

Somerset County Council

HR Policy Committee

Adoption Policy and Fostering Policy

Cabinet Member: Cllr Mandy Chilcott, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources

Lead Officer: Chris Squire, HR&OD Director

Author: Laura Holland

Contact Details: 01823 359398

<i>Please complete sign off boxes below prior to submission to Democratic Services</i>			
	Seen by:	Name	Date
Report Sign off	Legal	Honor Clarke	03.09.2020
	Corporate Finance	Jason Vaughan	
	Human Resources	Chris Squire	03.09.2020
	Cabinet Member	Mandy Chilcott	11.09.2020
	Monitoring Officer	Scott Wooldridge	03.09.2020
	Summary:	The Report sets out proposed amendments to the Council's Adoption and Fostering Policies, to allow employees paid leave to attend the training, assessments and meetings required to become an adoptive parent or foster carer.	
Recommendations:	The HR Policy Committee is asked to: 1. Accept the amendments in their entirety		
Reasons for Recommendations:	To enhance our time off provision to make it easier for employees to become adoptive parents or foster carers.		
Links to Priorities and Impact on Service Plans:	Within the County Plan there is a target for Children in need in Somerset: "We will aim to have fewer children in Council care and greater numbers of residents approved to foster and adopt children". These policy amendments support that aim by taking positive action to increase the number of adoptive parent and foster carers in Somerset.		
Financial, Legal and HR Implications:	There are indirect and direct costs to services to allow employees additional paid time off. In particular if posts need to be covered by casual or relief staff. However, in the past the take up has been low we know of two cases in the last year. Therefore, we do not expect it to have a significant negative impact.		
Equalities Implications:	The Council's duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 is to have "due regard" to the matters set out in relation to equalities when considering and making decisions. There are no direct equality impacts associated with these changes. There are		

	no direct impacts on sustainability, health and safety, community safety or privacy aspects as a result of the recommendations.
Risk Assessment:	There are risks to the Council in not having enough Adoptors and Foster Carers for children in need. The Council has statutory requirements to ensure vulnerable children in Somerset are free from harm, neglect and abuse.
Scrutiny comments / recommendation (if any):	None

1. Background

- 1.1. Our current Adoption and Fostering Policies set out entitlements to paid time off for parents who are about to adopt a child and foster carers who need to take time off to look after the children in their care. There is no provision within the policies for employees who want to become adoptive parents or foster carers.
- 1.2. A case last year highlighted a lack of entitlement within our policies for time off for an employee to become an adoptive parent. This resulted in the individual taking annual and unpaid leave to be able to undertake the training and assessment required.

2. Options Considered

- 2.1. To enhance the policies to allow employees additional paid time off work to attend training and assessments to become an adoptive parent or foster carer.
- 2.2. To leave the Policies as they are and require employees to take annual leave or unpaid leave to attend training and assessment.

3. Consultations undertaken

- 3.1. The proposed amendments were shared with the Green Book Union meeting on Wednesday 13th February, the two Unions present, Unite and GMB were supportive of the amendments.
- 3.2. Trevor Goss, Team Manager, Fostering in Somerset advised on the amount of training required to become a foster carer.
- 3.3. Suzanne Lyus, Operations Manager – Children Looked After & Leaving Care Services West has given feedback on the policies.

4. Implications

- 4.1.** The recommendations are intended to support the corporate aims of the Council to increase the number of adoptive parents and foster carers in Somerset. This needs to be balanced with the business need to deliver essential services.
- 4.2.** It is difficult to state exactly how much time is needed to become an adoptive parent as it will differ according to the need of the individuals. Some training is delivered in the evenings and weekends, in addition individuals can undertake self-learning in their own time. Meetings and assessments with social workers will normally be within normal working hours. It can take up to six months before parents are ready for the Assessment Panel, to decide if they can become Adoptive Parents.
- 4.3.** To become a Foster Carer the average number of hours training is 36. Some of this training is delivered in the evening and weekends. Individuals will also need to meet assessors for evaluation of suitability to become Foster Carers.

5. Background papers

- 5.1** Appendix 1: a draft copy of the amended Adoption Leave Policy and the Fostering Leave Policy

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.