorities, a 50% reduction would incur a reduction of Council Tax revenue of £56,584 for existing carers that reside in Monmouthshire and cost of £19,120 for carers out of county, totalling £75,704. A more modest subsidy of 30% Council Tax would incur a reduction of Council Tax revenue of £33,950 for existing carers that reside in Monmouthshire and cost of £11,473 for carers out of county, totalling £45,423. Discussions around applying a Council Tax subsidy for foster carers have been on-going as part of the development of the Fostering Strategy and a Budget Pressure has been built in for Council Tax for 2024/25 for £50,000 which would cover the 30% subsidy.

- 3.10 If accepted, it is proposed that the scheme be open to all local authority foster carers fostering Monmouthshire children. Discussions with the Council Tax department have taken place as to how the scheme would work. The Fostering Team will be responsible for notifying the Revenues Shared Service of any new foster carers and any cancellations throughout the year (including start and end dates). On a 6 monthly basis the Revenues Shared Service will provide a list of exemptions applied to the Foster Care Team. It will be the responsibility of the Foster Care Team to review this list and notify the Shared Service of any amendments. The Council Tax department would apply the subsidy on a pro rata basis and also end the subsidy for any foster carers no longer fostering for the local authority. Carers living outside the area would receive the 30% subsidy administered as 10 monthly payments following receipt of their council tax demand. This would be managed by the Fostering Team and paid as part of the fostering fees and allowances.
- 3.11 In addition to subsidising Council Tax for our current in-house carers to improve retention, it is hoped that the benefit of the Council Tax subsidy will encourage IFAs to consider converting to become MCC foster carers. A subsidy to Council Tax is a benefit only the local authority can offer. The current amount that IFAs pay to MCC in Council Tax is £74,842. In the extremely unlikely event that 100% of IFAs converted to LA foster carers, this would incur approximately an additional £30,000 commitment for MCC as a contribution to carers' council tax payments, however the cost saving to the local authority would be significantly in excess of this. If 10% or 25% of IFAs convert this would represent a £3,884 or £9,710 cost respectively.

The Need for a Wider Review

- 3.12 Council Tax exemption or discounts, or other similar benefits have a tangible, monetary value to fostering households; however, a wider review of the current fees and allowances structure for our carers is now required, the reasons for which are set out below. The review will need to consider the financial offer to carers in the context of the wider practical and professional offer that is already in place. Whilst any uplift to the financial offer for carers will place an additional cost pressure

on the service, this must be weighed against the potential savings that could be made if more Monmouthshire carers were recruited, together with the benefits this would bring in terms of achieving good outcomes for children. The outcomes of the review will form the basis of an options appraisal and cabinet report in September / October 2024 to align with the Council's budget setting process.

3.13 Today, the reality of foster caring is very different to how it might have been perceived in the past. Whilst it is true that foster carers do need (usually) a spare room and definitely a big heart, they also need the skills, patience, time and resources to invest in building relationships and caring for traumatised children whose behaviour can communicate their pain and distress in sometimes extremely challenging ways. Carers need to have the time and resources to organise their days and weeks around attending meetings, taking children to family time between the child and people who are important to them, attending training, writing daily recordings and responding to the numerous requests for information and support from social workers. If we are to effectively support our foster carers, we have to recognise and compensate carers for the time they will need to invest in caring for our children. That includes recognising that for many of our children, they will need carers who have a great deal of flexibility and availability of time and attention.

3.14 In common with other local authorities across the UK, MCC faces significant difficulties in the recruitment and retention of foster carers, which contributes to the overall insufficiency of placements for children. [Data from England shows that not only has the number of enquiries from potential foster carers fallen by 11% over the past two years but also more mainstream foster carers (excluding family and friends foster carers) stopped fostering than were approved, leading to a net decrease in fostering capacity]. As at 09/04/24, of the 120 children who are fostered in Monmouthshire 45 (37.5%) are currently placed with IFA foster carers. Of the remainder, 40 (33.3%) are with in-house generic foster carers and 35 (29.2%) are with kinship foster carers. Looking only at children placed outside of their family network, 53% are placed with IFA foster carers and 47% with MCC generic foster carers. It is hoped that reviewing our overall offer to in-house carers will assist with developing the means through which this differential could be reversed.

- 3.15 MCC's dependence on IFAs places it in a difficult position in regard to the Eliminate agenda because from 2027 local authorities will be unable to place children with for-profit IFAs. Our dependence on IFAs also comes at significant price as IFA placements cost anywhere between £751.06 to £1,615.67 (compared with a local authority placement which varies between £231 to £331). In spite of, or may be even because of, the Eliminate agenda, there has been a noticeable increase in IFA activity in Wales. In addition, evidence suggests this is also causing some providers to prioritise offering placements to children from England. Both of these factors are placing additional pressure on MCC in terms of the importance of recruiting and retaining foster carers.
- 3.16 The lack of availability of foster placement accounts, in part, for the relatively high number of children in residential placements currently. Residential care providers are likewise avoiding investing in Wales in preference to England. There is a risk that in the event of no alternative placement being available, children may have to be placed further away from home and community which is both less than ideal for the child and comes at a significant financial cost to the authority. In addition, it means that placement matching is often lacking in sophistication which increases the likelihood of placement breakdown with a further adverse impact on children.
- 3.17 Retention of existing foster carers is essential to achieve placement sufficiency and promote placement stability. Each year foster carers will be lost to MCC due to retirement, sickness, change of circumstances/career, transfer to IFAs and other life events. Five fostering households were lost to MCC over the past 3 year period due to a combination of retirement, move to IFAs, deregistration and changes in circumstances.
- 3.18 The demographic profile of our foster carers is towards an older age group with 66% being in over 50. The age range spans from 33 – 76 whilst carers in their 50s represent the single biggest age group (18, 46%) with 7 (18%) being in their 40s and only 2 being in their 30s. We are anticipating a further three fostering households retiring over the next 12-18 months.

3.19 Since 2019 considerable resource has been turned to recruitment activity and the implementation of a foster carer strategy. Despite our efforts we are not currently generating the number of enquiries needed and neither do we consistently meet our target conversion rate from initial inquiry to placement [Foster Wales has a target conversion rate of 12% conversion, the Gwent region is running at approximately 8%].

	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22	Target 22-23	Actual 22-23	Target 23-24	Actual 23-24	Target 24-25
Enquiries	56	60	52	75	53	84	76	92
Initial visits	24	16	15	25	20	28	11	31
Assessments	12	10	5		7		8	
Approvals	4	7	5	9	1	10	7	11

3.20 Based on our commissioning data, ideally, by 2027 MCC needs to recruit an additional 30 fostering households to meet current demand as well as compensate for those leaving fostering. If we are to come anywhere close to achieving this we need to be able to make fostering for MCC an attractive option.

3.21 MCC is in direct competition, not only with IFAs able to pay significantly higher placement fees, but also with neighbouring local authorities who also pay higher fees. IFA placements cost anywhere between £751.06 to £1,615.67 per week compared with a current local authority placement cost which varies between £231 to £331. Given MCC's reliance on IFA placements there is a strong financial case to develop and improve the foster carer offer to increase the number of local authority foster carers, retain the carers we currently have and attract IFA foster carers to foster for MCC. All of these issues will be fully considered within the review of the foster care offer.

3.22 Foster carers are generally positive about the holistic support they receive from MCC. They speak favourably about the support they get from supervising social workers and the psychology and therapy service (BASE). However they, like everyone else, are struggling with the cost of living and would like to see uplifts to fees and allowances in line with inflation. Although we were able to achieve this in 2024 / 2025, it is acknowledged that this is insufficient to bring the financial offer up to a competitive rate. [The increase in fostering allowances from 2023/24-2024/25

was 6%, based on inflation at the time, and 4.5% for the fee element which matched the pay award for staff in 2024/25 budget build.] We are aware the one major reason that foster carers chose to foster for IFAs is the fees and allowances they are paid and that there are foster carers living in Monmouthshire who foster for other local authorities. It is plausible that uncompetitive foster carer fees in MCC are a contributing factor to this.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION

4.1 Children who are looked after are a particularly vulnerable population as they have all experienced, to varying degrees, significant loss and trauma. MCC has a corporate parenting responsibility to these children to safeguard and promote their wellbeing as they would their own children. Having sufficient, high quality, foster placements is key this. A full impact assessment is included at appendix A.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The options are set out in the table below:

	Description	Costs	Benefits	Disbenefits/risks	Recommended
Option 1	Do nothing	Cost neutral	Cost neutral	Failure to recruit new foster carers or retain existing foster carers leading to increased costs as children are required to be placed with IFA carers or in residential homes. This will become increasingly risky as from 2027 local authorities will be unable to place children with for profit IFAs.	No
Option 2	Agree a £1000 fixed amount subsidy to council tax	An estimated reduction of council tax revenue of £42,000 for carers in Monmouthshire and cost of £19,000 for carers out of county, totalling £61,000.	<p>This would offer a tangible financial benefit to foster carers.</p> <p>A £1,000 subsidy is a significant benefit, especially for less affluent fostering households for whom the amount represents a greater %.</p> <p>A subsidy for council tax is not a benefit IFAs can offer and so represents a good marketing opportunity for MCC.</p>	<p>Cost in loss of revenue, however will be mitigated if we are able to recruit additional foster carers and bring children out of high cost placements or prevent children from being placed in high cost placements.</p> <p>A fixed subsidy is more difficult to administer than a percentage discount and needs to be annually reviewed.</p> <p>A fixed subsidy offers a disproportionate subsidy to some foster carers over others and is therefore less equitable than a % subsidy which applies equally to all foster carers.</p>	NO

				This is a higher amount than has been built into the budget pressure for 2024/25	
Option 3	Agree a 50% subsidy in council tax for foster carers	An estimated reduction of council tax revenue of £75,704	<p>This would offer a tangible financial benefit to foster carers.</p> <p>A 50% subsidy in council tax is a significant benefit to fostering households, and highly attractive in terms of promoting fostering, especially in a cost of living crisis. A 50% subsidy would match Merthyr Tydfil, Ynys Mon and Flintshire CBC's council tax subsidy.</p> <p>If this leads to recruitment and retention of additional foster carers, the additional cost will be mitigated as we will be able to bring children out of high cost placements or prevent children from being placed in high cost placements.</p> <p>A council tax subsidy is not a benefit IFAs can offer and so represents a good marketing opportunity for MCC.</p>	<p>Loss of Council Tax revenue. Although this matches Merthyr Tydfil, Ynys Mon and Flintshire CBC's council tax subsidy, the cost of property in MCC, and therefore council tax bandings are higher and therefore the cost in terms of loss of revenue will be higher.</p> <p>This is a higher amount than has been built into the budget pressure for 2024/25</p>	NO
Option 4	Agree a 30% reduction in council tax for foster carers	An estimated reduction of council tax revenue of £45,423	<p>This would offer a tangible financial benefit to foster carers.</p> <p>A 30% subsidy in council tax is a significant benefit to fostering</p>	Cost in loss of revenue.	YES

households, especially in a cost of living crisis.

If this leads to recruitment and retention of additional foster carers, the additional cost will be mitigated as we will be able to bring children out of high cost placements or prevent children from being placed in high cost placements.

A 30% subsidy is more affordable to MCC than a 50% reduction and is within the budget envelope built into the budget pressure for 2024/25.

A council tax subsidy is not a benefit IFAs can offer and so represents a good marketing opportunity for MCC.

6. EVALUTAION CRITERIA

- 6.1** Recruitment of carers is monitored within the current Fostering Strategy including numbers of inquiries generated through to final approval rates. Data is tracked and monitored against recruitment activity to identify what is most effective in terms of raising the profile of fostering and recruiting foster carers for Monmouthshire. In terms of retention, we monitor levels of satisfaction of foster carers through annual appraisals and wider engagement opportunities and ensure that the reasons why any foster carers stop fostering are fully understood. Alongside of data specifically relating to foster carers, the overall distribution of children's placements is monitored so that we can monitor the % of children placed with Monmouthshire carers.
- 6.2** For 2024 / 2025 the targets are: 92 initial inquiries; 31 follow up visits and 11 approvals. There are currently 4 foster care assessments in progress.

7. REASONS

- 7.1** The rationale for the proposal for introduction of a council tax subsidy is set out above. Principally it is designed to help make fostering for the local authority more attractive and financially viable in an environment where IFAs are aggressively recruiting, and the Local Authority cannot compete in terms of fees and allowances.
- 7.2** MCC has insufficient in-house foster placements for the children in its care causing a dependency on IFA placements. This is both costly and also makes us vulnerable in the light of the Eliminate agenda. The MCC offer to foster carers is not competitive, even across Gwent authorities. Given that foster carers can receive significantly more money for fostering with IFAs, MCC must find ways of making fostering for the Local Authority as attractive as possible if it is to recruit sufficient foster carers and retain the carers we have. A wider review is needed to better understand what the components of should look like and take account of both the financial and support elements.

7.3 It is accepted that the current financial situation for all local authorities is an extremely difficult one. These proposals are advanced on the basis that recruiting and retaining sufficient foster carers makes good economic sense as it reduces MCC's reliance on high-cost IFA and residential placements, and achieves better outcomes for children.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 A 50% subsidy would incur a reduction of council tax revenue of £56,584 for existing carers that reside in Monmouthshire and cost of £19,120 for carers out of county, totalling £75,704.

8.2 A 30% Council Tax subsidy would incur a reduction of council tax revenue of £33,950 for existing carers that reside in Monmouthshire and cost of £11,473 for carers out of county, totalling £45,423.

8.3 Discussions around applying a Council Tax subsidy for foster carers have been on-going as part of the development of the Fostering Strategy and a budget pressure has been built in for Council Tax for 2024/25 for £50,000. This means that a 30% subsidy would be affordable within the current budget envelope. However although first year costs will be within the £50,000 budget pressure the service has been awarded it will need to be taken into account that costs will increase as annual council tax rises.

8.4 If the ambition to make MCC a first choice for future carers then the costs of improving the financial offer to foster carers will be significantly offset against a reduction in high cost placements. The impact initiatives such as this have on foster carers, foster carer recruitment and retention will need to be monitored and will feed into the future development of the service.

9. Consultees

Social Care and Health DMT

Corporate Parenting Panel

10. Background Papers

None

11. AUTHOR: Charlotte Drury

CONTACT DETAILS

E-mail: charlottedrury@monmouthshire.gov.uk



Name of the Officer Charlotte Drury	Please give a brief description of the aims of the proposal To provide foster carers who foster for Monmouthshire County Council and care for Monmouthshire children with a council tax subsidy.
Phone no: 07811 234244	
E-mail: chalottedrury@monmouthshire.gov.uk	Date 23/04/2024
Name of Service area All directorates	

1. **Are your proposals going to affect any people or groups of people with protected characteristics?** Please explain the impact, the evidence you have used and any action you are taking below.

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Age	Children who are looked after are a particularly vulnerable population as they have all experienced, to varying degrees, significant loss and trauma. MCC has a corporate parenting responsibility to these children to safeguard and promote their wellbeing as they would their own children. Having sufficient, high quality, foster placements is key this.	None	A council tax subsidy will be used to promote fostering for MCC to increase foster carer recruitment and retention.
Disability	None identified	.None identified	.None identified
Gender reassignment	.None identified	.None identified	.None identified
Marriage or civil partnership	None identified	None identified	.None identified

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Pregnancy or maternity	<i>None identified</i>	.None identified	None identified
Race	<i>.None identified</i>	None identified	.None identified
Religion or Belief	<i>None identified</i>	None identified	None identified
Sex	<i>None identified</i>	.None identified	None identified
Sexual Orientation	None identified	.None identified	.None identified

The Socio-economic Duty and Social Justice

The Socio-economic Duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to reduce inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage when taking key decisions This duty aligns with our commitment as an authority to Social Justice.

	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has in respect of people suffering socio economic disadvantage	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has in respect of people suffering socio economic disadvantage.	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Socio-economic Duty and Social Justice	Outcomes for many care experienced people are often poorer than for the general population. It is critical therefore, that we seek to provide children with the best support possible and this means also providing those who care for them with appropriate support, including financial support.	.None identified	None identified

How does your proposal impact on the following aspects of the Council's Welsh Language Standards:	Describe the positive impacts of this proposal	Describe the negative impacts of this proposal	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts
Policy Making Effects on the use of the Welsh language, Promoting Welsh language Treating the Welsh language no less favourably	<i>.None identified</i>	<i>.None identified</i>	<i>.None identified</i>
Operational Recruitment & Training of workforce Page 75	We will continue to seek to recruit carers who have Welsh language skills so that children can be placed placements which best meet their identity needs.	None identified	Recruitment campaigns run in both Welsh and English
Service delivery Use of Welsh language in service delivery Promoting use of the language	<u>.None identified</u>	None identified	None identified

3. Policy making and the Welsh language.


4. Does your proposal deliver any of the well-being goals below? Please explain the impact (positive and negative) you expect, together with suggestions of how to mitigate negative impacts or better contribute to the goal. There's no need to put something in every box if it is not relevant!




Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
A prosperous Wales Efficient use of resources, skilled, educated people, generates wealth, provides jobs	Providing subsidised council tax will make fostering a more financially viable option, promoting the recruitment and retention of foster carers and promoting better long term outcomes for children who might otherwise have to be cared for in residential children's homes.	.None identified
A resilient Wales Maintain and enhance biodiversity and land, river and coastal ecosystems that support resilience and can adapt to change (e.g. climate change)	Placing children closer to home can help reduce carbon emissions through less travelling.	None identified
A healthier Wales People's physical and mental wellbeing is maximized and health impacts are understood	Providing subsidised council tax will make fostering a more financially viable option, promoting the recruitment and retention of foster carers and promoting better long term outcomes for children who might otherwise have to be cared for in residential children's homes..	.None identified
A Wales of cohesive communities Communities are attractive, viable, safe and well connected	Providing subsidised council tax will make fostering a more financially viable option, promoting the recruitment and retention of foster carers and promoting better long term outcomes for children who might otherwise have to be cared for in residential children's homes.	.None identified
A globally responsible Wales Taking account of impact on global well-being when considering local social, economic and environmental wellbeing	None identified	None identified


Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
<p>A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language Culture, heritage and Welsh language are promoted and protected. People are encouraged to do sport, art and recreation</p>	<p>Providing subsidised council tax will make fostering a more financially viable option, promoting the recruitment and retention of foster carers and therefore reducing the number of children who might otherwise need to be placed out of Wales in residential children's homes or IFA placements.</p>	<p>.None identified</p>
<p>A more equal Wales People can fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances</p>	<p>Providing subsidised council tax will make fostering a more financially viable option, promoting the recruitment and retention of foster carers and promoting better long term outcomes for children who might otherwise have to be cared for in residential children's homes.</p>	<p>.None identified</p>

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5 How has your proposal embedded and prioritised the sustainable governance principles in its development?

Sustainable Development Principle	Does your proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not explain why.	Are there any additional actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
 <p>Balancing short term need with long term and planning for the future</p>	<p>Whilst providing a council tax subsidy will have a financial impact on MCC in the short term, if this leads to improved recruitment and retention of foster carers this will reduce MCC's reliance on high cost IFA placements and reduce the number of children being placed in residential children's homes when they would be more appropriately cared for in foster care and at a much greater cost. In the long term, this not only makes financial sense but also promotes better long term outcomes for care experienced people.</p>	<p>.None identified</p>

Sustainable Development Principle	Does your proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not explain why.	Are there any additional actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
 <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Working together with other partners to deliver objectives</p>	<p>Adopting this as a council policy promotes a collegiate approach across the council and opportunities to raise the profile of this issue with partners.</p>	<p>.None identified</p>
 <p>Involvement</p> <p>Involving those with an interest and seeking their views</p>	<p>Financial support is given by foster carers as one of their top priorities in a recent survey by Fostering Network.</p>	<p>.None identified</p>
 <p>Prevention</p> <p>Putting resources into preventing problems occurring or getting worse</p>	<p>MCC's foster carer population is aging and unless we are able to recruit new foster carers, MCC is going to continue to be reliant, or worse still, increase it's dependence on high cost IFA and residential placements. Investing in foster carers will be critical if we are to get close to achieving placement sufficiency, an outcome that is both better for children and more financially sustainable for the local authority.</p>	<p>.None identified</p>

Sustainable Development Principle	Does your proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not explain why.	Are there any additional actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
 <p data-bbox="138 542 279 570">Integration</p> <p data-bbox="107 597 436 699">Considering impact on all wellbeing goals together and on other bodies</p>	<p data-bbox="501 298 1209 401">Adopting this as a council policy promotes a collegiate approach across the council and opportunities to raise the profile of this issue with partners.</p>	<p data-bbox="1268 298 1472 326">.None identified</p>

6. Council has agreed the need to consider the impact its decisions has on the following important responsibilities: Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding. Are your proposals going to affect any of these responsibilities?

	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has	What will you do/ have you done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Safeguarding	MCC has a duty to protect and safeguard children who have been impacted by harm or abuse. This proposal is in line with MCCs safeguarding responsibilities.	<i>.None identified</i>	.None identified
Corporate Parenting	This policy speaks directly to the councils corporate parenting responsibility.	.None identified	.None identified

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7. What evidence and data has informed the development of your proposal?

Placement Commissioning Strategy – data on placement and CLA numbers
 Fostering Strategy 2023-26 – data on recruitment and retention of foster carers
 Foster Wales – data on placement sufficiency

8. SUMMARY: As a result of completing this form, what are the main positive and negative impacts of your proposal, how have they informed/changed the development of the proposal so far and what will you be doing in future?

.This section should summarise the key issues arising from the evaluation. This summary must be included in the Committee report template

Investing in foster carers is key to working towards placement sufficiency and placement sufficiency is critical if we are to meet the 2027 deadline for Eliminate and also if we are to reduce MCC’s reliance on high-cost IFA and residential placements which are neither in the best interests of children not the local authority. Whilst subsidising the cost of council tax for foster carers does come at a financial cost

to the local authority, it has the potential to support existing foster carers to remain fostering as well as encourage people who are considering fostering to foster for MCC rather than an IFA or different local authority. In the cost of living crisis, it may also encourage people who have not thought about fostering to consider becoming foster carers.

9. ACTIONS: As a result of completing this form are there any further actions you will be undertaking? Please detail them below, if applicable.

What are you going to do	When are you going to do it?	Who is responsible
Monitor the implementation of the policy.	Annually as part of the review of MCC Fostering Strategy	C Drury

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10. VERSION CONTROL: The Equality and Future Generations Evaluation should be used at the earliest stage, such as informally within your service, and then further developed throughout the decision making process. It is important to keep a record of this process to demonstrate how you have considered and built in equality and future generations considerations wherever possible.

Version No.	Decision making stage	Date considered	Brief description of any amendments made following consideration
	<i>e.g. budget mandate, DMT, SLT, Scrutiny, Cabinetetc</i>		

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