

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 20TH SEPTEMBER 2017
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: MELANIE HOCKENHULL

SUBJECT: ENHANCEMENT OF CURRENT PROVISION FOR MATERNITY AND ADOPTION LEAVE

Purpose of Report

1. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service prides itself on being a family friendly employer and on its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. The Service is also keen to diversify the makeup of its workforce.
2. In order to achieve these goals and assist new parents and families, it is proposed to enhance the current provision for Occupational Maternity Pay and Adoption Pay. As concerns maternity pay, this could help to attract more women to join the Service and thereafter retain their skills if they choose to become mothers.

Recommended: That

- [1] Members consider the content of this report and the recommendations contained within it;
- [2] Members approve the proposal to increase the current provision for occupational maternity/adoption pay as outlined at paragraphs 10-12; and
- [3] Members approve changes to the maternity and adoption policies to reflect the proposals.

Background

3. The Service is committed to increasing the diversity of its workforce. This report has particular relevance to its desire to increase the number of operational women. At the same time, the Service operates a three year review of all internal HR policies. The Maternity and Adoption policies required updating during 2017 as part of this review.
4. To complete this review, a working group was set up which comprised of members of the FBU and FOA, the Equality and Inclusion Officer, and female members of both operational and support staff who had been on maternity leave. This report and proposal has been produced as a direct result of the discussions and findings of the group and the research undertaken.

Information

5. By law all staff must be given the provision for up to 52 weeks off work for either maternity or adoption leave.
6. In respect of pay for maternity leave, the minimum provision is Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) which is paid for up to 39 weeks as follows:
 - For the first 6 weeks, receipt of 90% of their average weekly earnings (AWE) before tax.
 - For the remaining 33 weeks, receipt of £140.98 or 90% of their AWE (whichever is lower).

Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP) typically mirrors the same provision although there are nuances in terms of who is eligible and when it is paid during the process of adoption.

7. Many employers, including the Service, offer an enhanced provision over and above the normal statutory provisions. This is referred to as Occupational Maternity Pay or Occupational Adoption Pay. Following a benchmarking exercise, it seems there is an increasing number of employers providing paid time off of between 26 weeks and 52 weeks full pay. Appendix 2 to the report contains some comparisons taken from the benchmarking exercise.
8. It is considered that our current provisions do not adequately mirror the Service's commitment to being a family friendly or diversity driven organisation.
9. The current Service provision for Maternity and Adoption Pay is shown in Appendix 1 to this report alongside the proposed enhancements as explained below.

Proposal

10. It is proposed that the Authority enhances Occupational Maternity Pay to 45 weeks pay which will provide up to 52 weeks of full pay (inclusive of annual leave, bank holidays and Keeping in Touch days).
11. At the same time as enhancing Occupational Maternity Pay, it is proposed to apply the same benefit to Occupational Adoption Pay.
12. These proposals should mean the Service will become the "best in class" within the fire and rescue sector. Enhancing adoption pay at the same time as maternity pay will ensure consistency and will be inclusive of employees who choose to adopt, which can often be individuals in a same sex relationship.

Financial Implications

13. It is difficult to accurately estimate the impact of these new proposals on the budget. The number of employees who choose to take maternity or adoption leave each year fluctuates, as does the seniority and pay grade of these employees. For this reason, it is proposed that the costs are reviewed on an annual basis. The table in Appendix 1 to this report shows the cost to the Authority of paying a firefighter at the current levels of occupational maternity or adoption pay as compared to the proposed enhancement.

Legal Implications

14. The proposals will be consistent with legislation concerning Maternity and Adoption Leave and Pay.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. The proposal is designed to remove barriers to attraction and retention of under-represented groups and to reinforce the Service's position as a family friendly employer.

Environmental Implications

16. Not Applicable.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE