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difference

Fostering Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Fostering is an activity where even though a looked after child or young person is placed with a fostering family, the legal responsibility remains with the local authority and/or the child's birth parents. Fostering can last as long as months or years - or as short as just a few days. Sometimes the child will end up returning to their birth families; sometimes they will get adopted into a new family. Fostering is not the same as adoption; placements are considered a temporary solution that will help in the journey towards a permanent solution. There are many reasons why fostering is put into place and children are brought into care, including illness, a family breakdown, instances where the child's welfare is in jeopardy and relationship problems. While the benefits to the looked after child or young person are numerous, there are also benefits to the fostering family and the wider community where children live in a loving and supportive environment.
- 1.2** Wyre Council is committed to supporting employees to become foster parents and employees in their role as a foster parent. This policy sets out the Council's support for employees who are undertaking the care of a child or children under a foster-care arrangement with a local authority.
- 1.3** It is recognised that, in such cases, employees have specific obligations towards the child/children in accordance with their arrangement with the local authority and that, in some cases; the child/children may require a high level of care. This policy is intended to form part of the Council's overall family-friendly/ work-life balance approach, and it attempts to strike a balance between the business needs of the Council and the needs of the employee to meet their care obligations.

2. NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

- 2.1** To ensure that the line manager and colleagues can provide employees with the necessary support and encouragement, employees who are intending to foster a child/children are asked to give their line manager at least four weeks' notice of their intention to train as a foster carer. This is to ensure that, should they wish to request any special arrangements to care for the child/children, their line manager has sufficient notice to make any necessary arrangements for staff cover.

3. TIME OFF TO CARE FOR NEW FOSTER CHILDREN

- 3.1 Foster carers may need to take time off work to help the child/children to settle into the new environment. They may also need time off to attend training courses, meetings with professionals or appointments with the child/children. Employees who require time off to attend training or meetings or to care for the child/children at the start of the foster-care arrangement may request special leave to do so. The request must be in writing and the employee must specify the period of time off that they require.
- 3.2 The following provisions are available to support employees who require leave to attend to their fostering commitments. The leave most appropriate to the situation, which takes account of the individual circumstances, should be discussed with and agreed between the employee and their line manager:
- Annual Leave
 - Special Leave – Time off for Dependants or Emergencies (Unpaid)
 - Special Leave (Unpaid)
 - Extended Authorised Absence (Unpaid)

4. TIME OFF FOR DEPENDANTS

- 4.1 Foster carers (irrespective of length of service, and whether they are part time or full time) are entitled to take a reasonable amount of time off during working hours to take necessary action:
- to provide assistance when a dependant falls ill, gives birth or is injured or assaulted;
 - to make arrangements for the provision of care for an ill or injured dependant;
 - because of the unexpected disruption or termination of arrangements for the care of a dependant;
 - to deal with an incident that involves their child and occurs unexpectedly while the child is at school/other educational establishment.
- 4.2 It is helpful if the foster carer informs their line manager the reason for their absence and how long they expect to be absent as soon as is reasonably practicable. Time off work is envisaged as being no more than one or two days. It is envisaged that this leave is used by an employee to attend to an emergency that arises during working hours. It cannot be used as a means of the employee seeking time off to attend to or care for the foster child/children because of lack of available childcare options.
- 4.3 Time off for carers' dependants is unpaid.

5. PARENTAL LEAVE

- 5.1 All employees who have parental responsibility for children are entitled to take up to 18 weeks' unpaid parental leave for each individual child before that child reaches the age of five. Where the child is in receipt of disability living allowance, the employee may take up to 18 weeks before the child's 18th birthday.
- 5.2 However, the statutory right to parental leave is available only to carers when they have parental responsibility for the children concerned. It is normally the case that foster carers will not have parental responsibility, since this will usually be with the local authority if the child has been placed under an interim or full care order.
- 5.3 Employees who are foster carers and wish to take parental leave may be asked to supply evidence of parental responsibility.
- 5.4 In cases where employees do not have parental responsibility for the child, they will not be entitled to parental leave. Instead, employees may request annual or special leave.

6. FLEXIBLE WORKING

- 6.1 All staff have a statutory right to request flexible working if they have 26 weeks' continuous service.
- 6.2 Each request will be dealt with individually, taking into account the likely effects that the proposed changes to working hours or place of work are likely to have on the council, the work of the department in which the employee making the request is employed and the employee's colleagues. Agreeing to one employee's request will not therefore set a precedent or create a right for another employee to be granted a similar change to their working pattern.
- 6.3 Employees who wish to submit a request for flexible working should do so in writing in line with the procedure set out in the Flexible Working Policy which can be accessed via the intranet or available from HR.
- 6.4 The request may be for a permanent or temporary variation of their working arrangement.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING

- 7.1 The operation of this policy will be monitored for its impact on different staff groups in line with the Equality Act 2010. This will enable the Council to assess whether any differences have an adverse impact on a particular group, such that further action would be required.

8. DATA PROTECTION

- 8.1 In implementing this policy, the Council will ensure that any personal data relating to the application of this policy will be obtained, processed and destroyed in line with Data Protection requirements.