

Report to:	Strategy and Resources	Date:	14 January 2019
Report title:	Proposal to apply for Employer with Heart Charter Mark in support of employees with premature babies.		
Report from:	Gerald Almeroth, Strategic Director - Resources and Alison Hackett, Assistant Director, People and Organisational Development.		
Ward/Areas affected:	Not applicable		
Chair of Committee/Lead Member:	Councillor Ruth Dombey, Leader of the Council		
Author(s)/Contact Number(s):	Marie Gadsden, Head of HR Consultancy, 07903 187905		
Corporate Plan Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making Informed Choices 		
Open/Exempt:	Open		
Signed:		Date:	28 December 2018

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals to apply for the Employer with Heart Charter Mark for employers who support premature babies. It proposes changes to Parental Leave provisions to support parents at this difficult time.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To endorse the proposal to apply for the Employer with Heart Charter Mark and make the required changes to the Council's policies.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Smallest Things Campaign was founded in 2014 by a mother of two small boys, Catriona Ogilvy, following their premature birth. The Smallest Things Campaign recognises the significant impact a premature birth has upon a family, both financially and emotionally, and understands that the neonatal journey does not end when you leave hospital.
- 3.2 In February 2018, The Smallest Things Campaign launched the Best Employer Charter Mark for employers who support premature babies and their families. Employers who sign up to the Charter receive The Smallest Things Employer with Heart Charter Mark and will be included in the online Employer with Heart Hall of Fame.

Why apply?

- 3.3 As a compassionate employer the Council recognises the unique, yet significant, circumstances that employees find themselves in following the premature birth of a child. The Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has also called upon employers to support working parents following premature births.
- 3.4 Giving mothers extended leave to recover from the physical and mental trauma of premature birth ensures that they are fit and able to return to work. This is expected to reduce the significant risk of mothers taking long-term sick leave once they return to work.
- 3.5 The numbers of families affected by premature birth is relatively small. Just 7% of births end in pre-term labour, with the majority (85%) of premature births happening between 32-37 weeks, therefore requiring less additional leave. The small costs involved are likely to be outweighed by the successful return of mothers to the workplace. It is a small change but is the right thing to do for an employee going through such a difficult time and can make the difference between retaining and losing an experienced, valued member of staff.

What the Charter requires

The Charter asks employers to sign up to the following commitments:

- 3.6 **Commitment 1** - Extend maternity leave for mothers who give birth prematurely (before 37 weeks gestation) by the number of days a baby was born prior to their due date.
- 3.7 **What the Council will do:** update the Maternity Policy to include Premature Baby Leave and Premature Baby Pay. Parents of babies born at or before 37 weeks will be entitled to receive an extra week's Premature Baby Leave and an extra week's Premature Baby Pay, at full pay, for each week their baby spends in hospital, before the original due date.
- 3.8 **Commitment 2** - Give partners the time they need to be with their baby in hospital, receiving at least two weeks' paid compassionate leave on the birth of their premature baby. Partners may wish to save or split their parental leave, for being there when their baby comes home from hospital. It is understood that plans may change depending upon the baby's medical needs, that additional compassionate leave may be required and that the date a baby will come home from hospital is rarely set in stone.
- 3.9 **What the Council will do** - update the Parental Leave Policy to allow partners flexibility in these circumstances to save or split their parental leave. The Council will also update the Additional Leave Policy to include two weeks paid leave at full pay for partners of premature babies to use for time needed to be with their baby in hospital, with the potential for additional unpaid leave if required.
- 3.10 **Commitment 3** - Support parents returning to work following the birth of a premature baby. It is understood that returning to work can be a difficult time for parents of premature babies and that babies born too soon can have ongoing medical needs, requiring regular hospital appointments and check-ups. It is recommended to follow the [ACAS best practice guidance](#), considering formal and informal flexible working patterns and offering additional paid or unpaid leave.

3.11 **What the Council will do** - the Council already supports requests for flexible working when required within its existing policies and this is supported by the ICT technology. The Council has covered the issue of offering additional paid or unpaid leave under Commitment 2, in terms of making changes to the Additional Leave Policy.

4. Next Steps

4.1 To apply for the Charter, the Council needs to send a signed copy of the Employer with Heart Charter, along with relevant amended Parental Leave policies to the Smallest Things Founder. Sutton will then be added to their Online 'Employers with Heart' hall of fame and receive their Employer with Heart Charter Mark.

5. Impacts and Implications

Financial

5.1 There will be a financial impact from the proposals but it will be small. The numbers of families affected by premature birth is about 7% of total births with the majority (85%) of premature births happening between 32-37 weeks. The total number of maternity leave requests in the Council last year was 18, assuming that 7% of those employees need to take an additional 5 weeks (full pay) at average pay, the total additional cost would be between £5K to £7K. The proposal also includes extending compassionate leave for partners (para 3.8), the figures provided from HR suggest that the total numbers of parental leave requests are very low (3 last year in total), as only 7% of births on average are premature, the costs of this will be very small and can be accommodated within the range of figures provided above.

Legal

5.2 Maternity and Parental Leave Policies are contractual and once changes to these policies are implemented they will have full contractual effect.

6. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendix letter	Title
	None

Background documents
None



Audit Trail		
Version	Final	Date: 19 Dec 2018
Consultation with other officers		
Finance	Yes	Miguel Fernandez
Legal	Yes	Nigel Cameron
Equality Impact Assessment required?	No	N/A