

BARNSLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

TITLE: BARNSLEY MBC – A FOSTERING FRIENDLY EMPLOYER

REPORT TO:	CABINET
Date of Meeting	21 SEPTEMBER 2022
Cabinet Member Portfolio	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
Key Decision	Yes
Public or Private	Public

Purpose of report

To seek Cabinet's approval for the Council to be recognised as a "*Fostering Friendly*" employer

Council Plan priority

The proposal primarily supports the priority of a **Healthy Barnsley** through enabling vulnerable children in need of care to remain safe from harm. The improvements in skills and capacity envisaged through becoming a '*Fostering Friendly*' employer can ensure greater stability of care and act as a platform for improving a range of outcomes, thereby reducing inequalities in health and income

Recommendations

That Cabinet supports the proposal for the Council to become a National Fostering Network '*Fostering Friendly*' employer

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report outlines a brief case for proposing that the Council should become a *Fostering Friendly* employer.

2.0 PROPOSAL

2.1 Foster carers can provide a stable, loving home that can enable children and young people in need of care to thrive. Fostering provides a sense of belonging for children within a family setting and recruiting foster carers

locally, supports children in being able to stay close to their family network and community within Barnsley.

2.2 At a time when demand among children and young people in need of care grows, we are experiencing a combination of factors that has led to challenges in the supply and recruitment of labour in many sectors of the employment market. In combination, the objective of ensuring children and young people in need of care stay local and constraints in the supply of skills, therefore provide an opportunity for the Council to become a *Fostering Friendly* employer. A fostering friendly employer is an enterprise that helps employees who are foster carers or who want to become foster carers do this alongside their day job.

2.3 One of the outcomes and recommendations of the recently published final report of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, was that a national foster carer recruitment programme should be launched later this year to recruit 9,000 additional foster carers in the next three years. Incentives such as the Fostering Network's *Fostering Friendly* initiative can improve the quality of practice and provision locally and quickly.

2.4 Current Position

2.5 The current position concerning the recruitment and retention of Local Authority foster carers in Barnsley is as follows:

2.6 *Allowances*: The payment of weekly fostering allowances in Barnsley are based on the National Minimum Fostering Rate that increases year on year. The allowance is intended to cover the following elements:

- Food, including school meals
- The child's health and hygiene
- Toys and play equipment
- Activities including school trips and some residential trips
- Clothing
- Pocket money
- Mobile phone top ups
- Costs of travel to school
- Contribution to household costs, for example, heating, lighting
- Bedding and replacement items
- Day to day transport, either by car or public transport
- Family day trips
- Personal allowance, including for trips to the cinema, bowling, swimming

2.7 Moreover, additional allowances can be made in relation to the following:

- Holidays, birthdays, and festivals
- Clothing
- School uniform
- School extra-curricular activities

Carers can also receive financial support through our skills-based payments scheme. Foster carers are paid at 3 levels and the criteria is based against their experience, knowledge and range of skills. The financial fees are paid based upon the age of the children in care with the older the child, the greater the payment.

- 2.8 Whilst the Scheme of payment and allowances is felt to be comparable with neighbouring local authorities (*comparisons were reviewed in September 2021*), challenges prevail in the recruitment and retention of foster carers nationally and Barnsley has been no exception. During the period April 2021 to March 2022, 23 foster carers left their role and whilst some of the reasons are positive, including through legal permanence via a Special Guardianship Order, exit interviews also indicated the following reasons:
- Local authority concerns over foster carers standards of care
 - Separation or divorce
 - Special guardianship orders (SGO)
 - Retirement
 - Withdrawal due to health reasons
- 2.9 We are keen to support our workforce to become foster carers and increasingly foster carers combine the role of foster carer with their day job. The National *Fostering Friendly Scheme* helps in recognising this dual role. Since the Scheme's inception in 2015, over 70 organisations including neighbouring local authorities and the Department for Education have participated in the Scheme.
- 2.10 The attraction for potential carers is that the Scheme recommends that employers adopt a fostering friendly policy and procedure which should include an entitlement to flexible hours of working, paid leave for training purposes as well as special leave to help enable a new child in their care to settle into their new home.
- 2.11 In noting the challenges and considerations described earlier in this report, the proposal is therefore, to revise and update the Council's existing policies for Flexible Working, Work Breaks and Special Leave as part of making it a Fostering Friendly employer and to attract the right people capable of offering a stable and loving home to children in need of care (*Please also see Paragraphs 3.10 and 4.2*).
- 2.12 Participation in the Scheme would be accentuated by the ability of the Council to use the Fostering Friendly insignia on recruitment literature to help promote this within the wider market. We will also communicate out to all partner agencies to encourage them to take up this scheme through the Fostering Network including the private sector, through the Business Economy Board.
- 2.13 Investing in such a policy will support council employees who are already foster carers, including for other councils to feel more supported and remain working but also supports any Council staff who are considering fostering to potentially be able to fulfil their current contractual responsibilities but also enable them to foster children and young people alongside this.

- 2.14 Historically, foster cares did not combine the role with formal paid work. With the passage of time local authorities have recognised they can recruit foster carers who also have paid roles. An example being if a foster carer has an older child who is in full time education, then paid work around their commitments can be considered. This would be the same as in a non-fostering family and provides young people in their care, with a positive work ethic and role modelling for the future. Our communication plan for the 'Fostering Friendly' Employer Initiative will address this perception.
- 2.15 Whilst there are various other fostering schemes, including emergency provision that can be considered which offer flexibility, the *Fostering Friendly Employer* initiative would enhance the number of current fostering households and support our ambition to continue to reduce the number of children being placed in independent fostering or residential provision, thereby enabling the Authority to deliver value for money and a more effective use of available resources within children's social care.

3.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

3.1 Financial and Risk

- 3.2 There are no direct financial implications for the Authority emerging through consideration of this report, as there are no proposed changes to the foster carers' scheme of payment and allowances.

3.4 Legal

- 3.5 There are no legal implications or risks for the Authority emerging through consideration of this report (*Please also see Paragraph 5.2 of the report*).

3.6 Equality

- 3.7 An equality impact assessment has been completed in relation to the proposal and is attached as an appendix to this report.

3.8 Sustainability

- 3.9 There are no implications for sustainability in the Borough arising through consideration of this report.

3.10 Employee

- 3.11 The proposal would afford opportunities for anyone within the Council's workforce who has considered becoming a foster carer but is unsure whether they can combine both roles, to fulfil this role with the assurance that flexible working, together with special leave and work breaks will become a feature of their tenure.

3.12 Communications

- 3.13 Subject to Cabinet approving the proposal, steps will be taken to promote the

Council as a 'Fostering Friendly' employer within internal news channels and across our network of partner organisations.

4.0 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation on the proposal has taken place with the Service Director (Human Resources, Business Improvement and Communications) together with trade union representatives from the GMB, Unison and Unite. All three trade unions have indicated their support for the proposal.
- 4.2 In order to ensure consistency of approach, the Council's existing Special Leave and Flexible Working policies will be amended to include details of the Fostering Friendly Employer initiative and include relevant information such as eligibility criteria, time- off requirements and how to process requests.
- 4.3 Consideration will also be given to aligning policies such as parental and adoption leave in Barnsley for new foster carers, if appropriate. The amended policies would follow the normal consultation and approval process including consulting with relevant Trade Unions and equality impact assessed.
- 4.4 to promote the Council as a Fostering Friendly Employer, it is recommended that job adverts and recruitment sites include a link to the Fostering Friendly Network Web site and their logo. The Council's corporate induction checklist would also be amended to refer to the Council being a 'Fostering Friendly' Employer and to encourage managers to raise awareness with new starters.

5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The proposal for the Council to become a *Fostering Friendly* employer provides an opportunity to increase capacity within our cohort of foster carers for children in need of care and to help improve a range of outcomes.
- 5.2 Should Cabinet decide not to support this proposal, there is a risk that it would be an opportunity wasted in ensuring we have a cost-effective solution to satisfactorily complying with our statutory responsibility for ensuring a sufficient volume of placements for children in need of care.

6.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The proposal for the Council to become a *Fostering Friendly* employer provides useful accreditation in attracting additional foster carers of the right calibre, particularly from within the Council's own workforce, including Children's Services.

7.0 GLOSSARY

- 7.1 None, applicable.

8.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

- 8.1 Appendix 1: Barnsley MBC – A ‘Fostering Friendly’ Employer: Equality Impact Assessment

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

10.0 REPORT SIGN OFF

Financial consultation & sign off	<i>Joshua Amahwe 20/07/2022</i>
Legal consultation & sign off	<i>Jason Field 19/07/22</i>

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