

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 15 th November 2016
Report Subject	Foster Friendly Employer
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cabinet have previously endorsed that the Council becomes a 'Foster Friendly Employer'. This approach recognises that there are people within our existing workforce with the right skills and qualities to become foster carers for the organisation.

Research commissioned by the Department for Education confirms that "it is possible to combine fostering with other work if fostering services and employers are supportive and flexible". A 'Foster Friendly' employment policy has been developed to support employees who foster for the Council. The Policy supports employees to manage their foster commitments whilst balancing their job responsibilities. The Policy also aims to encourage employees who may be considering foster care to take that step, and as a large employer in the local area, the Policy enables us to lead by example in the call to support more people to become foster carers.

The employment policy will enable Flintshire to become the first Council in Wales to be a 'Foster Friendly' Employer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	This report is presented for information. A 'Foster Friendly' Employment Policy has been through the Council's processes for employment policy development, consultation and agreement.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING A FOSTER FRIENDLY EMPLOYER
1.01	On any one day there are an average of 220 children looked after by Flintshire Social Services. 66% of our children are placed in foster care and the remaining children are placed with appropriate family/friends, placed for adoption, in residential homes, in independent living or placed with parents.
1.02	Flintshire's Fostering service is very well regarded and does well to attract high quality foster carers. Our ambition is to extend the number of foster carers in Flintshire with a focus on carers who have the skills to support older children and teenagers, including those with challenging behaviour.
1.03	We recognise that there are people within our existing workforce with the right skills and qualities to become foster carers for the organisation. In becoming a Foster Friendly Employer we will be supporting employees who already foster for the Council as well as encouraging those who may be considering foster care to take that step. Our approach will also ensure that we lead by example as a large employer in the local area, encouraging local businesses to also make this important commitment.
1.04	A Foster Friendly Employment Policy has been developed to enable us to take forward our commitment. The Policy is attached as Appendix 1. The key focus of the Policy is provide support at 2 key stages of fostering:
1.05	<p>i) <i>Support through the foster care assessment process</i></p> <p>In line with national approaches the foster care assessment process in Flintshire usually takes 6 months. The application and assessment process is detailed to ensure that we attract the right people, with the right skills. As part of the preparation and assessment process prospective foster carers must attend meetings, home visits and mandatory training. Under our Policy employees who are going through the application process to become a foster carer with the Council may be granted up to 5 days leave with pay.</p> <p>ii) <i>Post approval support</i></p> <p>Once approved, up to 5 days leave with pay may be granted to employees who are foster carers with the Council, where they are required to attend training, or meetings, relating to their position as foster carers.</p>
1.06	The Policy will be launched through the Infonet and staff briefings with press releases.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	This proposal forms part of the Fostering Services strategy to recruit more foster carers. Foster care is significantly more cost effective in providing care to children than residential care, and costs less than commissioning placements through an independent fostering agencies (IFA).
2.02	It is anticipated that the impact of the Foster Friendly Policy will be managed within Services. We currently have 3 foster carers who also work for the Council.
2.03	This Policy will help to recruit and retain foster carers as well as helping to ensure that our foster carers are financially stable and good role models by being in employment.
2.04	Employees wishing to take leave under the Foster Friendly Policy must produce written evidence to their manager to show that they are actively applying to become foster carers or are required to attend meetings or training.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Consultation on the employment policy has been through due process.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Where a Council employee also becomes a foster carer the needs of the individual children will be carefully considered prior to any placement, to ensure there is compatibility between caring responsibility/expectations and employment commitments.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1: Flintshire Fostering Friendly Policy.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Department for Education commissioned report by the National Fostering Network 'Combining Fostering and Other work':</p> <p>https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/combining-fostering-report-v5.pdf</p> <p>Contact Office: Craig Macleod Telephone: 01352 701313 E-mail: craig.macleod@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Looked After Children: are children and young people who are in public care and looked after by the state. This includes those who are subject to a care order or temporarily classed as looked after on a planned basis for short breaks or respite care. The term is also used to describe 'accommodated' children and young people who are looked after on a voluntary basis at the request of, or by agreement with, their parents.