

Swindon Borough Council

Human Resources & Organisational Development

Fostering Friendly Policy - Frequently Asked Questions

Is an employee required to disclose to their line manager that they are a foster carer/connected carer?

Employees are not required to disclose to their line manager that they are a foster carers/connected carer, but are encouraged to do so if they wish, as this will help the Council provide appropriate support to the employee. Line managers must respect the confidentiality of any information provided to them in this regard.

Where a manager is aware that an employee in their team has foster caring responsibilities, the manager should inform the employee about the support that the Council offers foster carers. For further information on support for foster carers, please refer to Swindon Borough Council's website: <https://www.swindon.gov.uk/fostering>

Who can take foster care leave?

Any employee who is applying to become foster carers who have a child in placement (or have had a child in placement for 75% of the previous 12 months), or is an approved connected carer can request foster care leave.

Is there a minimum period of service to qualify for foster care leave?

You should have 12 weeks or more employment service with Swindon Borough Council or continuous service within another Local Authority.

Is foster care leave given as paid time off?

To support foster carers and connected carers the Council will give paid time off in any 12 month period as follows:

- Assessment and initial training prior to approval as a foster carer - **up to three days**
- Attendance at panel for approval – **up to 1 day**
- Child review meetings, annual foster carer review meeting and training – **up to five days**

What pay will an employee receive during the period of foster caring leave?

Employees will receive their normal basic pay rate.

Can an employee who is fostering choose when to take annual leave?

As a foster carer looking after a child there will be occasions when you will need to attend meetings. These may be with the school, social worker and other key people involved with your child. There may be times when you would wish to take annual leave through your Council employment that clashes with an appointment or meeting for your child. The fostering service will work with you to ensure that you are able to take planned breaks.

What process should an employee follow to request to take foster caring paid leave?

Employees can request foster caring paid leave for authorisation by the line manager via the Employee Self-Serve System (ESS). The request for leave should outline the reason and the amount of leave required.

The employee's line manager will consider and approve the leave on a discretionary basis, taking into account individual circumstances of each case and operational requirements of the business and dependent on service needs. The leave will be considered and approved on a pro rata basis.

What documentation is required as part of an employees' request for fostering caring paid leave?

Employees will need to show a copy of the Fostering Caring approval, and/or the annual review of continual approval, to their manager before leave can be authorised. This information is for approval for leave purposes and should be not be retained by the manager.

Are there any other options that can be considered to support employees with foster caring responsibilities?

Staff can also request the following to support them with their foster caring responsibilities:

- [Annual leave](#) (including purchasing annual leave)
- [Career breaks](#)

The Council will consider requests from staff to change their work pattern because of their foster caring responsibilities. Employees can request the following patterns, but it is important to remember it is dependent on service need:

Flexible Working

Employees can apply to work a flexible working pattern. Employees can request, for example, to work part time, compressed hours, job sharing, annualised hours. Further information can be found in the Council's Flexible Working Policy and Guidance. Please note this is a permanent change to an employee's terms and conditions and cannot be changed until after 12 months.

Working from home	The flexibility of occasionally working from home could be of use if the member of staff needs to take their dependant(s) to a couple of appointments during that day. Appointments should be booked and agreed with the manager or alternative arrangements made. Not all roles within the Council will have this flexibility. Working from home must be requested and agreed with their line manager in advance.
Flexi time	The Council operates a flexi-time scheme for some roles (dependant on service requirements). Employees may be able to work extra hours and use the additional time to take the time off work when required. Any flexi-time must be discussed with their line manager and agreed in advance, and is always subject to service needs.
Shift swapping	Employees who work shifts may be able to re-arrange shifts among themselves by swapping shifts with colleagues who perform the same type of work at different times of the day.
Staggered hours	Employees could agree to have different start and finish times in order to support them with their caring responsibilities.

What support is available to foster carers in an emergency situation?

Employees with foster caring responsibilities cannot always plan ahead for time off. The ability to take leave in an emergency is important for foster carers, who may be called on at short notice.

Employees have the right to take a reasonable amount of unpaid time off work to assist or make arrangements for the care of their dependants. Employees who wish to take paid time off for dependants for urgent domestic circumstances should refer to the Council's Policy on [Compassionate Leave](#).

Where can an employee find additional support and guidance for foster carers?

Swindon Borough Council has a foster carer's network that provides practical peer-to-peer support and information for carers. Information, guidance and FAQs are available on the Swindon Borough Council website: <https://www.swindon.gov.uk/fostering>

Other support provided by the foster caring team includes:

- Swindon Foster Care Association
- Coffee Mornings
- Buddy system between foster carers
- Events and activities
- Annual celebration evening
- Kids united group
- Monthly newsletter
- Extensive training
- 24 hour support from the Social Work team

Further guidance on the Council's [Fostering Friendly Policy](#) is available on the intranet.