

# HUMAN RESOURCES & COUNCIL TAX COMMITTEE

24 February 2025

## REPORT OF HEAD OF PEOPLE

### A.4 FOSTERING FRIENDLY POLICY

#### PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

##### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To present to the Human Resources and Council Tax Committee the development of the Council's Fostering Friendly Policy, ensuring alignment with identified best practice and contributing to the authority's obligations under Social Value legislation.

##### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

According to Essex County Council's Fostering team, Essex currently has over 1,000 children in care, each facing significant disruption in their lives. Unfortunately, this number is increasing, leading to a growing demand for more foster carers.

Foster carers provide essential care and stability to children who cannot live with their birth families. For many of these children, foster care represents their first positive experience of family life. The shortage of foster carers across the UK often results in children being placed far from their communities.

Tendring District Council recognises and values the vital contributions that foster carers and supported lodgings carers make to society, particularly to the lives of children and young people in care.

We understand that foster carers require flexibility in their working arrangements to meet the needs of their fostered children or young people.

We aim to achieve this by creating a fostering-friendly organisation that offers flexible working arrangements to accommodate the needs of all foster carers.

We acknowledge that the process of becoming an approved foster carer is lengthy and involves several reasonable but demanding expectations, particularly concerning training, assessment, and approval.

Therefore, the Council has introduced a policy to support any staff member who is a foster carer, approved connected person's carer, supported lodgings carer, or an approved kinship carer (*hereafter referred to as foster carers*). This policy will apply to all Council employees.

To publicly demonstrate our commitment to being a fostering-friendly organisation, the Council is also collaborating with Fostering Network UK to become a recognised Fostering Family Employer.

By recruiting more foster carers and supporting those employed by the Council, more children will be able to receive support locally, allowing them to stay connected with the people and places that matter most to them. As a Fostering Friendly employer, the Council can be part of the solution.

## RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Human Resources & Council Tax Committee:

- (a) approves and adopts the Council's new Fostering Friendly Policy and the organisation's commitment to becoming a recognised Fostering Friendly employer;
- (b) requests the Leader of the Council to delegate responsibility to the Portfolio Holder for Partnerships to approve initiatives that promote fostering and becoming a foster carer.

## REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

Implementing a Fostering Friendly Policy provides numerous benefits, including enhanced support for employees who are foster carers, leading to increased job satisfaction and retention. It fosters a positive work environment by demonstrating the Council's commitment to social responsibility and employee well-being. Additionally, it supports the authority's position as an 'employer of choice' while also contributing to the community by ensuring more children in care can remain connected to their local areas. Overall, such a policy underscores the Council's dedication to making a meaningful impact on both its employees and the wider community.

As the Foster Friendly Policy is a new people policy, it is appropriate for the Human Resources and Council Tax Committee to approve its adoption in accordance with Part 3 of the Council's Constitution.

## ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

While there is an option to not introduce this policy, doing so would not align with current best practices, the Council's family-friendly and supportive culture, or our aspiration to be an 'employer of choice'.

## PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

### DELIVERING PRIORITIES

Implementing this policy will support employees who wish to foster, strengthen our organisation, and ultimately benefit vulnerable children in our community who need foster carers.

The Council's Fostering Friendly Policy aligns with the authority's Corporate Plan 2024/28 priorities of 'working with partners to improve quality of life' and 'raising aspirations and creating opportunities.' By supporting our employees and the wider community to become and remain foster carers, the policy enhances the quality of life for children and young people, raises their aspirations (*and those of their carers*), and creates employment and other opportunities.

### LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)

Employers have a legal obligation to consider the needs of employees who are foster carers, although specific rights and protections can vary. Foster carers have the same statutory rights as other employees, including the right to request flexible working arrangements.

While implementing a Fostering Friendly Policy is not legally required, it aligns with best

practices and demonstrates the Council's commitment to supporting its employees and the wider community.

As a result of adopting this policy, employees' terms and conditions of employment will be amended to include a contractual right to paid time off as detailed in the policy.

### **FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

No specific resource implications have been identified to date as the Council does not hold data on whether staff are currently foster carers or intend to become foster carers. However, the HR team will seek to obtain this information and will monitor the take up of any paid leave taken as a result of this policy. This work sits within existing budgets.

### **USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY**

The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:

<p>A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;</p>	<p>The Fostering Friendly Policy looks to support employees who otherwise might feel they need to leave to continue their fostering responsibilities and therefore impacting our delivery of services.</p>
<p>B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including; and</p>	<p>The Fostering Friendly Policy provides a mechanism to ensure that there are clear and consistent procedures for managers to authorise time off for foster carers.</p>
<p>C) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.</p>	<p>As a major employer in the district, the Council's ambition is to contribute to building a more prosperous local community by modelling good employment practice.</p> <p>Tendring District Council is also an 'Anchor' organisation – Anchors play a key role in shaping and developing the skills of the local workforce.</p>

### **MILESTONES AND DELIVERY**

- (a) Agreement by Management Team 5 February 2025
- (b) Human Resources & Council Tax Committee 24 February 2025
- (c) Officer Decision 3 March 2025
- (d) Publication to TDC intranet 10 March 2025
- (e) Seek approval to become Foster Friendly Employer through the Fostering Network 10 March 2025
- (f) Commence a programme of raising awareness amongst staff of the benefits of becoming a foster carer and the Council's support as their employer (*once approval has been granted to be a Foster Friendly Employer*)

### **ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION**

The new Fostering Friendly Policy will ensure that the authority meets any statutory obligations with regard to employment and equality legislation.

### **OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

Full consultation has taken place with the local Unison Branch Executive, who are fully supportive and welcome the introduction of this policy and the Council's commitment to

supporting foster carers.

The HR team has also consulted with a staff member who is an experienced foster carer to gather their views on the policy. They felt that the policy comprehensively addresses their experiences and provides carers with the assurance that they have the support of their employers.

## **EQUALITIES**

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when the Council makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

The Council is committed to being an inclusive employer and a 'Family Friendly Employer', in all of its people policies and practices.

The Foster Friendly Policy will ensure that the Council complies with all relevant employment legislation and identified best practice.

The implementation of a clear policy to support foster carers will ensure that all requests for support will be dealt with in a non-discriminatory and consistent way and in accordance with the Council's Diversity and Equality Policies.

The Equality Impact Assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

## **SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS**

Social Value is defined through the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 and requires all public sector organisations (and their suppliers) to look beyond the financial cost of a contract and consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area.

The Council aims to lead by example as a major local employer. This includes following recognised best practice and ensuring full compliance with legislation.

The Council is also an Anchor organisation. Anchor organisations are usually large organisations which are local to place and have the leverage to maximise social value through their role as workplace developers, employers and procurers, their core business (*for example health and education*) and the linkages they have to the place they operate.

It is envisaged that the introduction of this policy and the Council's commitment to becoming a Fostering Family Employer will create significant social value by supporting employees who

are foster carers, thereby enhancing their job satisfaction and retention. It also promotes a positive work environment and demonstrates the Council's commitment to social responsibility and employee well-being. This policy helps attract a diverse and compassionate workforce and contributes to the community by ensuring more children in care can remain connected to their local areas.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2030**

This report has no direct implication on the Council's aspiration to be net zero by 2030.

#### **OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS**

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	Not applicable
<b>Health Inequalities</b>	Supports vulnerable children and young adults by encouraging employees to become foster carers.
<b>Area or Ward affected</b>	Throughout the district.

#### **ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION**

This policy aligns with a number of the authority's people policies, including but not limited to, its Volunteer Policy, Reservist Policy, Time of for Dependents, Flexible Working Policy.

### **PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Policy clearly outlines the Council's commitment to supporting foster carers, detailing the time off and support they are entitled to, and how they can access these benefits.

The Council's updated Policy includes the following sections:

- Leave and the procedure for requesting time off
- The benefits of the policy
- Further information

To simplify the Policy, the term 'foster carers' is used throughout to refer to the various types of care provided to children and young people.

To support the Policy and the Council's commitment to becoming a Foster Friendly employer, resources and promotional materials will be made available for Managers and Employees.

This policy has been produced using the Fostering Network model policy, which has also been adopted by Essex County Council.

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS TAKEN BY COUNCIL/CABINET/COMMITTEE ETC.**

None

**BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL**

There are no background papers or published reference material associated with this report. However, resources provided by Essex County Council's Foster team and Fostering Network have been used to develop the policy and support this report.

**APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Fostering Friendly Policy

**REPORT CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

*Include here the Name, Job Title and Email/Telephone details of the person(s) who wrote the report and who can answer questions on the content.*

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