

Devon County Council Fostering Friendly Employer Policy

Report of the Deputy Chief Officer Head of Children's Health and Wellbeing

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation: that the Cabinet endorse and adopt a Fostering Friendly Employer policy to support Devon County Council employees who are also foster carers.

1. Summary

Devon County Council is responsible, as a corporate parent, for children who become cared for by the local authority, either because a court has made an order about the child's care or under a voluntary arrangement with the child's parents. In Devon, as nationally, there is a shortage of suitable foster carers for children who need a foster home. The County Council has a duty to provide a sufficient number and range of foster carers to meet our children's needs and recruiting more foster carers is a high priority in our improvement plan.

Fostering Friendly policies are adopted by employers to support their employees who are also foster carers. Such policies include a range of support for foster carers and are normally in line with support offered to employees who have other caring responsibilities. A range of other employers, such as Tesco and O2, as well as neighbouring local authorities, and our improvement partner Leeds City Council, have already adopted Fostering Friendly Employer policies.

The draft Fostering Friendly Employer policy meets the requirements of the Fostering Network, a national body promoting the importance of foster care, and will support employees who are already employed by the council, or employees who may wish to consider becoming foster carers.

2. Introduction

Being a foster carer is a rewarding role that has a real, and lasting beneficial effect on children's lives. It is not without challenges and requires the carer to be involved in additional activities, such as attending health appointments or statutory meetings about the child, or children they care for.

Foster carers require a network of support to provide children with the best care they can, this will include social workers, teachers, and their own wider family. Many foster carers are also in full, or part time employment, and it is important that their employer understands the importance of their role and supports them. Often this will mean little more than considering flexible work arrangements from time to time, but a formal policy also offers support through additional paid leave, in line with policies for employees with other caring responsibilities.

The draft Fostering Friendly Employer policy requires managers to adopt a flexible and accommodating approach to requests for flexible working arrangements from an employee as result of their caring role. In addition, an employee who is applying to become an approved foster carer in Devon could apply for up to five days leave with pay (pro rata for part time employees) as part of the fostering preparation and assessment process. Employees who are already foster carers may make similar applications to attend appointments or meetings as part of their fostering responsibilities. In either case the employee's manager will make the decision, taking into account individual circumstances, and business need.

3. Proposal

That Devon County Council adopts a Fostering Friendly employer policy to support foster carers who are employed by the County Council, promoting fostering more widely in Devon, recognising the importance of foster carers to our communities, and modelling to Devon employers the importance of supporting employees who are also foster carers.

4. Options

Maintain the status quo in which DCC, as an employer, does not offer foster carers any formal support in relation to their role as carers.

Amend the proposed policy, to change the number of additional paid days leave offered to foster carers. The policy would then not align with support provided to employees with other caring roles.

Endorse and adopt the draft Fostering Friendly policy.

5. Consultations

None.

6. Financial Considerations

Currently there are fewer than five DCC employees who are foster carers for Devon. The financial impact of adopting this policy will be small and will be funded from the current placements budget.

7. Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations.

8. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

Adopting this policy would be environmentally neutral

9. Equality Considerations

If adopted, the policy promotes the rights of foster carers with caring responsibilities for children in local authority care.

10. Risk Management Considerations

No risks have been identified.

11. Public Health Impact

Supporting foster carers to provide children with high quality care, close to their communities, improves children's experiences and outcomes including in relation to their physical and mental health and well-being.

12. Conclusions

Endorsing and adopting a Fostering Friendly Employer policy will support the Council's statutory obligation to develop sufficient foster carers for children in Devon by supporting staff who are, or want to become carers, and promoting the role across wider Devon.

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[Electoral Divisions: All]

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Futures: Councillor Andrew Leadbetter

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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