

Acceptance and Delivery of Department for Education Fostering Programme Funding

Decision Maker: Chief Executive

Service Area: Children's Social Care

Directorate: Children's Services

Report Author: Nick Whitbread

Email: nick.whitbread@oldham.gov.uk

Date of Decision: September 2026

1. Power to make the decision

The decision is being taken under the authorisation contained in Section 9C – Delegations to Specific Officers of Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Council Constitution for the Chief Executive to take any emergency decisions in respect of the Council's executive functions which cannot be delayed until the next Cabinet meeting.

2. Decision Sought

This paper seeks agreement for Oldham Council to progress the transition from the current fostering recruitment hub to an end-to-end fostering hub model.

3. Reason for urgency

The Department for Education has approved the Greater Manchester End-to-End Fostering Hub and implementation is scheduled to commence from 30th September 2026. Participation decisions are required by partner authorities in advance of implementation to enable finalisation of legal agreements, workforce secondments, governance arrangements and funding allocations. Delaying the decision would place Oldham's participation at risk, jeopardise access to Department for Education and Greater Manchester Combined Authority funding streams, and potentially prevent the Council from joining the programme from its commencement date.

4. Risk(s) of not taking the decision

Failure to approve participation could result in Oldham being excluded from the Greater Manchester End-to-End Fostering Hub and associated innovation programmes. This would significantly reduce the Council's ability to influence regional fostering developments and may limit access to future government

investment linked to children's social care reforms and regional sufficiency arrangements. There would also be a risk of reduced foster carer recruitment and retention activity, increasing reliance on high-cost external fostering and residential placements. Given the continued shortage of foster carers across Greater Manchester and nationally, non-participation could adversely impact placement sufficiency, increase placement instability for children and place additional pressure on the Council's budget.

5. Financial impact if decision not taken forward

Failure to participate could result in the loss of access to significant external investment available through the Greater Manchester fostering programmes.

There is a recognised financial pressure associated with participation in 2027/28, when Oldham's estimated contribution rises to £437k, including a cash contribution of approximately £187k and staffing contributions of £250k. Current modelling identifies a potential cash shortfall of £133k which would need to be met from within existing placement budgets if no further Department for Education sustainability funding is secured. This investment is predicated on achieving increased fostering capacity and reducing reliance on significantly higher-cost external fostering and residential placements.

Should the decision not be taken, Oldham would avoid the direct Hub contribution but would remain exposed to continued and potentially increasing expenditure on external placements, with reduced opportunity to benefit from regional initiatives designed to increase local fostering capacity and achieve long-term cost avoidance. The greater financial risk is therefore considered to be continued dependence on high-cost placement provision without access to the funding, resources and recruitment infrastructure available through the Greater Manchester End-to-End Fostering Hub.

6. Statutory Officer clearances

a. Section 151 Officer

Name Lee Walsh

Date 8 Sept 2026

Comments

The report outlines the funding awarded to GMCA from the DfE in 2026/27 for the following:

- Fostering end-to-end hub transitional funding - £790k
- Mockingbird Expansion - £800k
- Room Makers - £677k
- Fostering Innovation fund - £4.73m

It must be noted that the Council along with the 10 Local Authorities with GM must accept the grant.

The Council's contribution to the Fostering End-to-End Hub for 2026/27 is £167k, comprising a cash contribution of £45k and an in-kind staffing contribution valued at £122k. The contribution has been calculated using a combination of a weighted average methodology and an equal ten-way apportionment. There are no additional budgetary implications for 2026/27, as the Council's contribution can be met from within existing resources.

For 2027/28, the estimated total contribution is £437k, comprising a cash contribution of £187k and an in-kind staffing contribution valued at £250k. The Council currently holds a budget provision of £60k towards the cash contribution, resulting in an estimated funding shortfall of £127k. This pressure will be considered as part of the 2027/28 budget-setting process. However, it is currently anticipated that the shortfall could be accommodated within the placements budget, as the primary objective of the Hub is to increase the availability of foster placements and thereby reduce reliance on higher-cost external placements.

It should also be noted that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is expecting additional Department for Education (DfE) Hub Sustainability Funding in 2027/28. Whilst this funding has not yet been confirmed, it is anticipated that further information will be provided alongside the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement later in the year.

In addition, the Council will receive £80,000 of additional funding to support the expansion of the Mockingbird programme.
Any future requirements for additional financial contributions will be subject to a separate approval process and the necessary governance arrangements

b. Monitoring Officer

Name: Alex Bougatef

Date: 28.8.26

Comments:

The exercise of emergency powers should be undertaken in consultation with the Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council. However, the Council has not yet appointed a Leader or Deputy Leader for the current municipal year; it is therefore not possible to consult them. In addition, there is no certainty about when a Leader or Deputy Leader will be appointed as the Council has failed at three successive meetings to do so. For the reasons given in the report, an urgent decision relating to the report is required, and it cannot wait until the appointment of a Leader and Deputy Leader at some undetermined future date.