

**TO: EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE  
4 OCTOBER 2017**

---

**FOSTER CARER LEAVE POLICY  
Director of Corporate Services - HR**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To propose that employees who become Foster Carers are allowed up to ten days of paid foster carer leave, to demonstrate the Council's commitment to fostering and to become a "Fostering Friendly Employer".

**2 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 **That employees who are foster carers or are in the process of becoming a foster carer are allowed up to 10 days total paid foster carer leave (excluding schools).**
- 2.2 **That requests for time off, leave and flexible working arrangements in relation to care of a looked after child are considered favourably where this is consistent with the operational demands of the organisation.**
- 2.3 **That the Council supports the annual Foster Care Fortnight awareness campaign.**

**3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 To promote foster care and to promote the Council as a Fostering Friendly Employer.

**4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 Run the scheme for a pilot period of two years and review – before making an established commitment that would allow the Council to be considered Fostering Friendly.
- 4.2 Not to award the additional days but to ask managers to be understanding when foster carers and potential foster carers ask for time off under one of the council's existing policies (eg Time Off for Dependents, flexitime scheme).

**5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 5.1 The Fostering Friendly Employer initiative suggests that an employee going through the process of becoming a foster carer should receive up to five days paid leave to go through the application and assessment process, and up to five days for those who have become foster carers to allow them to attend meetings, training, panels, hearings or any other key events or activities in support of foster children and young people in their care. In addition, it suggests embedding an accommodating approach to any requests for flexible working arrangements.

- 5.2 The Fostering team are keen to promote the Fostering Friendly Employer scheme, run by the Fostering Network. It would be helpful to be able to indicate that the Council had also adopted this standard.
- 5.3 It is likely that take up would be very low. Few or no employees at any one time are foster carers and it is unlikely that offering paid leave would increase this substantially. In any case, the council's existing policies on time off for dependents, flexitime scheme, use of annual leave etc would mean that employees in this position are likely to be able to take some time off through other means, either paid or unpaid; this move would simply signal the council's support for foster carers and would be unlikely to cause a significant cost increase.
- 5.4 Schools would be exempted from this policy. A teacher, for example, using this time off during term time would result in the school having to take time and incur additional cost to secure a supply teacher.
- 5.5 If Bracknell employees were more likely to become foster carers this could lead to less out of area foster placements, which is more cost effective for the Council – although the time off would be offered even if the employees were undertaking fostering for other local authorities or other fostering organisations.
- 5.6 Foster Carers currently have no legal protection in relation to paid time off with the exception of Dual Approved Prospective Adopters who have a child placed with them under section 22C of The Children Act 1989 with a view to adopting that child. This has been reflected in the Council's Adoption Policy.
- 5.7 Bracknell Forest employees working in social care are not able to foster children for Bracknell Forest; however if they chose to do so for another authority or organisation the time off provisions would still apply.

## **6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

### Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The local authority has the legal power to provide the proposed leave.

### Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 n/a

### Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 n/a

### Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 n/a

### Other Officers

- 6.5 n/a

## **7 CONSULTATION**

### Principal Groups Consulted

#### 7.1 Local Joint Committee

### Background Papers

None

### Contact for further information

Nikki Gibbons, Resources HR - 01344 352049

[nikki.gibbons@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:nikki.gibbons@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Sarah Crawforth

Recruitment/Publicity Officer

Children's Social Care – 01344 352651