

Report to: **Executive**

Date: **25 January 2024**

Title: **Support for Care Leavers**

Portfolio Area: **Leader of the Council**

  

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y / N**

Author: **Andy Bates** Role: **Chief Executive**  
**Andy Wilson** **Head of Human Resources**

Contact: **Telephone 01803 861154**  
**Email: andy.wilson@swdevon.gov.uk**

---

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**That the Executive NOTE:**

- 1. the measures implemented to support care leavers into employment;**
- 2. the intention for the Council to sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant; and**
- 3. the steps taken to support Council employees who are seeking approval to be a foster carer and following the placement of a child.**

**1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 South Hams District Council is working in partnership with Devon County Council and districts to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities by seeking to provide young people leaving the care system and living in the district with the support they need and deserve.
- 1.2 At its meeting on 28 September 2023, full Council agreed that it will award a council tax discretionary discount of 100% to care leavers up to their 25th birthday (Minute CM 27/23 refers).
- 1.3 The Council also offers a free pass to the Council's leisure centres to young people in care resident in the district (plus a carer) and to care leavers living within the district up to the age of 25.
- 1.4 The Council is playing an important role in working with colleagues across the two-tier system to improving housing

options for care leavers as well as to better understand the interface between social care and housing and to add capacity to the housing system as a whole (see para 1.10).

- 1.5 Since the September meeting, we have been looking at other ways to provide support, including access to work experience and employment and to how we can best support our staff who are planning to become foster parents or to adopt children, which are the subject of this report. This forms part of a wider review to improve the way in which apprenticeships are designed and managed by the Councils which is aimed at increasing opportunities and developing our own talent.
- 1.6 Following consultation with staff side representatives, a new employment policy has been introduced to provide employment opportunities with the Council for care leavers.
- 1.7 The policy consists of four main employment commitments to care leavers living within the district:
  - The offer of a two to four-week paid work placement.
  - The support of a senior manager as a mentor to help care leavers working with the Council to adapt to the working environment and secure permanent employment.
  - The ring-fencing of identified entry-level apprenticeship opportunities.
  - The guarantee of an interview to any care leaver who meets the minimum requirements of a vacant post.
- 1.8 Alongside these practical measures it is proposed the Council sign up to become a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Research has identified numerous contributory factors for the poor experience that care leavers have in education and in finding employment, including mental health, learning and behaviour problems, trauma, attachment issues, stigma, disruption in living placements and schools, poverty, chaotic living arrangements, and low expectations from social workers, teachers, and carers.
- 2.2 In July 2016, the Government published a major policy document 'Keep on Caring' to support young people from care to independence.
- 2.3 A key policy commitment in the paper was a strategic pledge to introduce a Care Leaver Covenant. The Covenant is a promise made by the private, public and voluntary sector organisations to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them live independently; provide education, employment and training opportunities; support their safety and security, promote their physical and mental health; and support their financial

independence.

- 2.4 The aim of the Care Leaver Covenant is to provide additional support for those leaving care, making available a different type of support and expertise from that statutorily provided by local authorities.
- 2.5 The Council intends to submit an application to become a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant with the offer made to care leavers published on the Care Leaver Covenant website.
- 2.6 The Council also identified that there are potential barriers preventing existing and future employees becoming foster carers because of the requirement to attend meetings and training as part of the commitment and is working with the recognised trade unions to agree and implement a new policy to provide additional paid time off.

### **3. Work to Support our Corporate Parenting responsibilities**

- 3.1 The Council has made a positive commitment to working with Devon County Council and the other Devon districts to do its best to ensure that it meets its 'corporate parenting' responsibilities and to do our best for care leavers living in the district/ borough. The Council has already taken steps to support Care Leavers in its area by agreeing to provide an exemption from Council Tax and access to leisure facilities.
- 3.2 Council officers are also heavily involved in the work of the Devon Corporate Parenting Board, with the chief executive acting as the lead officer on the Care for Me Sub-Group which is focussed on housing and accommodation for young people leaving the Devon care system. The focus of the Group is on addressing the immediate challenges of the numbers of care leavers in short-term and temporary accommodation, developing pathways to plan ahead for those leaving care who are able to go into mainstream housing system and designing and building facilities for those who are most vulnerable and with complex needs who require 'supported housing' with wrap around support. The Head of Housing and Housing Options Manager are key contributors to this important work.
- 3.3 These plans will take time to come to fruition and the purpose of this paper is to focus on the support the Council can offer as a medium-sized public employer to care leavers to access employment.
- 3.4 In order to support care leavers to find employment, an employment policy has been introduced to provide employment opportunities with the Council for care leavers who live within the district up to the age of 25. This forms part of a wider review to improve the way in which apprenticeships are designed and

managed by the Councils which is aimed at increasing opportunities and developing our own talent.

- 3.5 The policy consists of four main employment commitments to care leavers living within the district:
- The offer of a two to four-week paid work placement
  - The support of a senior manager as a mentor to help care leavers working with the Council to adapt to the working environment and secure permanent employment.
  - The ring-fencing of identified entry-level apprenticeship opportunities.
  - The guarantee of an interview to any care leaver who meets the minimum requirements of a vacant post.
- 3.6 It is our intention to work with partners, including Devon County Council, to encourage large employers within the district to adopt supportive policies.
- 3.7 The Care Leaver Covenant is a national inclusion programme funded by the Department of Education set up to create meaningful opportunities for care leavers in five key areas, including Education, Employment and Training. The Council has provided information on its offer with a view to sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant. This in turn ensures the details of our offer to care leavers is promoted on their website and in promotional materials.
- 3.8 The Council recognises and values 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.
- 3.9 In addition to the existing policies and procedures to support employees with family commitments, including flexible working arrangements and the Adoption Policy, the Council proposes to implement a new employment policy to provide further support for employees who are foster carers or are going through the application process to become a foster carer.
- 3.10 The new policy proposes up to 5 working days paid time off for an employee who is applying to become a foster carer to attend assessment meetings and initial training prior to approval and attend the approval panel.
- 3.11 After the placement of a child with an employee who is an approved foster carer, the employee proposes for up to 5-days paid time off in each 12-month period to attend child review meetings, the annual foster carer review meeting, and any related training.

#### 4. Outcomes/outputs

- 4.1 The policies seek to improve the life chances of care leavers within the district and to support employees who are foster carers. It is the Council's ambition to employ a number of the care leavers living within our community and to help them successfully transition into independent living.
- 4.2 A number of entry-level apprenticeship opportunities have been ring-fenced for care leavers and the Council is working with Devon County Council and the Care Leaver Covenant to identify suitable candidates for the positions in early 2024 and each year thereafter.
- 4.3 The proposed support for foster carers is designed to remove barriers preventing people in work becoming a foster carer and to enable existing and future employees balance the support they provide for young people with the demands of their employment with the Council.

#### 5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 The Council signs up to become a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant and promotes employment opportunities to all care leavers living within the district with the support of partner organisations.
- 5.2 It is anticipated that the Council will adopt the new policy on Supporting Foster Carers at work from February 2024 following the completion of negotiations with the recognised trade unions.

#### 6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance		Whilst being a care leaver is not a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act 2020, the offer of support for care leavers securing employment is consistent with good employment practice.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money		There are no significant financial implications. There will be some additional salary costs when a care leaver accepts the offer of a short-paid work placement.
Risk		Support will be put in place to mitigate any risk arising from the employment of a vulnerable person.

Supporting Corporate Strategy		The report supports the Council's strategic commitment to supporting care leavers who live within the district
Consultation & Engagement Strategy		The Council engaged with, and secured the support of Care Leaver Covenant and is working with partner organisations to support care leavers.
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact		No direct carbon/biodiversity impact arising from the report.
<b>Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications</b>		
Equality and Diversity		The measures identified in the paper will provide support for a vulnerable group within the district and increase the representation of care leavers within the Council's employment establishment.
Safeguarding		Individual safeguarding plans will be drawn up as necessary depending on personal circumstances.
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		The opportunity to gain meaningful employment may contribute to greater inclusion of care leavers and reduce any instances disruptive of community safety, crime and disorder.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		The opportunities afforded by this policy should support the health, safety and wellbeing of a vulnerable group of residents.
Other implications		

### **Supporting Information**

#### **Appendices:**

A: Supporting Care Leavers into Employment

B: Supporting Foster Carers (Draft employment policy)

#### **Background Papers:**

None