

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 5 December 2024

Report of the Director of Children's Social Care

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Caring for the vulnerable;

Fostering Friendly Accreditation

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

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Brief Summary

This report asks for approval for Lancashire County Council to seek "Fostering Friendly" employer accreditation, subject to the satisfactory resolution of any necessary discussion around terms and conditions.

Fostering Friendly is an accredited scheme hosted by the Fostering Network that encourages organisations and employers to sign up to a commitment to support employees who Foster. It is one of several initiatives planned to fulfil the authority's objectives to increase recruitment and retention of In-House Foster Carers, which in turn will mean that the county council can expand its matching potential, as well as securing Lasting Homes and positive outcomes for our children.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to approve:

- (i) In principle that Lancashire County Council seeks accreditation as a Fostering Friendly employer, subject to satisfactory completion of the necessary discussions relating to terms and conditions.

- (ii) That the Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance, Director of People and the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, be authorised to submit the application for accreditation as a Fostering Friendly employer.

Detail

What is Fostering Friendly?

Fostering Friendly is an accredited scheme hosted by the Fostering Network that encourages organisations and employers to sign up to a commitment to support employees who Foster. 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.

Members of the scheme agree to put in place a Fostering Friendly Human Resources policy for all Foster Carers in their employment (regardless of the nature of the organisation and whether or how they run a fostering service). This includes offering Foster Carers flexible working and paid time off for mandatory training linked to the Foster Carer role, attending statutory meetings in relation to children they Foster, and for settling a new child into their home. Fostering Friendly employers also help promote Foster Care Fortnight™, the county council's annual campaign to raise the profile of Fostering and encourage people to consider becoming Foster Carers and offer children the care they need.

Lancashire County Council's Proposal:

The authority is considering providing a reimagined offer to Lancashire County Council employees who foster. This will cover mandatory and statutory training for this enhanced role. To achieve these ambitions, the following is being considered:

- Increased leave arrangements to support training for mainstream and Kinship Foster Carers who work for Lancashire and leave arrangements to support Foster Carers who Foster via another authority or Independent Fostering Agency.
- Continued and better promotion of Foster Care Fortnight.
- Working to recruit more part-time and flexible Foster Carers from the county council's existing workforce.
- Explore social value objectives within contracts to help third party suppliers help to promote Fostering.
- A commitment from all services within the county council to promote Fostering.

A draft Fostering Friendly policy is attached at Appendix 'A'.



Benefits of becoming a Fostering Friendly Employer:

The Fostering work outlined in this report is part of the wider Where Our Children Live Programme and supports the ambition of the authority to increase the number of Foster Carers for our children.

Fostering remains highly competitive with a small cohort of interested and eligible families. Lancashire's Fostering Service wants to reduce avoidable and preventable demand for more costly homes by recruiting more in house Foster Carers.

The benefits of becoming a Fostering Friendly employer include:

- Increased recruitment and retention of Foster Carers.
- Better life chances for children living in a family setting, which in turn supports Lancashire County Council meet its obligations under the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- More children living in Foster homes in Lancashire supporting the Where Our Children Live vision of 'Lancashire homes for Lancashire children'.
- Potential cost savings to the children's placement budget.
- Lancashire will be added to the accredited list of employers.
- Fostering Friendly employers can improve support for staff, making workplaces friendlier for Foster Carers, benefiting the children in their care and making it easier for people to consider Fostering.
- Adopting a social value contract with all third-party contractors allows the council to widen the reach of Foster Carer marketing and nurture Fostering sufficiency within the County.
- The Fostering Friendly logo on our website and social media to build our brand and create a competitive advantage.
- Joining the scheme shows strong corporate social responsibility, a responsible company with a long-term commitment in the area.
- Support for the authority to deliver better services and care for the vulnerable and to fulfil the county council's responsibility as corporate parents to Lancashire's Children in Our Care.

Learning from other authorities:

Lancashire is currently gathering data and practical learning from other authorities to ensure best practice is adopted. 80 local authorities, many of which are Lancashire's neighbours, are accredited or in the process of becoming accredited.

Stockport Council implemented Fostering Friendly over 5 years ago and has had a good success rate. This year, the ten Greater Manchester local authorities have gained the accreditation, currently promoting "Greater Manchester being the first region to be Fostering Friendly".



Fostering Friendly Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies Northwest

Fostering Friendly Local Authorities

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Bury Council
Calderdale Council
Cheshire East Council
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Kirklees Council
Leeds City Council
Liverpool City Council
Manchester City Council
Rochdale Borough Council
Salford City Council
Sheffield City Council
Stockport Council
Wakefield Council
Wigan Council



Local Authorities on the pathway to Fostering Friendly accreditation

Warrington
St Helens
Trafford
Blackpool

Fostering Friendly Independent Fostering Agencies

TACT
National Fostering Group

Lancashire
County Council 

Next Steps:

- Communications and engagement plan to be completed.
- Engage with key stakeholders including Education and Unions about the proposed changes.
- Trade Union consultation.
- Consideration by the Strategic People Board.
- Application to Fostering Network for accreditation.
- Communications and promotion.
- Acquire and analyse data from Local Authorities already in the scheme.

Work required:

There are a number of considerations that, as an organisation, the county council need to consult and engage with key stakeholders over.

The county council's terms and conditions for employees are part of a nationally agreed framework, and any local arrangements which sit outside of the agreed framework will require engagement, consultation and agreement with stakeholders, such as Trade Unions.

It is also prudent to map the work roles of where the county council's In-House Foster Carers and those who Foster for other organisations, currently are. The increase in leave allowance will impact teams and workloads, possibly in frontline services, and this should be considered.

Work around learning from other authorities which have achieved the accreditation will be carried out by the Fostering Services will communication and engagement across the whole county council with stakeholders to raise awareness of the proposed changes. The proposal for Fostering Friendly accreditation will continue to be explored, to determine if there is an evidence base to support the outcomes required.



Appendices

Appendix 'A' is attached to this report. For clarification, it is summarised below and referenced at relevant points within this report.

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	Fostering Friendly Draft Policy

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Human Resources/People Services

The Equality Impact Assessment which can be viewed [here](#) has been produced and needs to be considered as part of the proposal. Alongside any policy implementation/changes, management guidance will also need to be drafted. The Policy/guidance needs to include the application process to become a Foster Carer, and the approach to how time off is managed in a way that does not impact service delivery.

Lancashire County Council schools can be given the option to adopt corporate policies, although this cannot be enforced, given they are on different terms and conditions. Trade Union Joint Negotiating Consultation Forum meetings take place on the first Thursday of every month and the Employment Committee meets every two months.

Financial

The recruitment of an in-house foster carer by the county council results in costs that are much lower than those of an agency foster carer. When considering the potential financial impact of covering the additional leave discussed as part of this report, based on the current employees, the impact would be minimal, and in most cases, it is unlikely that the leave would need to be backfilled. The impact on schools is not known at this stage.

Procurement

In conjunction with the Procurement Team, it is proposed the following be reviewed:

- Aligning Fostering Friendly with the ongoing work with the Social Value Portal.
- Liaising with Warrington, and other, Councils in regard to how they have adopted the Social Value Clause.
- Develop a model that supports Lancashire County Council to promote Fostering to local large employers with consideration to whether information can be provided within procurement webpages, tender documentation and/or contract management functions.
- Partnership with the Northern Power House and Local Enterprise Partnership.



Legal

In relation to employment law, changes to terms and conditions can only be made following consultation, negotiation and agreement between the parties. Legal advice will be sought as part of the application process.

Risk Management

Trade Union agreement to entitlement for employees will be required to gain the accreditation.

If Cabinet agrees to approve working towards the accreditation, a communication and engagement plan will be developed, to raise awareness of the changes which will be rolled out across the authority.

The current number of employees who Foster is relatively small compared to the size of the overall workforce. Directorates would need to manage any increased special provision where applicable. Ongoing consultations with the relevant services will be carried out including Finance, People Services, Procurement and Legal.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

