

REPORT TO CABINET

18 November 2020

Subject:	Foster Carers Leave Policy
Presenting Cabinet Member:	Councillor Wasim Ali – Cabinet Member for Resources and Core Services
Director:	Interim Director - Human Resources – Sue Stanhope
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	  
Key Decision:	Not Applicable
Cabinet Member Approval and Date:	Councillor Wasim Ali – 24-09-20
Director Approval:	Sue Stanhope
Reason for Urgency:	Not Applicable
Exempt Information Ref:	Not Applicable
Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):	Not Applicable
Scrutiny Consultation:	Not Applicable
Contact Officer(s):	David Briggs – Assistant HR business partner david_briggs@sandwell.gov.uk Ian Markham – Assistant HR Policy Officer ian_markham@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the Foster Carers Leave Policy, as now submitted.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the development of a Foster Carers Leave policy (attached as Appendix 1 & 2) and to seek its approval.
- 1.2 This policy would support employees who are prospective or existing foster carers.

2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION

- 2.1 Ambition 2 – Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.
- 2.2 Ambition 4 - Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.
- 2.3 Ambition 10 - Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.

3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 There are currently around 78,000 children in care in the UK. The highest proportion, 72%, of those children are in foster care, with a child coming into the care system and in need of a fostering family every 20 minutes.
- 3.2 The demographic profile of foster carers, many of whom are approaching retirement age, places further pressure on future carer numbers.
- 3.3 The Council understands that foster carers who do other work in addition to fostering need some flexibility in their working arrangements in order to meet the needs of their fostered child.
- 3.4 To address the national challenges around fostering, and to try and encourage more working people to become foster carers, the Government has called on employers to become 'fostering friendly'.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Sandwell Council recognises and values the contribution that foster carers make to society and especially the lives of children in care.

- 4.2 Sandwell Council is committed to being a 'Fostering Friendly Employer' by supporting those employees who are already foster carers, and to encourage those who may be considering foster care to take that next step.
- 4.3 By doing so, we will be providing positive working role models, and widening the pool of available foster carers, enabling more children in care to be matched with the most appropriate foster carer.
- 4.4 Therefore, a Foster Carers Leave policy (attached at appendix 1&2) has been developed and should be read in conjunction with this report.
- 4.5 The policy aims to provide paid time off in any 12-month period as follows:
- assessment and initial training prior to approval as a foster carer - up to four days
 - attendance at panel for approval – one day
 - child review meetings, foster carer review meetings and training – up to five days.

In addition, the Council recognises that foster carers need to be able to respond flexibly to the needs of the children in their care and that by enabling them to work flexibly will help them to balance their work and caring responsibilities.

Therefore, employees who are foster carers should have the same access to our flexible working scheme, carers leave scheme, and emergency leave scheme as parents, and by recognising fostered children as dependants, the Council will assist foster carers in providing a stable and secure home for the children they care for.

- 4.6 For the purposes of this policy, the term foster carer will also extend to kinship carers, connected carers, special guardianship order carers and foster to adopt carers, as appropriate.
- 4.7 These principles accord with best practice for employers, as promoted by the Fostering Network

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- 5.1 Sandwell Council is committed to working with its recognised Trade Union colleagues to ensure support is available to employees who are prospective or existing foster carers.

- 5.2 The policy was developed in conjunction with Sandwell Council's recognised Trade Union colleagues.
- 5.3 The proposal to implement a Foster Carers Leave policy was endorsed by all members of the Joint Consultative Panel (JCP) on 13 October 2020.
- 5.4 The Council will continue to review this policy in consultation with the Trade Unions to ensure it is in line with current best practice and any future legislation.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 The Council is not obligated to implement a Foster Carers Leave policy. However, as part of its corporate and social responsibility, the Council has a commitment to carry out its practices in an ethical way which supports the development of employee relations.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The corporate risk management strategy has been complied with to identify and assess the risks arising from the decisions being sought. This has concluded that there are no red risks that require reporting. All risks identified have suitable measures in place to mitigate risks to an acceptable level within the council's appetite for risk.
- 7.2 There are no specific financial implications arising from the contents of this report. It is expected that service areas will accommodate the additional leave available to foster carers from existing staffing resources.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report. The policy does not create any risk of discrimination claims, as it can be applied equally to all employees. It does not affect any other statutory employment rights.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 An initial screening was undertaken in September 2020, it was agreed at this time that the subject of the statement did not meet the criteria for undertaking a full EIA.
- 9.2 The information assessed had a positive impact on one of the nine protected characteristics or groups – namely sex. The remaining characteristics were not adversely affected, as the policy will be applied equally and consistently to all employees.

9.3 Although this policy applies equally to all employees, managers should have due regard to the personal circumstances of individuals.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 There are no specific data protection implications arising from the contents of this report.

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from the contents of this report.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS.

12.1 There are no sustainability issues arising from the contents of this report.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

13.1 By taking a proactive approach to supporting foster carers, as detailed within this report, the Council can ensure that these employees are also provided with the best possible opportunities to achieve a proper work life balance.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

14.1 There is no specific impact on any council managed property or land arising from the contents of this report.

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 The Council recognises that by having a Foster Carers Leave policy, may make the vital difference in the decision of an employee to become a foster career.

15.2 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is fully committed to providing an inclusive working environment for every employee, and that foster carers need to be able to respond flexibly to the needs of the children in their care and that by enabling them to work flexibly will help them to balance their work and caring responsibilities.

15.3 It is important to make it clear through workplace policy and guidance, that employees who are foster carers will be supported, and to outline and communicate what support is available.

- 15.4 Once agreed, the Council will communicate to current and prospective employees that this policy has been developed.
- 15.5 Senior Managers, Line Managers and Human Resources will also be informed of their responsibilities under this policy.

16 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 None

17 **APPENDICES:**

17.1 Appendix 1 – Foster Carers Leave Policy – HR74

17.2 Appendix 2 – Foster Carers Leave request form – HR74.1

Sue Stanhope
Interim Human Resources Director