

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE	DATE 24 July 2024	ITEM NO 5
TITLE Proposal for Royal Greenwich Council becoming a Fostering Friendly Employer and offering an Incentive to Council Staff for foster carer recruitment.	WARD (S) All	
CHIEF OFFICER Director of Children’s Services	CABINET MEMBER Children and Young People	
DECISION CLASSIFICATION Key Non-exempt	IS THE FINAL DECISION ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT TO BE MADE AT THIS MEETING? Yes	

1. **Decision required**

1.1 This report makes the following recommendations to the General Purposes Committee:

- To support the implementation of a Fostering Friendly Employer Policy for Royal Greenwich.
- To support the Local Authority’s effort to expand the foster friendly employer policy amongst partner agencies including public bodies, businesses, and community voluntary sector.
- To support the application for accreditation of Royal Greenwich as a Fostering Friendly Employer with The Fostering Network.
- To recommend to General Purposes Committee a staff incentive whereby any RBG staff member will receive £250 who successfully refers a person who is then approved by the Fostering Panel as a Greenwich Foster Carer and takes the placement of a Greenwich Child.

2. **Links to Our Greenwich missions**

2.1 This report relates to the Council’s agreed missions as follows:

- Children and young people can reach their full potential
- People in Greenwich have access to a safe and secure home that meets their needs

- Everyone has the opportunity to secure a good job
- Our Council is better at listening to communities, and communities feel they are heard
- We develop networks with communities, key partners and businesses to meet need and address challenges together
- We design our services around the needs of our residents
- Our Council is an adaptive organisation, enabling it to navigate the increasing number of challenges it faces while remaining financially sustainable
- Our Council is a great place to work, with a diverse workforce who have the right skills and are motivated and empowered to deliver.

2.2 All children need security, stability, love, and a strong sense of identity and belonging. The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to providing safe, caring and professional foster care for every child within the borough that is in need of a foster placement.

2.3 Royal Greenwich prides itself on supporting and promoting a one council approach in its corporate parenting responsibilities to children in care. In relation to Council staff, we value the importance of recognising and appreciating the professionalism of our different roles we serve and to support our employees who choose to foster in order to improve the outcomes for our children.

3. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

3.1 The purpose of this report is to obtain approval to introduce a Foster Friendly Employer Policy which will support our Council staff who are prospective or existing foster carers.

3.2 Given the increased need for more foster carers, we also want to engage Council staff in our recruitment strategy by offering a financial incentive for every successfully approved foster carer that they refer to us.

3.3 Royal Greenwich wishes to support those employees who are already foster carers and to encourage those who may be considering foster care to take that step. We recognise that where employees have vital support in place, this will result in making a difference in the decision of an employee to become a foster carer. These proposals will therefore be a good recruitment and retention incentive for Council Staff.

- 3.4 Foster Carers provide a stable home for some of the most vulnerable children across Greenwich. Many of the children that foster carers support often have complex and challenging needs. A supportive and flexible employer enables foster carers to balance their work and caring responsibilities. The adoption of a Fostering Friendly Employer policy and accreditation seeks to reinforce the Council's existing commitment to being a flexible employer that supports work-life balance and promoting the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities to our children and young people and recognising the importance of foster carers.
- 3.5 Royal Greenwich offers staff the opportunity to work flexibly where this is compatible with the demands of their job. Our flexible working, child placement leave, emergency time off for dependents and parental leave policies and excellent training opportunities, currently do not apply to approved foster carers and kinship carers
- 3.6 The Fostering Service considers a launch of a Fostering Friendly Employer Policy for staff across Greenwich Council will demonstrate our commitment as corporate parents to our children and young people. It will also serve as an effective mechanism to promote the difference fostering can make, by endorsing the idea of working while fostering with flexibility will further increase the pool of possible people who can consider fostering.
- 3.7 In terms of wider community impact, it is hoped that Greenwich adopting this policy will lead to wider Businesses and Employers in Greenwich looking to also achieve accreditation as a Fostering Friendly Employer. The impact of this would be opening up the possibility to a greater sector of the community of becoming foster carers which would increase placement choice for Greenwich Children.
- 3.8 This paper proposes the agreement of a Foster Friendly Employer Policy and subsequent approved status which will not only provide better support to staff who act as foster carers but act as an incentive to foster care helping Royal Greenwich to meet its corporate parenting duties and save money for placements for children and young people.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 The Fostering Friendly Employers (FFE) scheme was launched in 2014 by The Fostering Network. It arose from a two-year, Department for Education funded project to support Local Authorities to improve

recruitment and their report “Combining Fostering and Other Work”, which detailed foster carers’ requirements and wishes of their employers.

- 4.2 To be recognised as FFE an employer must put in place an HR policy offering a minimum of five days additional paid leave to all foster carer and applicant foster carer employees to cover their fostering commitments (See Appendix One). In addition, they must commit to supporting Foster Care Fortnight.
- 4.3 There are currently 133 Foster Friendly Employers in the UK. Of these, there are 57 Local Authorities and 8 Independent Fostering Providers, with the majority coming from outside the fostering sector. These include John Lewis, the Welsh Government, the Home Office, Nationwide, Santander, KPMG, Atlas Facilities, Kier, KLA, Metrobank, Admiral, Alton Towers and Rolls Royce.
- 4.4 There are currently over 82,170 children in care in England and we recognise the urgent need to do more to help recruit new foster carers and support current foster carers in employment. Across England 70% of Children in care are cared for in Foster Care and in Greenwich over the last 5 years this has been at around 77 % of children who are in foster care. Royal Greenwich is committed to trying to ensure that all children requiring to be in care are in a family setting wherever possible and where it is in the best interest of the young person.
- 4.5 There is a lack of sufficient placements for children and young people across the age range and with varying levels of need. Identifying suitable placements for children with complex health needs, sibling groups, adolescents at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation and those at risk of or stepping down from residential care is a growing challenge. The number of children placed with internal foster carers compared to those with IFA carers is steadily increasing. This is a trend we urgently want to maintain both to ensure we have greater ability to quality assure the placements for Greenwich children and to save costs as each IFA foster placement potentially costs the Local Authority around £20k more per year.
- 4.6 Over the past two years, as part of the Building Brilliant Outcomes Together Programme, (BBOT), the Greenwich Fostering Service improved the systems, processes and recruitment strategy to increase the pool of foster carers. Whilst progress has been made, the cost of living crisis, aftermath of covid and increased market competition continue to impact the challenge in attracting more people to become foster carers. We therefore

require a whole Council approach to increase the pool of available foster carers for our children.

5 Available Options

5.1 Option one - Accept the Proposal to become a 'Foster Friendly Employer' and the Staff incentive scheme to attract more people to become foster carers for Royal Greenwich.

5.1.1 Becoming a foster-friendly employer is a noble and compassionate endeavour that can make a significant positive impact on the lives of foster children and families. Below are a few benefits to becoming a Foster Friendly Employer:

5.1.2 Social responsibility: Embracing foster friendly policies demonstrates our commitment to social responsibility and community support. By providing a supportive environment for foster families, we contribute to the well-being and stability of children and young people in foster care.

5.1.3 Employee Morale and Loyalty: Building a foster friendly workplace fosters a positive organisational culture. Employees who witness their employer's commitment to making a difference in the lives of foster children often feel a sense of pride and increased loyalty. This can improve overall morale, job satisfaction, and employee retention.

5.1.4 Attracting Top Talent: Being known as a Foster Friendly Employer can attract talented individuals who are passionate about making a difference in their communities. People who value social impact and support for vulnerable populations are more likely to be drawn to organizations that prioritise these values.

5.1.5 Enhanced Diversity and Inclusion: Embracing foster friendly policies promotes diversity and inclusion within the workplace. By actively supporting foster families and individuals involved in the foster care system, you create an environment that is inclusive and understanding of diverse family structures and backgrounds.

5.1.6 Skill Development and Team Building: Engaging in foster friendly initiatives often involves collaboration with community organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders. These partnerships can provide unique opportunities for team building and skill development. Our employees may gain valuable experience in working with different organizations and learning about child in care and advocacy.

- 5.1.7 Positive Public Image: Becoming a foster friendly employer can enhance our Council's reputation and public image. Our commitment to supporting foster families and the well-being of children can generate positive publicity, leading to increased brand recognition and customer loyalty.
- 5.1.8 In relation to the staff incentive, there have been 21 RBG staff recommendations in the last few years, of which 7 have been successful which makes this our highest percentage conversion application route (33%).
- 5.1.9 However, these recommendations come from staff members who are highly linked to the fostering service already. To leverage this high conversion rate, this incentive seeks to broaden our reach to the whole council and not just staff members who are already linked to the service.
- 5.1.10 We are currently exploring free engagement strategies with staff across the council including advertising in the Talk Greenwich newsletter. But this has not had the desired impact in encouraging staff to enquire.
- 5.1.11 The financial incentive is deserved, as the recruiting of an internal foster carer is not only of great benefit to the child they are placed with, but the Council as well. A placement externally compared with a placement internally is an additional £599 per child per week. Therefore, the council will recoup the £250 cost within the first week a child is placed with this foster carer. This makes the incentive financially viable.
- 5.1.12 The biggest disadvantage to this option is that it does have a cost and it is possible for a carer to be recommended at panel but not placed with a child for a period of time (the action which recoups the cost of the referral). However, this disadvantage does not have a significant impact, as our utilisation rate for placing children with foster carers is very high (around 80%) compared to the average rates for the sector (60%).
- 5.1.13 This means that the likelihood that a carer would be recommended at panel, with their referrer receiving the financial incentive but them not being placed with a child, is highly unlikely. Indeed, even in instances where this does happen, it would only be temporary as they would eventually be placed.
- 5.1.14 The risk of a carer being recommended and then resigning before being placed is even less likely, as such a carer would be unlikely to go through the rigorous fostering assessment and panel process only to resign.

5.1.15 The introduction of a Fostering Friendly Policy in the Council would apply to all to staff who:

- Are applying to become foster carers
- Are approved foster carers and have a child in placement (or have had a child in placement for 75% of the previous 12 months) or are an approved kinship carer
- Have three months or more employment service with the Council.

5.2 **Option 2 – Do nothing**

5.21 The Council is already behind the curve in not being a Foster Friendly Employer. As highlighted above this is not only a recruitment and retention incentive but also our responsibility as Corporate Parents to support the families who care for our most vulnerable children and young people.

5.22 There is already a national crisis with the shortage of foster carers. To not do anything would only exacerbate the challenges in attracting more people to become foster carers. This may lead to the increased use of external Independent Fostering Agency placements, alternative placement provision and Residential Care which all come at significantly higher cost to the Local Authority.

5.23 The rate of staff recommendations outside of those who already have links to the service would remain at a very low level. To not promote this, would go against corporate priorities and commitments to providing a good corporate parenting service.

6 **Preferred Option**

6.1 The preferred option is option one – Implement the Foster Friendly Employer Policy and Staff incentive scheme to refer people to become foster carers.

6.2 The expected outcome is that the incentive will draw in staff outside of the fostering service to recommend a foster carer. If the current rate of recommendation over two years is doubled to reach 14 successful recommendations, this would cost £3,500, but would save the council approx. £11,740 per week (based on each placement taking 1.4 children).

6.3 While the results are difficult to predict, any successful application will be financially worthwhile after one week of being placed.

7 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 As described above in Point 5.1, this recommendation is being made to fulfil our duty as corporate parents to increase the pool of Royal Greenwich foster carers so that more of our most vulnerable children would be with local families and there would be more placement options.
- 7.2 Furthermore, the recommendations will be a recruitment and retention incentive for Council staff who are either already foster carers or may be considering becoming foster carers. In addition, the cost that is associated with the staff incentive payment will be easily recouped while still making a net saving within one week of in-house foster care.
- 7.3 The Council currently has only 3 registered Greenwich based foster carers in its employment. Considering the additional changes proposed by this paper, the cost increase in terms of paid time off is minimal. It is however noted that there may be foster carers registered with other Boroughs or Independent Fostering providers and the purpose of becoming a Fostering Friendly accredited employer is to drive numbers of in borough Carers, so any current costs would be liable to rise.
- 7.4 Although the additional flexibility of up to five additional days off work for Council staff that are also foster carers has a financial cost, this is hard to quantify, and we would predict be counterbalanced by the reduction of spend on IFA placements if we can successfully increase the recruitment of Greenwich Foster Carers. The Fostering Network predicts on average 1 in 900 members of staff is a foster carer.
- 7.5 The extension of the £250.00 incentive to staff who introduce a Royal Greenwich Foster Carer who is approved at Panel and becomes a Greenwich Foster Carer is not considered to increase costs. Being able to place a child with a Greenwich carer rather than an IFA carer would easily recover the £250 incentive within a short period. In terms of weekly fee, the cost of an IFA per week is often more than £250 per week than the cost of an internal Greenwich Foster Placement.

8. Consultation Results

- 8.1. Benchmarking has been conducted against other local authorities. Additionally, consultations with senior leaders have taken place, involving extensive discussions with The Fostering Network and Human Resources, as well as current and prospective foster carers.

9. Next Steps: Communication and Implementation of the Decision

- 9.1. The draft policy will be finalised to align with other family-friendly policies. However, the fundamental principles approved by GPC will remain unchanged.
- 9.2. Trade Unions will be formally consulted through HR Professional Services regarding the proposed adoption of a Foster-Friendly Employer Policy and its terms.
- 9.3. Communications to staff will be published via Talk Greenwich, outlining the changes to the Council Policy and staff incentive for recruitment of carers. Details on the implementation will be explained as well.
- 9.4. Further dialogue with The Fostering Network will take place to seek formal accreditation as a Foster Friendly Employer.
- 9.5. The accreditation will be used in future Recruitment Campaigns for RBG employees and Foster Carer recruitment campaigns. There would be a formal launch event to promote the Fostering Friendly Employer policy and our responsibility as Corporate Parents.
- 9.6. An additional Leave Type will be built into iTrent to capture leave specifically taken for Foster caring purposes.

10. Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	<p>The decision maker is requested to approve the proposals in this report for the reasons set out in section 4 of this report. A decision on its implementation is required by the GPC in accordance with Part 3 of the Council’s constitution.</p> <p>Under Part 3, Para 1.1(F) of the Council’s Constitution the GPC is responsible for determining Human Resources Strategies/Policies and individual matters on behalf of the Council.</p>	<p><i>Ronica Best,</i> <i>Assistant Head of</i> <i>Legal Services</i> 16/07/2024</p>

	<p>Section 1 Localism Act 2011 allows the Council to offer the proposed incentive. This section gives the Council the same general power of competence to act in the same way that an individual can. The power does not need to be exercised for the benefit of any particular place or group and can be exercised anywhere and in any way. In exercising the power, the Council must act in accordance with any restrictions applying to existing powers that are overlapped by the general power. The Director can therefore make the decision required.</p> <p>The Council should seek to ensure that all staff are made aware of the Staff Incentive Scheme.</p>	
<p>Finance and other resources</p>	<p>This decision maker is requested to support the implementation of a Foster Friendly Employer for the Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG); to support the Local Authority's effort to expand the foster friendly employer policy; to support the application for accreditation as a Fostering Friendly Employer with the Fostering Network and to agree a staff incentive whereby any RBG staff member who successfully refers a person who is then approved by the Fostering Panel as a Greenwich Foster Carer and takes the placement of a Greenwich child will receive a one off payment of £250. The extension of the £250.00 incentive to staff who introduce a Royal Greenwich Foster Carer who is approved at Panel and becomes a Greenwich Foster Carer is not considered to increase costs. Being able to place a child with a Greenwich carer rather than an Independent Fostering</p>	<p>Akosua Boachie</p> <p>Accountancy Business Change Manager</p> <p>12/07/2024</p>

	<p>Agency (IFA) carer would recover the £250 incentive within a short period. In terms of weekly fee, the cost of an IFA per week is often more than £250 per week than the cost of an internal Greenwich Foster Placement.</p> <p>Resources to fund this proposal will be met through existing revenue budgets.</p>	
Equalities	<p>The decisions recommended as part of this paper makes the following contribution to the Council's Equality and Equity Charter and the Council's Equality Objectives 2020-2024:</p> <p>Actively promote equality, Work with partners and the community to make our information, services and products more accessible and inclusive put equal opportunity at the heart of our recruitment.</p>	<p>Ishara Tewary Acting Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Care Leavers 10/06/2023</p>
Climate change	<p>This report does not make any contribution to the Greenwich Carbon Neutral Plan agreed by Cabinet on 18 November 2020</p>	<p>Ishara Tewary Acting Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Café Leavers 10/06/2023</p>
Risk Management	<p>Operational Risk: There could be initial challenges in effectively implementing and monitoring the policy across various departments and teams within the local authority.</p> <p>Key risks attaching to the proposals in this report, together with applicable mitigating actions have been considered and detailed in the Background section above. The identified risks will continue to be monitored and managed in line with the Council's risk management Toolkit. Additionally, we will develop</p>	<p>Ishara Tewary Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Care Leavers 11 July 2024</p>

	<p>clear operational guidelines and procedures for all staff involved. Provide comprehensive training programmes for staff to ensure understanding and compliance. Establish regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms to address operational challenges promptly.</p>	
<p>Corporate parenting</p>	<p>These proposals support the Council’s corporate parenting role to promote recovery, resilience & well-being and specifically supports the corporate parenting statutory principles for the children in our care and care leavers in respect of the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners • to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people • for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work. 	<p>Ishara Tewary Acting Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Café Leavers 10/06/2023</p>
<p>Staffing establishment</p>	<p>These proposals if agreed would constitute an extension to the Councils existing special leave / family friendly policies and their application to those staff who provide Foster or Kinship care. The Council already provides provision for paid special leave consistent with the criteria set out in this policy so there is no anticipated adverse impact, or significant additional unquantified costs associated with these proposals.</p> <p>However, it is anticipated that agreement to approve the Council as Foster</p>	<p><i>Steph Mills Head of HR 12th July 2024</i></p>

	<p>Friendly, supported by a clear policy and staff incentive scheme will provide associated benefits to both eligible staff and to the Council as a whole as detailed at Section 3 and 7.1 of this report.</p> <p>As this constitutes a new HR policy, a decision on its implementation is required by the GPC in accordance with Part 4 of the Council's constitution.</p>	
--	---	--

11. **Report Appendices**

11.1 The following appendices accompany this report:

Appendix One - Foster Friendly Employer Policy

Appendix Two - The Fostering Network- Foster Friendly Leaflet

12. **Background Papers**

12.1 There are no background papers

Report Author: Ishara Tewary
 Tel No. 020 8921 2761
 Email. Ishara.Tewary@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

Reporting to: Onder Beter – Senior Assistant Director
 Tel No. 020 8921 3102
 Email. Onder.beter1@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Florence Kroll – Director for Children's Services
 Tel No. 020 8921 8230
 Email. Florence.kroll@royalgreenwich.gov.uk