

# **East Lothian Council appeals for foster carers to take in child asylum seekers and teenagers**

**An appeal for foster carers to take in child asylum seekers and teenagers has been made by East Lothian Council as it struggles to find places for them.**

Increased fostering fees have helped boost the number of carers in the county over the last year, however children's services say they are finding it 'challenging' to place older youths and those coming in as refugees.

A report to the council's education and children's services committee says that in the case of teenagers many foster places are so successful they carry on into continuing care placements which is welcomed for them but means no places are freed up for other teens in need.

It said: "Some young people who could be cared for in foster care if a space was available are instead moving to a residential, group living environment. This is not always in their best interests and can affect their outcomes."

And it revealed that finding dedicated carers to look after asylum-seeking young people, who are being transferred to the county under the Home Office National Transfer Scheme in

increasing numbers, is also proving difficult.

It said: "We have tried to recruit dedicated carers for this group of young people, but this has not been possible.

"Our current cohort of foster carers can be reluctant to offer a placement due to the lack of information we receive about each young person, and this makes it impossible to consider important matching factors, particularly when there are other children in the household.

"There can be additional complexities such as cultural differences and we are keen to hear from people who would be willing to receive dedicated support to care for this cohort of young people."

Despite the challenges the service says it is seeing more people register to foster in East Lothian after increasing the fees paid to them made it more competitive.

It said word of mouth over payments and the support provided by the local authority had seen people come to them who had been registered elsewhere.

It said: "Current East Lothian foster carers welcomed the fee increase and we know that word of mouth within the community has led to carers working for private agencies seeking to move their registration to East Lothian.

"East Lothian have also approved foster carers who had originally enquired with a neighbouring local authority."

Children's services said it continues to prioritise keeping children at home when they are safe and loved, or with extended family through kinship arrangements wherever possible, and the number of children in foster care is falling because of this work.

However, they said, there are still children who need foster care and a shortage of local carers mean that placements can not always be found within the county, meaning children are moved away from familiar people and connections.

Councillors heard that monthly-drop in sessions were offering prospective foster carers the opportunity to find out more in a relaxed and informal setting. Promotion through social media was also ongoing to increase awareness of foster care and attract new interest.

Council leader Norman Hampshire welcomed the increased number of foster carers and praised the work of all those involved in providing the vital support to children and young people which helped keep them in their local communities.

He said: "I know how difficult it is to find people to foster. It is a massive step but it is a really rewarding experience."

To find out more about fostering in East Lothian go to [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/foster](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/foster) or telephone the team on 01620 827 643.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter