

Committee: **Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14th March 2024**

Report Subject: **Fostering Friendly Employer**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Andrea J. Prosser – Head of Organisational Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	14.12.23	04.03.24			14.03.24		21.03.24	

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to give Scrutiny Members the opportunity to scrutinise, challenge and give views on the proposed Fostering Friendly Policy, and seek a recommendation to Council to approve the Fostering Friendly Policy (appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

2.1 Currently, there are over 70,000 children living with foster families across the UK, and the numbers are rising, with another child coming into care every 20 minutes. Foster families give children who cannot live with their birth family the care and stability they need, and for many children this is their first positive experience of family life.

2.2 There is a shortage of foster carers across the UK, meaning children are often being placed far from their community, and often moved many times. Both of these factors can harm the wellbeing of the child. By recruiting more foster carers and supporting them means more children will be able to stay connected with people and places that matter the most to them.

2.3 In order to address national challenges in relation to fostering, and to try and encourage more working people to become foster carers, the Government has called for employers to become “fostering friendly.” Part of the national push to encourage more people to become foster carers, has been to “bust the myth” that individuals are not allowed to work if they become a foster carer.

2.4 The Fostering Network’s Fostering Friendly employers’ scheme helps employers to support and recognise the roles of their employees who foster and involves no direct costs. Members of the scheme agree to put in place a fostering friendly policy for all foster carers in their employment (regardless of their fostering service). Currently Bridgend, Flintshire and Swansea Council’s and Welsh Government are listed as Foster Friendly Employers.

2.5 In order to become a Fostering Friendly Employer, the Council will need to offer the following:

- A flexible working policy. This is already in place, and;

- Offer foster carers and those preparing to foster a minimum of five days paid leave in order to support with their fostering commitments. These commitments can include training or settling a child into their new home.

2.6 There are many benefits to becoming a Fostering Friendly employer, including:

- Building on the Council's reputation as an 'Employer of Choice' and demonstrating the Council's commitment to caring for staff and the local community through displaying a Fostering Friendly logo, and the Fostering Network recognising the Council as a Fostering Friendly employer;
- To better understand and support our employees' needs and improve staff wellbeing;
- Being an attractive employer for foster carers, who are resilient, committed and skilled professionals; and
- Playing a vital role in recruiting and supporting foster carers, with a huge impact for children in the local community.

2.7 Foster Wales is the national network of 22 Local Authority fostering services across Wales. Foster Wales evolved from the National Fostering Framework (NFF) which was one of the work streams of WG's advisory group 'improving outcomes for children.' The purpose of Foster Wales is to increase the pool of Local Authority foster carers through enhanced recruitment and marketing and to support retention by bringing consistency of support for foster carers across Wales. There is a national commitment from Foster Wales for all 22 Local Authorities to become foster carer friendly and introduce a policy for all Foster Wales foster carers in their employment. Foster Wales's commitment proposes **that the provisions would only apply to those staff who foster with a local authority and not to those who foster with an independent fostering agency** in order to support and enhance the efforts to recruit and retain local authority foster carers.

2.8 The policy being recommended will apply to all Council employees and will be recommended to School Governing Bodies for adoption. The Policy has been developed in line with Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly employers' scheme with the provisions open to employees who are foster carers regardless of their fostering service. This approach will ensure equal treatment for all employees. In addition, the policy has been extended to introduce provision for employees who are applying to become a special guardian.

The Policy provides for the following paid leave:

- Employees who are applying to become a foster carer are entitled to **up to 5 days (37 hours) paid leave, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.** This leave entitlement will be a one of entitlement for the purpose of applying to become a foster carer.
- Employees who are an approved foster carer are entitled to **up to 5 days (37 hours) paid leave during any 12-month period, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.**
- Employees who are applying to become a Special Guardian are entitled to **up to 5 days (37 hours) paid leave, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.** This leave entitlement will be a one of entitlement for the purpose of applying to become a Special Guardian.

- Employees who are an approved Special Guardian are entitled to **up to 2.5 days (18.5 hours) paid leave during any 12-month period, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.**

In circumstances where both partners applying to become foster carers work for the Council the policy states that the leave provision will be shared which aligns to the provisions in the Council's Carer Policy.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

The Corporate Leadership Team considered this report on the 14th December 2023 and support the proposed policy.

3.1 **Option 1:** (preferred option) Members of the Committee to consider the Policy and recommend approval to Council.

3.2 **Option 2:** Members of the Committee suggest further amendments/additions to the Policy.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 **Statutory Responsibilities**

Becoming a Fostering Friendly employer is not a statutory requirement, however there is a national push from the Government for employers to adopt this policy and become a Fostering Friendly organisation.

4.2 **Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan**

The introduction of a Fostering Friendly Policy supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Priority, to maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent, by giving every child the best start in life and enabling all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 **Impact on Budget**

The costs associated with the introduction of this Policy relate to the paid leave for employees and the cost of cover arrangements for those taking the paid leave.

Additional local authority foster carers will support budget efficiencies in the future as the average weekly Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council foster carer payment is £541 against the cost of an independent Fostering agency placement of £1144.

5.2 **Risk**

Failure to adopt the policy would impact negatively in not supporting Foster Carers and the impact on children in care, and the local community.

5.3 **Legal**

There are no legal implications relating to the proposals in this report

5.4 **Human Resources**

The policy will support the Council's employees who are either existing foster carers or thinking of becoming a foster carer by enabling them the time and support to care for a child.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

There are no health and safety implications relating to the proposals in this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Not applicable

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

By adopting this policy, there would be a positive impact on the local community, and children in care within the community. It will mean they will receive the appropriate support through their foster carer, without removing them from the area and people they are used to. This may also contribute positively to the Council's reputation among members of the public.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

Consultation, engagement and participation regarding the amended policy has been internal to the Council, along with the Trade Unions.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

The policy is intended to provide increased support to all Council and school-based employees with the aim of providing long term support to our employees who are foster carers, and support with the children coming into care long term.

It will also form part of the longer term thinking and commitment of the Foster Wales Program.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

The policy aims to support staff to become foster carers, to support with the increased numbers of children coming into care. It is hoped by providing this leave, more staff would consider becoming foster carers, and therefore supporting with the children coming in to care.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

Not applicable

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

Not applicable

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

Not applicable

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**

An Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed and there is no adverse impact.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

- 7.1 The policy will be reviewed in line with OD Service policy review schedule and as required in line with best practice and/or statutory requirements.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Fostering Friendly Policy