



SUPPORTING FOSTER CARERS

Introduction

1. South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council (The Councils) recognise and value the contribution that foster parents make to our communities and especially to the lives of children in care. We understand that foster carers in employment need flexibility in their working arrangements in order to become foster carers and meet the needs of their fostered children.
2. Alongside the support that the Councils provide to care leavers within our communities, the Councils are committed to becoming a fostering friendly organisation that offers flexible working arrangements and additional time off to support any employee who is being assessed or who is a foster carer or an approved kinship carer.

Foster Carers

3. A foster carer is someone who is approved to take on the role of a parent. It could be for a day, a week, a month, a year or until the child reaches the age of 18 or when the child's care plan elapses.

Kinship Carers

4. A Kinship Carer is anyone who is looking after another person's child on a full-time basis. There are different ways an employee can become a kinship carer:
 - ❖ A **Special Guardianship Order** (often known as an SGO) is a legal order where the court appoints a carer – usually a relative – as the 'Special Guardian' of a child until they turn 18. The Special Guardian then shares parental responsibility for the child with the parents and can make nearly all the major decisions about the child without having to consult them.
 - ❖ The person named in a **Child Arrangements Order** shares parental responsibility for the child with the parents and can make the most important decisions on behalf of the child without needing the permission of the parents.
 - ❖ **Kinship foster care** is when a friend or family member becomes an official foster carer for a child. This is different to other forms of kinship care as the child is then considered 'looked after, and the employee won't have parental responsibility.

Fostering to Adopt

5. Under a local authority approved Fostering to Adopt scheme (sometimes known as Early Permanence) a child is placed with potential adopters who are also approved as temporary foster carers while decisions are made about the child's future within the family court process. The Councils' Adoption Policy is applicable to employees entering a Fostering to Adopt arrangement.
6. References to "Foster Carers" in this policy include Foster Carers, Kinship Carers and those employees Fostering to Adopt

Eligibility

7. This policy applies to all Council employees who:
 - Are applying to become foster carers, or



- Are approved foster carers and have a child in placement, or
- Are an approved kinship carer of a looked after child.

Time Off Work for Foster Carers

8. Foster carers and approved kinship carers may request paid time off work to support them in their role as foster carers.
9. All leave must be approved by the foster carer's line manager and recorded as Fostering Leave.
10. The leave is attached to the employee who is the foster carer and not to the child in placement, and therefore the foster carer of two children is not entitled to the paid time-off twice.
11. The paid time-off for a foster carer should be taken to attend specific meetings or training events and is not intended to be additional leave to be taken for a reason not related to the role as a foster carer.
12. All paid time-off is expressed for a full-time employee and should be pro rata for a part-time employee.
13. The foster carer should discuss with their line manager alternative means of taking time off if they require time off in addition to the provisions in this policy, such as annual leave, flexitime, or other forms of special leave.

Employees who are in the application and approval process to become foster carers

14. The Councils acknowledge that the application and approval process to become a foster carer can be lengthy and time consuming. To support employees, up to 37 hours (5 days) paid time-off may be taken to attend assessment meetings, initial training prior to approval as a foster carer and attend the approval panel.

After the placement of a child

15. Beginning on the day the child is placed with the foster carer, an employee may take up to 37 hours (5 days) of paid time-off in each 12-month period to attend child review meetings, the annual foster carer review meeting, and any related training.

Employees who are Fostering to Adopt

16. Employees who are in 'fostering to adopt' arrangements with a local authority can take the following leave in accordance with the Councils' Adoption Policy:
 - Up to 37 hours (5 days) paid leave to attend adoption appointments after being matched with a child
 - Once the child is placed for adoption, the Councils' Adoption Pay is applicable, including the right to adoption pay and adoption leave.
 - An employee can choose to start their Statutory Adoption Leave and Pay (where applicable) at the point when a fostering for adoption placement is made, or at a later date when the child is matched with them for adoption. However, employees are only entitled to one set of leave and pay per placement.
17. An employee can choose to start their Statutory Adoption Leave and Pay (where applicable) at the point when a fostering for adoption placement is made, or at a later date when the child is matched with them for adoption. However, employees are only entitled to one set of leave and pay per placement.



18. Further details can be found in the Councils' Adoption Policy

Requesting Foster Carer Leave

19. Foster carers should request the appropriate leave using the Foster Care Leave application form that can be found under the HR Forms page on the intranet. Requests should be submitted to the line manager.
20. The line manager will consider the request, taking into account the individual circumstances of each request and the operational requirements of the service. Leave will be approved wherever possible, however may be declined where its approval would cause excessive pressure to the service or a colleague(s).
21. The line manager should seek advice from HR before declining any request. If the request is declined, every effort should be made to find a suitable time when the leave can be taken if the meeting or training can be rescheduled.

Application for Foster Carer Leave

22. This needs to include a requirement to specify the event/meeting/training that the employee is attending.
23. Also needs to identify whether employee is at approval stage, within first 12 months of placement or post 12 months.

Further or Additional Support from the Council

24. The Councils offer all employees the opportunities to work flexibly where this is compatible with the requirements of the job, and there are a number of policies that provide support to foster carers and approved kinship carers, including:
 - The ability to purchase additional annual leave
 - A career break policy that protects an employee's employment if they take an extended break from work
 - A flexitime scheme that provides the opportunity for employees to vary their working hours within parameters
 - The right to request flexible working, including new working patterns or hours of work
 - The ability to take flexible retirement that allows employees to draw down their pension whilst still working part-time
 - Parental leave that provides additional time off for parents and carers
 - A Special Leave policy that provides additional time off for employees who need to provide unforeseen care for a dependant
- The Adoption Policy for employees who adopt a child through a fostering to adopt arrangement.