

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
3 DECEMBER 2015

EMPLOYEES AS FOSTER CARERS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to obtain the Employment Committee's feedback in relation to the proposed changes to the Council's leave provisions for employees who are foster carers, prospective foster carers and shared lives carers.

Background

2. The Council currently spends a significant amount of money on independent foster carers due to a shortage of local authority foster carers. In order to address this issue, Children and Family Services are working on a 'foster friendly employer' initiative to encourage local businesses to support their employees, by offering flexible working opportunities and time off work, to become foster carers with the Council.
3. As part of this process, the Fostering and Adoption Team are keen to encourage more Leicestershire County Council (LCC) employees to become foster carers and wish to promote the support that is available to enable employees to take on this role. Currently only 1-2% of the Council's 120 fostering households are LCC employees.
4. At present, council employees who are foster carers, either with LCC or another authority, are allowed up to five days unpaid leave per year to attend necessary meetings and assessments related to their fostering responsibilities. This leave can be taken in whole or part days. Where both foster parents are employed by the Council only one of the individuals can take the leave or the leave may be apportioned between them.
5. Although there is a number of other supportive measures available, including flexible working to enable school drop offs or to attend meetings these are not currently actively promoted to employees who are, or wish to become foster carers.
6. To coincide with the 'foster friendly employer' initiative, a review is being undertaken of the guidance available to employees who are interested in becoming a foster carer. This includes whether the leave provisions are still appropriate particularly as the majority of other family-related leave offered by the Council is paid. For example, the Council allows employees who are prospective adoptive parents up to five days paid leave for the purpose of attending pre-adoption meetings, assessments and training. If both adoptive parents work for the Council, only one of the parents may take the leave or the leave may be apportioned between them.
7. In addition, there are other leave provisions where a significant paid leave is offered. For example, up to 15 days paid leave per year may be granted to employees who are

members or officials of certain public bodies, such as youth offending panels, school governors, probation boards and up to ten days paid leave a year may be granted when employees are representing their county or country at sporting fixtures.

Arrangements within Other Organisations

8. To assist the Committee with their decision, the following are examples of the arrangements in place in other organisations:
 - (a) The Department for Education (DfE) - In April 2014 the DfE became the government's first foster family friendly employer. Employees who foster, as well as those who care for children of family or friends (such as a grandparent caring permanently for their grandchild) will be able to take up to 20 days paid leave in a twelve month period to attend training or meetings relating to their role as a carer. Up to five days leave can be taken during the assessment process, an additional five days during the approval process or when caring for a foster child (for meetings, training or unforeseen emergencies such as an emergency placement) and up to ten days leave at the start of a planned permanent placement. Employees will also be entitled to additional unpaid time off to deal with unexpected emergencies, such as welcoming a child into their home at short notice.
 - (b) North Lincolnshire Council - The Council has recently adopted the leave provisions set out in the DfE's policy.
 - (c) Cumbria County Council (CCC)- Up to five days additional paid leave of absence per year can be granted to any member of staff undertaking training related to their role as a foster carer (or applicant foster carer). CCC is already a foster friendly employer.
 - (d) Coventry City Council - An employee who is applying to become a foster carer may be granted five days extra paid leave to attend any meetings, home visits or training sessions as part of the preparation and assessment process. If a couple is applying and they both work for the Council, they are both allowed the extra leave so that they can support each other. Once approved as foster carers, employees are allowed extra three days' leave per year to attend meetings or training and to cover appointments.
 - (e) Brighton and Hove City Council - Employees may be granted up to three days paid leave per year to attend meetings, home visits, mandatory training, as part of the preparation and assessment process. Where both partners are employees of the council, the leave entitlement will apply to each partner. Employees who become approved foster carers may be granted up to five days paid leave per year to attend training courses and review meetings in connection with the child's placement. Where both partners are employees, the leave entitlement will apply to each partner. Additional unpaid leave can also be requested. These leave provisions only apply where the employee is becoming a foster carer with the council.
 - (f) Edinburgh City Council - Employees who are prospective foster carers may be granted up to three days paid leave to cover the preparation and assessment process to be registered as a foster carer. An accepted foster carer may be granted up to a day paid leave and up to four days unpaid leave in any twelve month period to enable him/her to attend urgent meetings convened in respect of

the placement of a child. Additional unpaid leave to care for a placed child may be granted.

- (g) Islington Council - Up to five days paid leave is available to employees who are registered foster carers to foster a baby or a child (up to the age of 16). This leave is to allow the prospective foster carer to attend related meetings, training sessions or help with the child's settlement into their new home.
- (h) Tesco - Up to five days paid leave is available to employees to apply to become a foster carer or attend foster care related meetings or training. Foster carers are also entitled to emergency leave if an emergency arises. In addition, all staff are able to swap their shifts to help them juggle their family or other commitments, and to take compassionate leave if the need arises.
- (i) O2 - Fostering leave policy gives all employees being assessed for foster care approval up to five days paid leave per year so that they can attend meetings and other activities related to their application. If an employee needs more than five days fostering leave, they are able to speak to their manager about other time out options, such as holiday, work back-time or unpaid leave.

Further Considerations

- 10. It is intended that any provisions agreed would only apply where the employee is a foster carer with LCC or another council. It would not apply to those who are independent foster carers.
- 11. It is also proposed that an element of paid leave could also be introduced for employees who are applying to become a shared lives carer within Adults and Communities Department. As shared lives carers are all self-employed, this provision is only likely to apply to part-time employees. A limited amount of paid leave (for instance up to five days) would be beneficial to enable these employees to attend matching appointments and training.
- 12. A substantial amount of part-time employees who do become shared lives carers tend to leave the Council's employment to undertake this role on a full-time basis.

Recommendations

- 13. Based on the information set out in this report, the Committee is asked to consider whether it would be appropriate to review the Council's existing leave provisions for employees who are or wish to become foster carers and consider implementing an element of paid leave. Specifically, the views of the Committee are sought with regard to the following:-
 - (a) The amount of paid leave being introduced to support employees who are foster carers or shared lives carers;
 - (b) The amount of paid leave that should be provided for each type of carer;
 - (c) Whether, in relation to foster carers, they wish to determine, as some of the organisations listed above have, the purposes for which this time can be used or whether they are happy to allow the leave to be used flexibly.

14. Subject to the Committee's views, the Leave Arrangements Policy will be updated and the new leave provisions promoted to employees along with how the Smarter Working Policy can support these employees to balance their commitments.

Background Papers

None.

Circulation under Local Issue Alert Procedure

None.

Officer to Contact

Gordon McFarlane, Assistant Director - Corporate Services and Transformation
Tel: 0116 3056123
Email: gordon.mcfarlane@leics.gov.uk

Denise Lacey, Recruitment Lead - Fostering and Adoption
Tel: 0116 3053902
Email: denise.lacey@leics.gov.uk

Equality and Human Rights Implications

15. The policy proposed seeks to ensure that changes which impact on employees as foster carers promote greater equality and are implemented in a fair and non-discriminatory manner.