

Report to:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	28 June 2023
Executive Member:	Councillor Jacqueline North – First Deputy (Finance, Resources and Transformation)
Reporting Officer:	Tracy Brennand, Assistant Director, People and Workforce Development
Subject:	FOSTER FRIENDLY EMPLOYER POLICY
Report Summary:	The report sets out the opportunity to adopt a Foster Friendly Policy that provides paid time off for employees who are foster carers or approved kinship carers, or are training to be foster carers. The policy aims to support employees to manage work and the commitments of being a foster carer.
Recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To agree the terms of the Foster Friendly Employer policy (Appendix 1) to support existing and aspiring foster carers in the workplace and to meet our corporate priorities of increasing levels of fostering and improving placement stability. 2. To acknowledge that the implementation of this policy will support our accreditation as a Foster Friendly Employer.
Corporate Plan:	The creation of a Foster Friendly Employer policy supports our corporate aims to increase levels of fostering and improve placement stability by supporting foster carers in the workplace. The policy will also enable us to lead in this area and promote our policy with partner organisations to increase attraction and retention of foster carers in employment across Tameside. The policy supports our aim to be an employer of choice.
Policy Implications:	This policy will sit alongside other family friendly policies improving our offer to employees with caring responsibilities. A specific policy is required for foster/kinship carers due to the nature of child placements and specific requirements for time off.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	The provision of paid time off for foster carers, approved kinship carers, or employees training to be foster carers may have some direct or indirect financial implications where essential work needs to be covered by agency staff or overtime, however the impact is not expected to be significant. The Council does not currently retain data on foster care responsibilities for employees therefore it is not possible to quantify the impact precisely.
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	As nearly 40% of foster carers combine fostering with other work this policy should have a positive impact on the foster carers and the children in our local community.
Risk Management:	This adoption of this policy is a positive step forward in support of our priorities and there are no identifiable risks. All family friendly policies will be reviewed over time to ensure they continue to adapt and support employees with caring needs within the workplace.

Access to Information:

Information relating to this report can be accessed by contacting the report writer Jennifer Tyson, Head of HR Strategy and Operations, People and Workforce Development.

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Jennifer Tyson, Head of HR Strategy and Operations, People and Workforce Development:



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Foster carers and kinship carers provide safe, secure and loving homes for children and young people who cannot live with their birth parents. This gives children stability and the chance to maintain important relationships. Tameside foster carers are invaluable and directly support our priorities to give children the best start in life, and to support children to fulfil their potential into adulthood.
- 1.2 However, a shortage of foster carers nationally means that often children are placed far from their community and can be moved between foster care families. This harms their wellbeing.
- 1.3 The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. Their aim is to make foster care the very best it can be. The national 'Fostering Friendly Employer' scheme encourages employers to sign up to become a Foster Friendly Employer and commit to supporting employees who foster as well as promoting and celebrating fostering.
- 1.4 The scheme asks employers to implement a policy that provides paid time off for foster carers. This includes those who are training to become foster carers, and approved kinship carers. The implementation of this policy will contribute towards becoming an accredited Foster Friendly Employer.
- 1.5 Tameside Council also has an important role in promoting foster care across partner organisations to maximise the numbers of foster carers across the borough. Accreditation will allow us to support partners to offer comparable policies to their employees to drive the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

2. KEY AIMS OF THE POLICY

- 2.1 The policy provides paid time off for existing foster carers or approved kinship carers (kinship care is where children who are not able to live with their parents are raised by family members or friends), as well as those who are seeking approval to become foster carers or kinship carers.
- 2.2 The approval process for becoming a foster or kinship carer is a lengthy one and includes a requirement for training. Employees are required to attend an approval panel with review each year. Once a child is placed with a family there are a range of meetings that are required as well as mandatory and specialised training depending on the needs of the child.
- 2.3 In addition, foster carers and kinship carers are required to attend regular meetings at the child's school, contact review meetings where the child will remain in contact with family members, and support group meetings.
- 2.4 This range of training and meetings is essential to support the family and the child, as well as to impart knowledge and skills in the foster carer to meet the needs of the child. Supportive arrangements enable the foster carer to feel confident in their care, which supports the overall wellbeing of the child. This also supports placement stability and prevents the breakdown of fostering placements.

3. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- 3.1 All employees who are either approved foster carers or kinship carers, or training to become carers are eligible for time off as set out in this policy and there is no minimum service requirement. The policy includes employees in schools where the Council is the employer, or where the school has adopted this policy where the Council is not the employer.
- 3.2 The Fostering Network estimate that there is one foster carer for every 900 employees.

Tameside Fostering Service are currently supporting 197 households and it is expected that a proportion will be Tameside Council employees.

- 3.3 The policy includes any foster carer regardless of local authority registration. This includes foster carers who are registered with independent fostering agencies. This is a key requirement for accreditation as a Foster Friendly Employer.

4. KEY POLICY TERMS

- 4.1 The policy provides a maximum of 10 days of paid leave per employee every 12 months (pro-rata for part time employees). This is based on the requirements for meetings and training at each stage of approval and child placement.
- 4.2 The 12 month period is a rolling 12 months, which will begin when the employee starts the formal journey of becoming a foster/kinship carer.
- 4.3 It is recognised that requirements for time off will be different for each foster/kinship carer depending on the number of children in placement, the duration of the placement, and the needs of the child or children. Time off will be considered for the following:
- Assessment and initial training prior to approval as a foster carer
 - Attendance at panel for approval
 - Child review meetings
 - Annual foster carer review meeting
 - Mandatory or specialised training
 - Meetings with the child's school
 - Contact review meetings
 - Support group meetings
- 4.4 All requests will be considered on a discretionary basis by managers based on the needs of the service and it is expected that employees are flexible to the needs of the business. For example, attendance at training sessions that are scheduled in the evenings rather than sessions that clash with working hours.
- 4.5 Time off will be recorded by line managers as part of the monthly absence return for HR or under the **other absence** category on the iTrent system where managers are set up for self service.

5. FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES

- 5.1 Tameside Council has a range of family friendly policies including maternity, adoption leave, paternity, maternity support leave, unpaid time off for domestic emergencies, and unpaid parental leave.
- 5.2 This policy will be included in the suite of family friendly policies and provides time off to meet the specific needs of foster/kinship carers which are not covered in existing policies.

5. SUMMARY

- 5.1 Currently foster/kinship carers are required to co-ordinate various meetings and training sessions around work commitments. This policy is a positive step forward in providing support for working foster/kinship carers and encouraging others to consider fostering. The adoption of the policy will ensure we are able to gain accreditation as a Foster Friendly Employer which supports our aim to be an employer of choice.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 As set out at the front of the report.