

<b>Report to</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of meeting</b>	25 March 2025
<b>Lead Member</b>	Cllr Julie Matthews
<b>Head of Service</b>	Rhiain Morrle, Head of Service – Education and Children’s Services
<b>Report author</b>	Rhiain Morrle, Head of Service – Education and Children’s Services
<b>Title</b>	Foster Friendly Policy

## **1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1. Introduction of Foster Friendly policy that will allow additional leave for local authority foster carers in order to aid recruitment and retention.
- 1.2. This report provides information on the Foster Friendly Policy which Cabinet is being asked to consider and approve. The Policy and Guidance can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

- 2.1. To gain Cabinet approval to adopt the Foster Friendly policy.

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

- 3.1. That the Foster Friendly Policy is approved and adopted by Cabinet.
- 3.2. That the Committee confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 2) as part of its consideration.

## 4. Report details

### Foster Friendly Policy

4.1. It is accepted that for children looked after, a placement within their own county, or as near to as possible, is important as this allows children and young people to maintain their established social networks with family, friends and education. Maintaining the cultural and language needs of children and young people is also an important placement consideration for our county.

Placing a child or young person at a distance not only has a potentially detrimental effect on the individual and their family, it also places additional pressure on already stretched resources with social workers and other professionals traveling significant distances to carry out their statutory duties.

4.2. Over recent years the numbers of potential foster carers coming forward for assessment and approval has dwindled, this is a national issue. We find ourselves competing with Independent Fostering Agencies to attract potential carers.

4.3. The cost of placements with Independent Fostering Providers can vary dependant on the company involved and any restrictions required within the placement, e.g. an enhanced fee if the child were to be placed alone, or had restrictive bail conditions. As a general rule it costs more than double to place with an Independent Fostering Provider than with an in-house foster carer. This is due to the provider taking a fee for each placement.

4.4. To ensure to placement sufficiency and to attempt to reduce our reliance on the independent sector we have already invested in recruitment, advertising and branding to remain visible in a highly competitive market and encourage new carers to come forward to be approved as local authority foster carers. In this venture we have been assisted by our colleagues in Communication, Marketing & Engagement and we are part of Maethu Cymru, which is the umbrella national brand of all 22 Welsh authorities.

4.5. In order to maximise the number of applicants coming forward for assessment, and to retain existing foster carers we have launched a project to improve our 'core offer' to foster carers. Alongside good rates of remuneration we want to have a menu of incentives that would not be available if you were to foster for an

Independent Fostering Agency. For example, some LA's offer free parking, council tax discounts and additional leave to their in-house foster carers.

4.6. During assessment as foster carers there is a requirement that potential carers undertake a three-day training. Currently employees of Denbighshire County Council are required to use their own leave or utilise the agile working policy to participate in this mandatory training.

4.7. In addition, once approved there are a number of training events that carers are required to undertake. Alongside this, foster carer must make themselves available for visits and meetings in relation to the children in their care. Currently foster carers who also employees of Denbighshire County Council have to take leave or utilise the agile working policy to attend such meetings.

The Fostering Network, a national charity supporting foster carers, have introduced the concept of 'Foster Friendly' HR policies, where in recognition of their role as foster carers, eligible employees are entitled to additional leave to undertake duties/tasks and training that are essential to their fostering role.

Foster Wales is supporting all 22 local authorities in Wales to develop and implement their own Foster Friendly Policy. In addition, Foster Wales are working with partner agencies to implement their own foster friendly HR policies.

4.8. By adopting this policy Denbighshire County Council would be sending a positive message to existing and potential foster carers, demonstrating that as a Council we value the work and commitment shown by foster carers to vulnerable children within their community.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?**

5.1. This decision contributes to the following themes, a prosperous Denbighshire, a healthier happier caring Denbighshire.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1. There are no costs associated with this report.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1. Overall the wellbeing impact assessment concluded that the policy has a positive impact on the majority of wellbeing goals with a one neutral goal. Positive impacts include local children being placed locally, therefore retaining close links to their community, family, education, healthcare and their Welsh language and culture.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1. The adoption of a 'Foster Friendly' policy in order to aid the recruitment and retention of local authority foster carers has been agreed by CET, with Trade Unions and the Joint Consultative Committee for Health and Safety and Employee Relations.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1. Not applicable at the stage of the process.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1. The recruitment of local authority foster carers is a Corporate priority. Not only will increasing the availability of Denbighshire foster carers have a significant impact on the Council's budget, but it allows for better outcome for our children looked after by way of placing them within their local communities. The risk for the Council in not assisting with the recruitment and retention of foster carers is a further increase in budget pressures and the risk that children remain without local foster care placements.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. Not applicable.