Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Quality Care - for you, with you

Equality, Good Relations and Human Rights Screening Template

Completed Screening Templates are public documents and will be posted on the Trust's website

See 'Equality, Good Relations and Human Rights Screening Guidance Notes' (on SharePoint) for further background information on the relevant legislation and for help in answering the questions on this template.

(1)   Information about the Policy/Proposal

(1.1)   Name of the policy/proposal

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust Fostering Friendly Policy.

(1.2)   Is this a new, existing or revised policy/proposal?

New

(1.3)   What is it trying to achieve (intended aims/outcomes)?

Background Information

The Southern Trust have in place a new Fostering Friendly policy, demonstrating our commitment to those staff who foster or offer supported lodgings and care for a child or young person when they need it most.   We recognise the vital role foster carers play in our community and want to make to make it's easier for colleagues who foster to balance work commitments alongside these crucial caring responsibilities.

In addition to existing provisions such as paid carers' leave, flexible working arrangements, and parental leave, our new dedicated policy goes further. Staff colleagues who are HSC Trust-approved foster carers including kinship, non-kinship and short breaks foster carers for children with a disability, as well as supported lodgings/STAY hosts, will now receive an additional five days paid leave each year (pro-rata for part-time employees).

This provision also extends to those staff currently completing the assessment process to become a HSC Trust-approved foster carers or supported lodgings/STAY hosts.

Aims & Objectives

The Trust has statutory duties to meet the needs of children in care and is committed to addressing the challenge to recruit and retain enough foster carers and supported lodgings hosts by creating a fostering friendly organisation. The Fostering Friendly Policy sets out the additional time off that is offered to staff who are a Trust approved foster carer or supported lodgings host. The policy aims to attract employees to become a foster carer or supported

lodgings host and to better support those already in these caring roles.

Outcomes

Becoming a fostering friendly employer will:

- enhance the corporate image of the Trust by demonstrating a commitment to social responsibility and caring for staff and the wider community.

- Increase awareness of fostering and supported lodgings across the Trust and encourage staff to consider these roles

- expand the pool of foster carers and supported lodgings hosts available to care for children in the Southern Trust

- provide better support for existing carers/ hosts by enabling them to balance their personal and professional lives with additional time off work.

(1.4)   Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy/proposal?

This policy aims to provide practical support to foster carers and supported lodgings hosts and promote a positive work-life balance, thus making it more feasible for employees to continue their careers while fostering. It also aims to increase the pool of foster carers and supported lodgings hosts so that children and young people are matched with the right family at the right time and experience a stable and nurturing family life.

(1.5)   Who owns and who implements the policy/proposal - where does it originate, for example DoH, HSCB, the Trust?

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust).

(1.6)   Are there any factors that could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/proposal/decision? (Financial, legislative or other constraints?)

No

(1.7)   Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy/proposal/decision could impact upon?   (E.g. staff, service users, other public sector organisations, trade unions, professional bodies, independent sector, voluntary and community groups etc.

- Trust staff who are either a foster carer, a supported lodgings host or a potential carer
- Trust managers in supporting their staff
- Trust Fostering Service and Supported Lodgings Host who have responsibility recruitment, assessment of, and support to carers and hosts
- Children and young people who are in need of foster care

(1.8)   Other policies with a bearing on this policy/ proposal (for example regional policies) - what are they and who owns them?

The Trust has a range of other statutory provisions such as shared parental leave, paternity leave, maternity and adoption leave. In addition, the Trust has a Flexible Working Policy and a Time off Work Policy which set out details of other arrangements for time off work, details of the time permitted and if the time off work is paid or unpaid.

The primary legislation that governs fostering is the Children (NI) Order 1996. The development of the Fostering Friendly policy is compatible with Children Order legislation, the Foster Placement & Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and Northern Ireland Fostering Services Minimum Standards (Draft) 2025.

(2)   Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms.   What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy?

2.1 Staff Affected by this Policy/Proposal / 2.2 Composition of Southern Trust Workforce
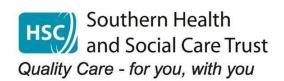
This policy is open to all Trust staff who are foster carers or potential foster carers to avail of.

Section 75 Group	Southern Trust Workforce Profile as at 1 January 2025	Percentage
Gender	Female	**85.6%**
	Male	**14.4%**
Religion	Protestant	**34.1%**
	Roman Catholic	**55.9%**
	Neither	**10.0%**
Political Opinion	Broadly Unionist	**8.9%**
	Broadly Nationalist	**9.7%**
	Other	**7.4%**
	Do Not Wish To Answer/Not Known	**74.0%**
Age	16-24	**6.7%**
	25-34	**22.5%**
	35-44	**27.9%**
	45-54	**21.2%**
	55-64	**17.8%**
	65+	**3.9%**
Marital Status	Single	**31.7%**
	Married	**56.8%**
	Not Known	**11.5%**
Dependent Status	Caring for a Child/Children / Dependant Older Person / Person With a Disability	**14.7%**
	None	**31.3%**
	Not Known	**54.0%**
Disability	Yes	**2.6%**
	No	**73.9%**
	Not Known	**23.5%**
Ethnicity	Bangladeshi	**0.01%**
	Black African	**0.45%**
	Black Caribbean	**0.01%**
	Black Other	**0.03%**
	Chinese	**0.09%**
	Filipino	**0.6%**
	Indian	**1.2%**
	Irish Traveller	**0.01%**
	Mixed Ethnic	**0.2%**
	Pakistani	**0.15%**
	White	**74.2%**
	Not Known	**23.0%**
Sexual Orientation *towards:*	Opposite Sex	**57.9%**
	Same Sex	**1.03%**
	Same and Opposite Sex	**0.26%**
	Do Not Wish To Answer/Not Known	**40.81%**

2.3 Patients / Clients Affected –

Section 75 Group	Make up of Patients/Clients Affected	Percentage
Gender	Female Male	This service is available to all children and young people regardless of gender
Religion	Protestant Roman Catholic Other	This service is available to all children and young people regardless of religious belief
Political Opinion	Broadly Unionist Broadly Nationalist Other Do Not Wish To Answer/Not Known	As above
Age	0-15 16-24 25-44 45-64 65-84 85+	Children and young person aged between 0 – 18 years old.
Marital Status	Single Married/Civil Partnership Other/Not Known	N/a
Caring Responsibility	Caring for a Child/Children/Dependant Older Person/Person(s) With a Disability None Not Known	Children and young person aged between 0 –18 years old.
Disability	Yes No Not Known	This service is available to all children and young people regardless of disability
Ethnicity	Bangladeshi Black African Black Caribbean Black Other Chinese Filipino Indian Irish Traveller Mixed Ethnic Pakistani White Not Known	This service is available to all children and young people regardless of ethnicity
Sexual Orientation *towards:*	Opposite Sex Same Sex Same and Opposite Sex Do Not Wish To Answer/Not Known	This service is available to all children and young people regardless of sexual orientation

2.4 Southern Trust's Area Population Profile – Census 2021

Section 75 Group	Trust's Area Population Profile (Population of 358,034)	Percentage
Gender	Female Male	**50.2** **49.8**
Religion	Protestant Roman Catholic Other	**35.5** **57.0** **7.5**
Political Opinion	Not collected	
Age	0-15 16-24 25-44 45-64 65-84 85+	**22.5** **10.2** **26.5** **25.2** **13.8** **1.8**
Marital Status (aged 16+ years)	Single Married/Civil Partnership Other	**28.1** **37.7** **34.2**
Dependent Status	Caring for a dependent Child/Children	**25.8% care for a dependent child/children**
Disability	Yes No	**21.8** **78.2**
Ethnicity	Asian Other Bangladeshi Black African Black Caribbean Black Other Chinese Filipino Indian Irish Traveller Mixed Ethnic Group Arab Roma Other Pakistani White	**0.4** **0** **0.4** **0** **0.4** **0.3** **0.1** **0.2** **0.3** **0.8** **0.1** **0.1** **0.2** **0.1** **96.5**
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual LGBTQ+ Not Stated	**69.8** **1.1** **29.1**

(3) Needs, experiences and priorities

(3.1) Taking into account the information above what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the Section 75 categories and for both service users and staff. *(NB: Use relevant statistical and qualitative data to complete the table below)*

Section 75 Category	Details of Needs, Experiences and Priorities	
	Staff	**Service Users**
Gender	All staff regardless of gender	This service is available to all genders
Age	As above	Foster Service and Supported Lodgings Service children and young people 0-18 years old
Religion	As above	This service is available to all Service Users regardless of their religion.
Political Opinion	As above	N/A
Marital Status	As above	N/A
Dependent Status	As above	Foster Service and Supported Lodgings Service open to children and young people 0-18 years old
Disability	As above	This service is available to all eligible Service Users regardless of disability.
Ethnicity	As above	This service is available to all eligible Service Users regardless of their ethnicity.
Sexual Orientation	As above	This service is available to all Service Users regardless of their sexual orientation.

(3.2) Provide details of how you have involved stakeholders, views of colleagues, service users and staff etc when screening this policy/proposal.

The content of the Fostering Friendly Policy has been endorsed by HSC Trust Children's Services Directors, HR Directors, DoH Children's Social Care Services Reform Programme Board and Fostering Work stream. The content of this policy has been informed by scoping research literature and policies already in place in local authorities in England and Wales and The Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly Employer Scheme. The additional time off work/ special leave provisions for Trust foster carers and supported lodgings hosts who are employees, as outlined within the policy, will be implemented by all five HSC Trusts.

(4) Screening Questions

You now have to assess whether the impact of the policy/ proposal is major, minor or none. You will need to make an informed judgement based on the information you have gathered.

(4.1) What is the likely impact of equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy/proposal, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?			
Section 75 category	*Details of policy/proposal impact*		**Level of impact?** *Minor/major/none*
	Staff	***Service Users***	
Gender	Minor positive – the extra paid leave is open to all Trust staff who become Foster Carers	Positive impact on service users	Minor positive
Age	As above	As above	As above
Religion	As above	As above	As above
Political Opinion	As above	As above	As above
Marital Status	As above	As above	As above
Dependent Status	As above	As above	As above
Disability	As above	As above	As above
Ethnicity	As above	As above	As above
Sexual Orientation	As above	As above	As above

(4.2) Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within Section 75 equality categories?	
Section 75 category	*Please provide details*
Gender	N/A
Age	N/A
Religion	N/A
Political Opinion	N/A
Marital Status	N/A
Dependent Status	N/A
Disability	N/A
Ethnicity	N/A
Sexual Orientation	N/A

(4.3) To what extent is the policy/proposal likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? minor/major/none

Good relations category	Details of policy/proposal impact	Level of impact Minor/major/none
Religious belief		None - Children and young people will be supported in following their religious, ethnic and cultural beliefs.
Political opinion		As above
Racial group		As above

(4.4) Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Good relations category	Please provide details
Religious belief	N/A
Political opinion	N/A
Racial group	N/A

(5)   Consideration of Disability Duties

(5.1)   How does the policy/proposal encourage disabled people to participate in public life and promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?

n/a

(6)   Consideration of Human Rights

The Trust has a duty to act compatibly and must take Human Rights considerations into account in its day-to-day functions/activities.

(6.1)   How does the policy/proposal impact on Human Rights?
        Complete for each of the articles

Article	Positive impact	Negative impact = human right interfered with or restricted	Neutral impact
Article 2 – Right to life			X
Article 3 – Right to freedom from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment			X
Article 4 – Right to freedom from slavery, servitude & forced or compulsory labour			X
Article 5 – Right to liberty & security of person			X
Article 6 – Right to a fair & public trial within a reasonable time			X

Article	Positive impact	Negative impact = human right interfered with or restricted	Neutral impact
Article 7 – Right to freedom from retrospective criminal law & no punishment without law			X
Article 8 – Right to respect for private & family life, home and correspondence.	X		
Article 9 – Right to freedom of thought, conscience & religion			X
Article 10 – Right to freedom of expression			X
Article 11 – Right to freedom of assembly & association			X
Article 12 – Right to marry & found a family			X
Article 14 – Prohibition of discrimination in the enjoyment of the convention rights			X
1st protocol Article 1 – Right to a peaceful enjoyment of possessions & protection of property			X
1st protocol Article 2 – Right of access to education			X

(6.2)	Please outline any actions you will take to promote awareness of human rights and evidence that human rights have been taken into consideration in decision making processes.
N/A	

(7)   Screening Decision

(7.1)   Given the answers in Section 4 of this template, how would you categorise the impacts of this decision or policy/proposal? *(Please tick one option below and list your reasons for the decision in 7.2 below)*

		EQIA Required? *(Delete as appropriate)*	
Major impact		~~Yes~~	**No**
Minor impact	**Minor positive**	Mitigation Required	Alternative Policy Required
		No	No
No impact		Screened Out	

(7.2)   Please give reasons for your decision and detail any mitigation or alternative policies considered.

The development of this policy will support the Trust in delivering statutory duties to meet the needs of children in care and address the challenges to recruit and retain enough foster carers and ensure there is sufficiency of foster placements available to meet the needs of children and young people. It is intended that this policy will also help to create a more fostering friendly organisation and attract employees to become HSC Trust foster carers or supported lodgings Hosts by making it easier for them to become a foster carer or host, and to better support those already in these caring roles.

(7.3)   Do you consider the policy/proposal needs to be subjected to ongoing screening? NB: for strategies/policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages – screen at various stages during implementation.

Yes	
No	X

(8)   Monitoring

(8.1)   Please detail how you will monitor the effect of the policy/proposal for equality of opportunity and good relations, disability duties and human rights?

The Trust Family Placement Service and Supported Lodgings Service will monitor the implementation of the policy including the number of Trust employees (existing foster carers and supported lodgings hosts and those who have made an application to the Trust to become a carer/ host) who apply for and receive additional leave under the provisions of the fostering friendly policy. The Trust will agree a system for collecting and analysing data and will compare these to pre-policy baselines.

A policy implementation plan has been developed and review of the policy in October 2027 will seek feedback on policy implementation from key stakeholders including Trust employees, managers and children/ young people. The methodology will include staff survey and focus groups. The results and any insights will be used to update the policy.

Approved Lead Officer: Sheila Smyth

Position: Children's Services Reform Coordinator

Email: Sheila.smyth@southerntrust.hscni.net

Date: 29 Sept 2025

                                              Jenny Johnston, Human Resources Assistant Director
                                              Sheila Smyth, Children's Services Reform Coordinator
Policy/proposal screened by: Cathy Lavery, Head of EDI

Please forward completed screening template to Equality.Unit@southerntrust.hscni.net for inclusion in the Trust's Policy Screening Reports which are uploaded to the Trust's website.