

Employment and Appointments Committee

27 June 2017

REPORT TITLE	FOSTERING FRIENDLY EMPLOYER
REPORT OF	ACTING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1.0 REPORT SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report sets out proposals for the Council to be a 'Fostering Friendly Employer' through supporting our employees who are prospective or existing foster carers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Employment and Appointments Committee approves the Council's policy to support employees who are prospective or existing foster carers.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure that the Council's commitment to foster care is reflected in its employment policies and the Council is seen as an exemplar to partners and other employers in Wirral.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 No other options were considered.

5.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 5.1 There are currently 64,000 children in care in the UK. The highest proportion, 78%, of those children and young people are in foster care and with a child coming in to care every 20 minutes in need of a fostering family we recognise the need to do more to help recruit new foster carers.
- 5.2 The demographic profile of foster carers, many of whom are approaching retirement age, places further pressure on future foster carer numbers. 94% of foster carers nationally are aged 40 and over and 65% are aged 50 and over.
- 5.3 To address the national challenges around fostering, and to try and encourage more working people to become foster carers, the Fostering Network has called on employers to become "fostering friendly".
- 5.4 There are currently 787 children and young people looked after by Wirral Borough Council. This is a large number in proportion to the local population. It raises challenges in relation to the need to source suitable placements to meet the diverse needs.
- 5.5 Of these 787 children and young people 604 are in foster care. These family placements may be placements with family members or with recruited foster carers. Families are usually the best environment for children to grow and thrive as they can provide trusting and warm relationships.
- 5.6 It is a continual challenge to meet the demands of placing new children into the system as often children can remain with carers. In order to draw the net as widely as possible to identify new placements and welcome new applicants we need to remove as many barriers as possible so foster carers are fully supported.
- 5.7 Part of the national push to encourage more people to become foster carers, has been to "bust the myth" that you are not allowed to work if you become a foster carer.
- 5.8 The Council wishes to support those employees who are already foster carers and to encourage those who may be considering foster care to take that step as by doing so, they will be providing positive working role models and widening the pool of available foster carers. In this way, more children in care can be matched with the very best foster carer for them.

- 5.9 We already have extensive provisions in place relating to adoption which mirror our maternity arrangements in terms of pay and leave and exceed statutory entitlements.
- 5.10 We recognise that having the support of the organisation, may make the vital difference in the decision of an employee to become a foster carer.
- 5.11 We will encourage partners and other organisations to adopt this approach.

6.0 Key principles

- 6.1 It is proposed that the following key principles are applied as policy:
- Up to 5 days paid additional leave for employees who are going through the application process to become a foster carer, as part of the fostering assessment process
 - Up to 5 days paid additional leave each year for employees who are foster carers in order to attend training related to their position as foster carers and/or to attend meetings, panels, hearings or any other key events or activities in support of foster children and young people in their care.
 - The Council adopts a flexible and accommodating approach to requests for time off, leave and flexible working arrangements from foster carers and prospective foster carers in relation to their care of a looked after child or during their journey through the process to become foster carers.
 - Further support to cover any extra training which may be needed or to cover unforeseen emergencies related to their fostering role remains at their line manager's discretion.
 - As a 'Fostering Friendly' the Council will commit to supporting the annual fostering awareness campaign, Foster Care Fortnight.
- 6.2 These principles accord with best practice for employers run by the charity the Fostering Network. The Council is the first Local Authority on Merseyside to formally sign up to be a fostering friendly employer.
- 6.3 Requests for paid leave will be managed through the Council's existing special leave policies.
- 6.4 We will communicate the support available to employees via the Council's intranet and other forums and work with Children's Services to continue to raise awareness and promote foster caring to employees.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Requests for time off will be met within existing resources.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no specific legal implications arising out of this report. The Council has discretion to adopt policies that go beyond the statutory requirements, where it is considered this adds value or benefit to the workforce and/or the corporate reputation of the organisation.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

9.1 There are no specific staffing, ICT or Assets implications arising out of this report.

10.0 RELEVANT RISKS

10.1 There are no specific risks arising out of this report.

11.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

11.1 The trade unions have been consulted about proposals.

12.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

12.1. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(a) Is an EIA required? Yes

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2017/business>

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APPENDICES

Appendix	Title
Appendix One	Fostering Leave Policy