

## Agenda Item No. 5

### Personnel Committee – 5 December 2022

#### Family Friendly Policy (Section 11 Fostering Friendly Policy)

##### 1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To gain Personnel Committee approval for the revised Family Friendly Policy (Appendix 1) endorsed by Corporate Management Team (CMT) at its meeting of 17 November 2022.

##### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the Family Friendly Policy as attached in appendix 1.

##### 3. Background Information

- 3.1 The Family Friendly Policy was last reviewed in 2019 to align it to the priorities of the council, including PROUD, reinforcing the council's standards and behaviour framework and aligning it to the other employment policies. This policy is usually updated to ensure legislative compliance, with the last change being in April 2020 due to the introduction of statutory parental bereavement leave.
- 3.2 The revised Family Friendly Policy has been drafted in response to a request from Children's Social Care to amend Section 11 in relation to foster care leave for employees. Foster care leave was introduced in the Family Friendly Policy in 2016.
- 3.3 Walsall Council is committed to ensuring that, wherever possible, children are supported to live with their birth parents or their extended family. Where this has not been possible and children become looked after, it is preferable that they are placed within a family setting. It is the aim of the council that wherever possible this will be with foster carer/s home approved by Walsall rather than through commissioning an external placement outside of the Borough. The rationale for this is two-fold; evidence suggests local family-based environments are more likely to improve outcomes for children, and secondly the huge cost differentials between children's home placements and foster care provision.
- 3.4 To address this, Walsall Council needs to be ambitious, bold and determined in its pursuit to increase the number of suitable Foster Carers who live in the Borough. We believe that there is an untapped potential to support this growth from our own internal workforce. By enhancing the current offer to employees backed with a strong promotional campaign, in which we can champion that the Council is a Fostering Friendly Employer, this could lead to an uptake in the recruitment for Foster Carers from within our own existing workforce.
- 3.5 The Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly employers' scheme helps employers to support and recognise the roles of their employees who foster and involves no direct costs for accreditation. Members of the scheme agree to put in place a

fostering friendly policy for all foster carers in their employment offering foster carers flexible working and paid time off for training and settling a new child into their home.

- 3.6 Although the council already operates a Family Friendly Policy which makes provision for employees being foster carers, with additional paid leave each year, to support the overall strategy regarding the recruitment of more foster carers and to provide greater support to those employees who are already Foster Carers, it was considered necessary to strengthen and improve this offer.

#### *Aim*

- 3.7 The aim is for the council to become accredited with The Fostering Network as a Fostering Friendly employer. Once accredited the council will be working with other large businesses across Walsall to also support them in working with us to secure Foster Friendly accreditation and to recruit further foster carers from across their workforce.

#### *Know*

- 3.8 The changes to this policy are limited to Section 11 as outline below:
- Section title changed from Foster Care Leave to Fostering Friendly Policy so that it can be used as an independent document for the purposes of Foster Friendly accreditation (if required).
  - Insertion of introductory two paragraphs on the Council's commitment to supporting foster carers.
  - Clarification on entitlement to foster care leave (section 11.1).
  - Increasing the maximum days paid leave per year from 5 to 7 days, with additional time off to attend the statutory 6 monthly meetings (section 11.2).

#### *Our Council Plan priorities*

- 3.9 The policy is directly aligned to the council's strategic priority of internal focus ensuring all council services are customer focused, effective, efficient and equitable and helps embed the behaviours and values expected of all employees as part of the Behaviour and Standards Framework.

#### *Response*

- 3.10 Subject to approval, HR will finalise all associated guidance/forms (where relevant) and prepare a workforce communications and implementation plan ready for publication.

#### *Review*

- 3.11 Employment policies will usually be reviewed on a three yearly cycle, unless legislation or internal organisational need prompt a review earlier.

## **4. Financial Implications**

4.1 The financial implications associated with the amendment of the policy are in relation to the increase in paid leave from 5 to 7 days per year, plus leave to attend the statutory 6 monthly reviews. However, any paid leave and associated costs for cover arrangements, where necessary, will be picked up by existing service area budgets.

## **5. Legal Considerations**

5.1 There are no anticipated legal issues arising from this report.

## **6. Risk Management**

6.1 An equality impact assessment is attached (Appendix 2).

## **7. People**

7.1 Employment policies include a scope section (where applicable) and in each policy it clearly sets out who the policy applies to and who it does not (Appendix 1 section 2).

7.2 There is a direct and positive impact on our residents as a result of this policy, where by being recognised as a Fostering Friendly employer more employees opt to become foster carers supporting Walsall's looked after children.

## **8. Consultation**

8.1 Specific collaboration has taken place with colleagues from Children's Social Care to aid the revision of the Foster Care Leave section prior to a draft version going out to consultation.

8.2 As the amendments are only to section 11 of the Family Friendly Policy this section (now entitled Fostering Friendly Policy) was formally consulted upon with senior managers and trade unions colleagues across the council between 2 and 11 November 2022.

8.3 Feedback on the changes from senior managers has all been positive with no issues being raised.

8.4 Feedback from trade union colleagues raised no issues or comments that needed addressing.

### **Author**

Nic Rickhuss

HR Manager – Strategy & Planning

Human Resources

☎ 655617 ✉ [nicola.rickhuss@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:nicola.rickhuss@walsall.gov.uk)