

**SUBJECT: DELIVERING EXCELLENCE IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES:
FOSTER CARER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION – FOSTER
FRIENDLY POLICY**

MEETING: CABINET

DATE: 13/12/2023

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 A paper on exploring how to improve MCC's offer to foster carers has already been presented to DMT and is being further worked on to identify a more detailed funding profile. The purpose of this report is to outline a proposal within the paper referred to above for Monmouthshire County Council to create a policy that supports its employees who are existing foster carers or wish to become a foster carer through offering an appropriate leave entitlement.
- 1.2 The policy would apply to all employees who foster directly with Monmouthshire County Council or other Local Authority, with the exception of those working in maintained schools under the direct control of a School Governing Body. Monmouthshire County Council would support the adoption of this policy to individual Governing Bodies. The report also advocates for provision to be made within the Council's Special Leave policy for Special Guardians who are employees of Monmouthshire County Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To consider proposals for implementing a Foster Friendly policy and agree next steps.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 In common with local authorities across the UK, Monmouthshire County Council faces difficulties in the recruitment and retention of foster carers. This is a problem that is exacerbated by MCC's already high dependence on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) which not only goes against Welsh Government's (WG) move to eliminate profit from children's care but is also costly since IFA placements cost anywhere between £520 to £1,300 more per week than in-house placements.
- 3.2 Retention of existing foster carers and recruitment of new carers are both essential if MCC is to achieve placement sufficiency. Each year foster carers will be lost due to due retirement, sickness, change of circumstances/career, transfer to IFAs and other life events. Analysis undertaken by Foster Wales indicates that by 2025 MCC needs to recruit an additional 30 fostering households to meet demand as well as compensate for those leaving fostering. If we are to come anywhere close to achieving this we need to be able to make fostering for MCC an attractive option. MCC is in direct competition with IFAs able to pay significantly higher placement fees. Adopting a Foster Friendly policy within MCC would be a valuable offer to MCC employees that IFAs could not match. It could also provide a valuable starting point to encourage other employers to adopt similar policies to promote support for foster carers who foster for the local authority.
- 3.3 MCC has been working in collaboration with Foster Wales as a pan Wales initiative in relation to the 'National Commitment'. This aims to achieve a more standardised approach to the support and rewards offered to local authority foster carers in order to promote fostering for local authorities. One of the good practice requirements of the National Commitment is for every local authority in Wales to work towards developing a foster carer friendly employer policy for all Foster Wales foster carers in their employment.
- 3.4 All local authorities in Gwent are currently progressing the Foster Friendly Employer status. It has not, so far, been fully implemented in any Gwent authority however the principles of the policy have been agreed by Senior Leadership Teams in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport and Torfaen and have had political sign off in Caerphilly. All areas are working with their Human Resources teams to

create a locally compliant policy which will need Council endorsement. As such MCC is currently slightly behind other areas in Gwent in progressing this policy.

4. PROPOSALS

4.1 To retain existing foster carers who work for the local authority and to encourage new foster carer applications from MCC Colleagues, it is proposed that MCC becomes a Foster Carer Friendly employer. This would mean offering employees an appropriate leave entitlement during the assessment to become a foster carer and following approval as a foster carer. This proposal would only apply to staff fostering for local authorities, not those who foster with IFAs. It would therefore form part of the USP for fostering for local authorities; supporting and enhancing efforts to recruit and retain local authority foster carers and working towards Welsh Government's eliminate agenda.

4.2 The policy will include the following:

- Up to 5 days per year paid leave (pro rata for part time) for employees of MCC applying to become a foster carer (generic or connected person's) or Special Guardian with any local authority. Days can be taken as half days if needed. In the first year this will be split into 2 days for assessment and 3 days for support needs following approval as a foster carer. Support needs could include:
 - attending meetings
 - home visits
 - mandatory training
 - to meet the needs of a child

- Up to 5 days per year paid leave (pro rata for part time) for employees of MCC who are foster carer (generic or connected person's) with any local authority or 2.5 days per year (pro rata for part time) for employees of MCC who are approved Special Guardians for any local authority. Days can be taken as half days if needed. This leave is for:
 - attending meetings
 - home visits

- mandatory training
- to meet the needs of a child

4.3 Where more than the maximum entitlement of fostering paid leave is requested, the line manager and the employee should discuss other options which might include use of annual leave, flexi-leave, special leave, unpaid leave or carers leave (if applicable).

5. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

5.1 Promoting fostering in MCC contributes to placement sufficiency and a reduction in the need for high cost placements which are often out of county. This keeps children close to their communities and to family and people who are about them and therefore promotes positive outcomes for care experienced young people supporting their development into adults who make a positive contribution to their community.

5.2 This is part of a package of proposals being developed to make fostering for MCC more attractive, some of which will need investment but which, overall will contribute to placement sufficiency, reduction in the reliance on high cost IFA placements and improved outcomes for children

5.3 In keeping with the principles of the UNCRC this model promotes the rights of children and young people. It also contributes to MCC meeting its responsibilities with respect to safeguarding and delivering to its corporate parenting responsibilities.

6. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Options	Description	Costs	Benefits	Disbenefits/risks	Recommended
1	Do nothing	Cost neutral	No disruption	Failure to recruit sufficient foster carers, continued reliance on IFA foster carers at significant cost to MCC and ultimately the risk of a high number of unregulated placements once local authorities are no longer able to place with profit making IFAs in 2027	
2	Implement Foster Friendly Policy	Cost of additional leave for those teams/directorates affected	This will contribute to the creation of an environment in MCC which encourages fostering with local authorities, with the intention of increasing the number of local authority foster carers and achieving placement sufficiency. This will also enable us to reach out to businesses in Monmouthshire to encourage the adoption of this policy.	Some disruption for teams accommodating foster carers taking additional annual leave	

7. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Evaluation Criteria – Cabinet, Individual Cabinet Member Decisions & Council

Title of Report:	Delivering Excellence in Children’s Services: Foster Carer recruitment and retention – Foster Friendly Policy
Date decision made:	
Report Author:	Charlotte Drury

What will happen as a result of this decision being approved by Cabinet or Council?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The policy will be implemented enabling local authority foster carers who are employed by MCC to access additional special leave to attend training, meetings or other events relevant to their roles as foster carers.

What benchmarks and/or criteria will you use to determine whether the decision has been successfully implemented?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved wellbeing of foster carers employed by MCC Improved support to foster carers and promotion of fostering leading to increased numbers of foster carers
12 month appraisal

What is the estimate cost of implementing this decision or, if the decision is designed to save money, what is the proposed saving that the decision will achieve?
<p>Individual teams will need to manage any potential disruption caused by individual team members accessing additional leave through this policy, however it is envisaged that this disruption will be minimal and outweighed by the benefits of working supportively with the employee around their needs regarding the child in their care.</p> <p>Creating an environment which encourages people to foster will reduce the reliance on high cost IFA placements which represents a cost saving of approximately £500 per week per placement.</p>
12 month appraisal
<i>Give an overview of whether the decision was implemented within the budget set out in the report or whether the desired amount of savings was realised. If not, give a brief overview of the reasons why and what the actual costs/savings were.</i>
Any other comments

6. REASONS

- 6.1 In common with local authorities across the UK, MCC faces difficulties in the recruitment and retention of foster carers which exacerbates MCC's already high dependence on IFAs. IFA placements cost anywhere between £520 to £1,300 more per week than in-house placements so represent a significant financial burden. In addition, WG's move to eliminate profit from children's care will lead to a situation where from 2027, local authorities will be no longer allowed to place children with for profit IFAs. Increasing the number of in-house foster carers is therefore critical and implementing the Foster Friendly policy in MCC is part of a package designed to improve the offer for local authority foster carers.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The numbers this applies to are currently very low. There is only one generic foster carer who is a local authority employee who is part time, so any additional leave entitlement would be on a pro rata basis. There is one further foster carer who is about to be approved who works for the council. There will potentially be foster carers who work for MCC but who are not MCC foster carers that this policy would apply to but we anticipate these numbers also being very low. There is one fostering household where the foster carers work for schools. Whilst we would encourage schools to adopt this policy, this would be at the discretion of the individual school as they would bear the impact, rather than the local authority.
- 7.2 Each service area will be responsible for managing the impact of their own staff taking foster carer leave. Leave would be granted for the specific purposes listed above. Leave would be on a 'rolling' year and would not be carried over.
- 7.3 The Foster Carer Friendly Employer Policy is provided to foster carers who currently work for the Local Authority. It does not represent an additional cash-cost to the Council but would result in reduced staff availability however the numbers involved are very small. In addition providing an environment that is supportive to foster carers in caring for the children in their care is likely to

increase loyalty and productivity overall. Where foster carers are fostering for MCC (which would be the majority) offering this flexibility will also assist the Council in delivering its Corporate Parenting responsibilities. As mentioned above, this is also a benefit that cannot be matched by IFAs so is part of the USP of fostering for MCC.

8. CONSULTEES

8.1 Consultation has been undertaken with the following groups who have all endorsed the proposal with no suggested amendments:

- DMT
- CSLT
- Corporate Parenting Panel
- Cabinet Member for Social Care, Cllr Ian Chandler
- Chief Officer Social Care and Safeguarding, Jane Rodgers

9. SUMMARY

9.1 MCC needs to recruit more foster carers and retain the ones it has. In a fiercely competitive market, where IFAs are aggressively recruiting, and MCC cannot match placement fees and allowances paid to foster carers by IFAs, we have to find ways of making the MCC offer as attractive as possible. Adopting a Foster Carer Friendly Policy would be part of MCC's USP for fostering and would form a platform for encouraging other businesses to sign up to become Fostering Friendly and therefore advocates and promoters of fostering for Monmouthshire County Council and Foster Wales.

AUTHOR: Charlotte Drury

CONTACT DETAILS

E-mail: charlottedrury@monmouthshire.gov.uk



<p>Name of the Officer Charlotte Drury Phone no: 07811 234244 E-mail: chalottedrury@monmouthshire.gov.uk</p>	<p>Please give a brief description of the aims of the proposal Implement a Foster Friendly policy giving additional days special leave to local authority foster carers to enable them to attend training, meetings and other activity directly related to the care of children who are looked after in their care.</p>
<p>Name of Service area All directorates</p>	<p>Date 01/12/2023</p>

1. **Are your proposals going to affect any people or groups of people with protected characteristics?** Please explain the impact, the evidence you have used and any action you are taking below.

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Age	Creating an environment which encourages people to foster will contribute to placement sufficiency, keeping children local to their communities, schools and people who are important to them. In this way it will promote the wellbeing of children.	None	The policy will be advertised to promote Monmouthshire County Council as a foster friendly authority.
Disability	N/A		
Gender reassignment	N/A	N/A	N/A

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Marriage or civil partnership	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pregnancy or maternity	N/A	N/A	N/A
Race	N/A	N/A	N/A
Religion or Belief	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sex	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sexual Orientation	N/A	N/A	N/A

2. The Socio-economic Duty and Social Justice

The Socio-economic Duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to reduce inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage when taking key decisions This duty aligns with our commitment as an authority to Social Justice.

	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has in respect of people suffering socio economic disadvantage	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has in respect of people suffering socio economic disadvantage.	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Socio-economic Duty and Social Justice	N/A	N/A	N/A

3. Policy making and the Welsh language.

How does your proposal impact on the following aspects of the Council's Welsh Language Standards:	Describe the positive impacts of this proposal	Describe the negative impacts of this proposal	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts
Policy Making Effects on the use of the Welsh language, Promoting Welsh language Treating the Welsh language no less favourably	N/A	N/A	N/A
Operational Recruitment & Training of workforce	N/A	N/A	N/A
Service delivery Use of Welsh language in service delivery Promoting use of the language	N/A	N/A	N/A




4. Does your proposal deliver any of the well-being goals below? Please explain the impact (positive and negative) you expect, together with suggestions of how to mitigate negative impacts or better contribute to the goal. There's no need to put something in every box if it is not relevant!



Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
<p>A prosperous Wales Efficient use of resources, skilled, educated people, generates wealth, provides jobs</p>	<p>Promoting fostering in MCC contributes to placement sufficiency and a reduction in the need for high cost placements which are often out of county. This keeps children close to their communities and to family and people who are about them and therefore promotes positive outcomes for care experienced young people supporting their development into adults who make a positive contribution to their community.</p>	<p>This is part of a package of proposals being developed to make fostering for MCC more attractive, some of which will need investment but which, overall will contribute to placement sufficiency, reduction in the reliance on high cost IFA placements and improved outcomes for children.</p> <p>Individual teams will need to manage any potential disruption caused by individual team members accessing additional leave through this policy, however it is envisaged that this disruption will be minimal and outweighed by the benefits of working supportively with the employee around their needs regarding the child in their care.</p>
<p>A resilient Wales Maintain and enhance biodiversity and land, river and coastal ecosystems that support resilience and can adapt to change (e.g. climate change)</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>A healthier Wales People's physical and mental wellbeing is maximized and health impacts are understood</p>	<p>Promoting fostering in MCC contributes to placement sufficiency and a reduction in the need for high cost placements which are often out of county. This keeps children close to their communities and to family and people who are about them and therefore promotes positive</p>	<p>As above</p>

Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
	outcomes for care experienced young people supporting their development into adults who make a positive contribution to their community.	
A Wales of cohesive communities Communities are attractive, viable, safe and well connected	Promoting fostering in MCC contributes to placement sufficiency and a reduction in the need for high cost placements which are often out of county. This keeps children close to their communities and to family and people who are about them and therefore promotes positive outcomes for care experienced young people supporting their development into adults who make a positive contribution to their community.	As above
A globally responsible Wales Taking account of impact on global well-being when considering local social, economic and environmental wellbeing	N/A	N/A
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language Culture, heritage and Welsh language are promoted and protected. People are encouraged to do sport, art and recreation	Promoting fostering in MCC keeps children close to their communities and to family and people who are about them and avoids having to use IFA placements, many of which are outside Wales. This therefore contributes to the culture of Wales.	As above

Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
<p>A more equal Wales People can fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances</p>	<p>Promoting fostering in MCC contributes to placement sufficiency and a reduction in the need for high cost placements which are often out of county. This keeps children close to their communities and to family and people who are about them and therefore promotes positive outcomes for care experienced young people supporting them in fulfilling their potential. As above</p>	<p>As above</p>

5. How has your proposal embedded and prioritised the sustainable governance principles in its development?

Sustainable Development Principle	Does your proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not explain why.	Are there any additional actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
 <p>Balancing short term need with long term and planning for the future</p> <p>Long Term</p>	<p>Promoting MCC as a Foster Friendly authority meets both the short and long term needs of the children for whom it has corporate parenting responsibility for.</p>	<p>This is part of a package of proposals being developed to make fostering for MCC more attractive, some of which will need investment but which, overall will contribute to placement sufficiency, reduction in the reliance on high cost IFA placements and improved outcomes for children.</p> <p>Individual teams will need to manage any potential disruption caused by individual team members accessing additional leave through this policy, however it is envisaged that this disruption will be minimal and outweighed by the benefits of working supportively with the employee around their needs regarding the child in their care.</p>
 <p>Working together with other partners to deliver objectives</p> <p>Collaboration</p>	<p>The implementation of this policy promotes a collaborative and partnership approach with foster carers in the care of children for whom we have a corporate responsibility for.</p>	<p>As above</p>
 <p>Involving those with an interest and seeking their views</p> <p>Involvement</p>	<p>This proposal is being developed as part of a national approach which has involved consultation and engagement with foster carers and local authorities across Wales</p>	<p>As above</p>

Sustainable Development Principle	Does your proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not explain why.	Are there any additional actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
 <p>Prevention</p> <p>Putting resources into preventing problems occurring or getting worse</p>	<p>Promoting fostering in MCC contributes to placement sufficiency and a reduction in the need for high cost placements which are often out of county.</p>	<p>As above</p>
 <p>Integration</p> <p>Considering impact on all wellbeing goals together and on other bodies</p>	<p>Promoting fostering in MCC contributes to placement sufficiency and a reduction in the need for high cost placements which are often out of county. This keeps children close to their communities and to family and people who are about them and therefore promotes positive outcomes for care experienced young people supporting them in fulfilling their potential.</p>	<p>As above</p>

6. Council has agreed the need to consider the impact its decisions has on the following important responsibilities: Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding. Are your proposals going to affect any of these responsibilities?

	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has	What will you do/ have you done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Safeguarding	Enabling foster carers to have additional special leave in order to attend training, meetings and other activities promotes safeguarding of children who are looked after for whom we have a corporate parenting responsibility.	N/A	Promoting the policy
Corporate Parenting	Enabling foster carers to have additional special leave in order to attend training, meetings and other activities is in line with MCCs responsibilities as Corporate Parent for children who are looked after.	N/A	Promoting the policy

7. What evidence and data has informed the development of your proposal?

1. Placement sufficiency and needs analysis contained with the Fostering Strategy 2023/2026

8. SUMMARY: As a result of completing this form, what are the main positive and negative impacts of your proposal, how have they informed/changed the development of the proposal so far and what will you be doing in future?

This section should summarise the key issues arising from the evaluation. This summary must be included in the Committee report template

- Promoting fostering in MCC contributes to placement sufficiency and a reduction in the need for high cost placements which are often out of county. This keeps children close to their communities and to family and people who are about them and therefore promotes positive outcomes for care experienced young people supporting their development into adults who make a positive contribution to their community
- This is part of a package of proposals being developed to make fostering for MCC more attractive, some of which will need investment but which, overall will contribute to placement sufficiency, reduction in the reliance on high cost IFA placements and improved outcomes for children

9. ACTIONS: As a result of completing this form are there any further actions you will be undertaking? Please detail them below, if applicable.

What are you going to do	When are you going to do it?	Who is responsible
Monitor the implementation of the policy.	Within 6 months	C Drury

10. VERSION CONTROL: The Equality and Future Generations Evaluation should be used at the earliest stage, such as informally within your service, and then further developed throughout the decision making process. It is important to keep a record of this process to demonstrate how you have considered and built in equality and future generations considerations wherever possible.

Version No.	Decision making stage	Date considered	Brief description of any amendments made following consideration

	<i>e.g. budget mandate, DMT, SLT, Scrutiny, Cabinetetc</i>		