

RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISION TAKEN BY AN EXECUTIVE MEMBER

This form **MUST** be used to record any decision taken by the Elected Mayor or an individual Executive Member (Portfolio Holder).

The form must be completed and passed to the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services no later than NOON on the second working day after the day on which the decision is taken. No action may be taken to implement the decision(s) recorded on this form until 7 working days have passed and the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services has confirmed the decision has not been called in.

1. Description of decision

That the introduction of an allowance payment to Foster Carers, in line with the Foster Carer’s Recognition Payment Policy at Appendix A to the attached report prepared to accompany this decision, be approved on the following basis:

- (a) That the allowance is made as both a recognition of the work of Foster Carers and also as an additional inducement to attract new carers and retain existing carers, thereby improving outcomes and reducing costs.**
- (b) The allowance will be made to those carers that have cared for a child for over 182 days in the previous financial year (2024/2025) and that, by applying this rule, it enables a payment to be made to attract new carers and to retain existing carers.**
- (c) The allowance will be paid to 186 carers eligible for the payment and 5 respite carers. The respite carers will receive £150 each and the carers will receive a payment of £801. The payment will be processed by the service along with the carers’ regular payment of allowances.**

2. Date of decision

10 December 2025

3. Reasons for decision

The payment is a recognition of the importance our carers have to the children of Bedford. It also enables Bedford to promote this additional allowance which increases the overall offer and makes caring for Bedford a more attractive proposition. That in turn reduces the pressure on the placements budget.

There is a known shortage of foster carers which was evidenced in a report from November 2024 in which Ofsted released figures on foster carers in the UK which showed the number of foster carers is at a 10-year low. Nationally more carers are leaving than being signed up. In Bedford we have seen a reduction in the proportion of children who are looked after living with families.

The below shows the gap between Bedford and statistical neighbours in relation to the number of children with in-house foster carers. We have approx. 20 children less than we would otherwise expect to have staying with in-house carers.

	Children with in-house carers	% that are in-house
Bedford	87	32%
SN	106	37%
England	123	43%

The drive to recruit and retain foster carers is key to improving our placement sufficiency and with it reduce the pressure of the placements budget.

4. Alternatives considered and rejected

The previous payment proposed was linked to council tax but has been ruled out due to possible complications with existing Council Tax relief systems in place. This approach is free from resource and legal difficulties and is straightforward to administer.

5. How decision is to be funded


There is a budget of £150,000 in Children's Services to fund this payment.

6. Conflicts of interest

Name of all Executive members who were consulted AND declared a conflict of interest.	Nature of interest	Did Standards Committee give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and date of dispensation)	Did the Chief Executive give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and the date of the dispensation).

The Mayor has been consulted on this decision

Not Applicable

Signed 

Date:

10 December 2025

Name of Decision Taker:

Mayor Tom Wootton

This is a public document. A copy of it must be given to the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services as soon as it is completed.

Date decision published:11December2025.....

Date decision can be implemented if not called in:19December2025.....

(Decision to be made exempt from call in.....NO.....)

Bedford Borough Council – Report to the Mayor

Date of Report: 10 December 2025

Report by: Service Director for Children’s Services

Subject: FOSTER CARERS – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR RECOGNITION PAYMENT SCHEME

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides detail on the eligibility criteria for foster carers and special guardians to receive an additional allowance and how this payment will be administered.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Mayor is invited to consider and, if satisfied, to approve the introduction of an allowance payment to Foster Carers, in line with the Foster Carer’s Recognition Payment Policy at Appendix A, on the following basis:
- (a) That the allowance is made as both a recognition of the work of Foster Carers and also as an additional inducement to attract new carers and retain existing carers, thereby improving outcomes and reducing costs.
 - (b) The allowance will be made to those carers that have cared for a child for over 182 days in the previous financial year (2024/2025) and that, by applying this rule, it enables a payment to be made to attract new carers and to retain existing carers.
 - (c) The allowance will be paid to 186 carers eligible for the payment and 5 respite carers. The respite carers will receive £150 each and the carers will receive a payment of £801. The payment will be processed by the service along with the carers’ regular payment of allowances.

3. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

3.1 To establish arrangements to provide this additional allowance.

4. **THE CURRENT POSITION**

4.1 Nationally more foster carers are leaving than being signed up. In November 2024 Ofsted released figures on foster carers in the UK which showed the number of foster carers is at a 10-year low. The reduction in foster carers has seen an increase in the number of children who are being cared for in a residential setting. These placements often do not produce good outcomes for the children and are more costly than other forms of care.

4.2 We want to ensure we retain our existing foster carers as well as being competitive when it comes to attracting new carers. We know the prospect of receiving an additional payment has persuaded experienced carers to sign up with Bedford. We want to be in a position where we are significantly increasing our in-house provision enabling children to remain in Bedford with all the benefits that this will afford them and this scheme will support that ambition.

5. **DETAILS**

5.1 The benefits of having Bedford children living with Bedford carers are multiple, some more measurable than others. The financial benefits are clearest in relation to the cost of the placement. The below shows the average weekly costs of the various types of placements provided for children in care. If simply comparing the costs of our own Bedford carers with that of independent foster carers provided through an agency the costs are doubled. The additional costs associated with home to school transport will increase this difference.

	Jul-24	Jul-25		
	Weekly Cost (£)	Weekly Cost (£)	Weekly Increase (£)	Increase %
Residential	5,818	8,245	2,427	42%
Unregistered Provision	9,909	10,558	648	7%
Semi-independent	845	879	34	4%
IFA	961	969	8	1%
In-house foster care	410	425	15	4%

- 5.2 The support provided to our own foster carers is significant and was commented on positively by Ofsted in the recent inspection. Providing that level of support will encourage some carers to consider providing a home to some of the more challenging children who need a home. The difference between one child in residential or with a Bedford carer for a year is on average over £400k. Building up our own provision and supporting foster carers to offer a home to children who might present with challenges that would deter an Independent Foster carer will generate significant savings.
- 5.3 The introduction of a payment badged against Foster Carer's Recognition Payment Policy will increase our ability to recruit and retain carers, thereby improving outcomes and reducing costs.
- 5.4 The payment will be made to those carers that have cared for a child for over 182 days in the previous financial year (24/25). Applying this simple rule enables a payment to be made to attract new carers and to retain existing carers.
- 5.5 There are 186 carers eligible for the payment and 5 respite carers. The respite carers receive £150 each and the carers will receive a payment of £801. The payment will be processed by the service along with the carers' regular payment of allowances.
- 5.6 There is a set budget of £150,000 in Children's Services to fund this payment.

6. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 6.1 The previous payment proposed was linked to council tax but has been ruled out due to possible complications with existing Council Tax relief systems in place.

7. KEY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 **Legal Issues – relevant legal power** - There are no specific legal issues arising from this policy.
- 7.2 **Policy Issues** - There are no specific policy issues.
- 7.3 **Resource Issues** – The Service is able to absorb the administering of the payments without difficulty. The annual budget available and the number of eligible carers will be known before any payments are made.
- 7.4 **Risks** - There is no risk. It is a benefit that enables us to attract carers to Bedford with all the additional benefits that will bring.

- 7.5 **Environmental Implications** - There will be less upheaval for children who are needing to be cared for as well as a reduction in journeys and journey time for children who will remain living locally to the families, schools and other professionals such as their GP or CAMHS.
- 7.6 **Equalities Impact** - It is a policy that will be shared with all carers and is transparent in how it is applied. In relation to the positive impact of being able to keep more children in Bedford this will reduce the number of children being removed from their communities and friendship group with all the associated trauma this can cause.
- 7.7 **Impact on Families** - By increasing the number of foster carers available to children in Bedford families will be assured that their children are remaining connected to professionals and friends and that the upheaval of leaving home is reduced somewhat by keeping familiar aspects of their life.
- 7.8 **Community Safety and Resilience** - It will help to keep children in their communities with all the benefits this brings.
- 7.9 **Impact on Health and Wellbeing** - Aiding children to remain in familiar settings will improve their wellbeing and keep them connected to involved professionals.

8. **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS AND OUTCOME**

- 8.1 The following Councillors, Council units, Officers and/or other organisations have been consulted in preparing this report:

Portfolio Holder for Valuing Families: Children's Services
Corporate Leadership Team
Head of Legal Services
HR Business Partner

9. **WARD COUNCILLOR VIEWS**

- 9.1 Not applicable.

10. CONTACTS AND REFERENCES

Report Contact Officer:	Jonathan Churchill, Service Director for Children's Services jonathan.churchill@bedford.gov.uk
Declarations of Interest by the Report Author:	None
File Reference:	Executive Decision – 10 December 2025
Previous Relevant Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	Appendix A – Bedford Borough Council Fostering and Special Guardian Recognition Payment Policy 2025/2026

BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Fostering and Special Guardian Recognition Payment Policy 2025/2026

About This Document

Title	Bedford Borough Council Fostering and Special Guardian Carers – Recognition Payment Policy
Purpose	Explains the purpose and eligibility criteria
Updated by	Melanie Field, Head of Service for Corporate Parenting
Approved by	Harmesh Bhogal, Executive Director for Children, Education and Families (DCS)
Date	December 2025
Version number	1
Next review date	March 2026

BEDFORD BOROUGH CARERS RECOGNITION PAYMENT POLICY

Our Foster Carers Recognition Policy highlights and rewards the amazing care, commitment and dedication our carers provide to our children.

The Fostering team will make a one-off payment to the carers once the amount has been calculated based upon the number of carers who meet the eligibility criteria and the budget for that year.

This scheme supports carers to continue to provide best quality care to our children and to reduce the financial impact upon carers who often have larger than required homes for their needs, ensuring that more homes can care for more Bedford children, in their community of belonging, and/or in many cases with their family or network of belonging.

For clarity, the word 'carer' within this document refers to Foster Carers, respite carers, special guardians, kinship carers also known as family and friends and connected person carers in line with Fostering Regulations; as to ensure equity across our carer demographic. This policy will be reviewed annually.

Eligibility Criteria

From April 2025 Bedford Council will offer a Recognition Payment where the following eligibility criteria is met:

1. The Foster Carers are fully approved by Bedford Council in line with Fostering Regulations 2011 and meet the Fostering National Minimum standards or they are Special Guardians who were assessed by Bedford Council and were awarded special guardianship order by the courts in respect of a child previously 'looked after' by Bedford Borough Council.
2. The Foster Carers or Special Guardians have provided care to a child 'looked after or previously looked after' for a total of 26 weeks (182 days) in the previous financial year (this does not need to be 182 consecutive days and does not need to be for the same child).
 - 'Staying put' arrangements are counted towards the 182-day total if the Foster Carer is not able to offer other placements due to the staying put arrangement

3. The Foster Carer must maintain their approval and availability to Foster. They will no longer be eligible for the Recognition Payment should they:
- a. Resign as a carer.
 - b. Receive a qualifying determination for de-registration from the ADM (if an appeal to a qualifying determination is successful and the ADM reverses a decision then they will be eligible to receive the payment).
 - c. Decide to take break from fostering but not resign for a period in excess of 30 days.

Any Carers who wish to dispute eligibility must contact the Fostering Team manager in writing giving reasons why they consider themselves to be eligible within the scope of this Policy.

Newly approved carers

Foster Carers and Special Guardians who are newly approved will need to meet the eligibility criteria set out above.

Connected Carers and Special Guardians

For clarity the same eligibility criteria apply to connected carers and Special Guardians. The care provided under temporary approval counts towards the 182-day total but all other criteria must also be met.

Temporary approved carers who become unregulated (not fully approved by the end of 24 weeks) for whatever reason and the child remains in their care pending full approval or SGO being granted, will continue to be eligible for Recognition Payment but will also need to meet all other criteria.

Eligibility start date for Special Guardians who are granted the order but were not prior temporarily approved as connected person carers, will be the date that a child is placed with them.

Respite Carers

For clarity the same eligibility criteria apply to respite carers. The care provided under respite counts towards the 182-day total but all other criteria must also be met (e.g. fostering standard met).

Where there is less than 182 days total care provided but an average of 30 days a year has been offered respite carers will receive £150. Respite carers who offered 15 to 29 days of respite care per year will receive £50.

Respite carers for Children with Special Needs and Disability

Those respite carers who offer regular monthly arranged respite care for average of 30 days a year to children with special needs and disability will receive £300. Carers who offered 15 to 29 days of respite care per year will receive £100.

Mockingbird Hub Home carers

The same eligibility criteria apply to a Mockingbird Hub Home Carer. The sleepovers provided to children within the constellation count towards the 182-day total.

Foster Carers transferring in from other Fostering agencies

In general, the same eligibility criteria apply. For carers transferring in from another service, where they have a Bedford Borough child already in placement, their eligibility will start from date of their approval (by Agency Decision Maker) with Bedford Council.

Foster Carers approved by other agencies

These carers are not entitled to Recognition Payment even if they reside in Bedford and / or are looking after Bedford Council's children. This benefit is offered to Bedford Carers only.

Review of this Policy

This Policy requires re-approval by members and as such is reviewed annually.