



WORKING CARERS POLICY

February 2019

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1. Background

- 1.1 Current figures suggest that as many as one in eight adults in the United Kingdom (approximately six million people in total) are carers and half of these individuals try to juggle their caring commitments with paid employment. With on-going advances in medical technology and treatment, people are living longer and it is anticipated that the number of carers could rise to nine million by the year 2037.
- 1.2 At Wyre Council we recognise that some employees have caring responsibilities for seriously ill, elderly or disabled relatives, partners and family members. We also recognise that other employees may have these responsibilities in the future.
- 1.3 As an employer, we have a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees, therefore a legal and moral responsibility to support employees who are carers.
- 1.4 Further, we are committed to offering carers the same recruitment and retention opportunities as everyone else, regardless of their responsibilities outside work. The Equality Act 2010 protects job applicants and employees against direct discrimination and harassment if they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic, for example a disability.
- 1.5 In addition to the legal and moral responsibilities we have, research has shown that it makes business sense to care for and support carers in their employment. Other employers have found that offering carers flexible ways of working and leave arrangements, to accommodate their needs, can bring huge benefits to an organisation, resulting in:
 - Lower staff turnover
 - Reduced recruitment and training costs
 - Greater productivity
 - Lower absenteeism
 - Higher staff morale
 - Higher levels of trust in working relationships
 - Improved image of the organisation

We appreciate the demands that caring responsibilities have on our employees and we are aware that, at times, it may be difficult to combine paid work with caring responsibilities outside of work. It is accepted that these caring demands place an additional strain upon an employee, which can in some cases impact on their performance at work as well as their health. It is for this reason that we recognise the importance of supporting carers and aim to assist them successfully manage the balance between caring and work responsibilities, wherever possible.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to ensure that we are able to recruit and retain the service of valued employees who have caring responsibilities outside of the workplace. The policy is a guide for both employees and managers as to how to approach and deal with requests for leave and flexibility to assist with caring commitments. It is intended to cover all possible situations and circumstances that an employee with caring responsibilities could face.
- 2.2 It is important to note that although the decision to agree requests for leave and flexibility in relation to working arrangements ultimately lies with line managers, they are encouraged and expected to sympathetically consider employees' requests for support in these circumstances, where business or service needs allow.

3. Scope of the Policy

- 3.1 The Work and Families Act 2006 and the Employment Rights Act 1996 gave working carers statutory rights to help them manage work and caring responsibilities, including the right to request flexible working arrangements and leave.
- 3.2 This policy pulls together the existing provisions that Wyre Council operates for employees needing time away from work with the flexible working provisions. This Working Carers Policy should therefore be read in conjunction with these statutory provisions, Council policies and approved practices/procedures.

4. Policy Statement

- 4.1
- Employees are actively encouraged to inform their line manager if they are caring for someone.
 - Managers are actively encouraged to meet with their employees who have caring responsibilities to discuss the support they need.
 - Managers are encouraged to consider requests from employees with caring responsibilities (for leave or flexibility in their working arrangements) favourably, wherever possible, where business or service needs allow.
 - Issues raised and discussed between employees and their manager are dealt with in a confidential manner.
 - Employees with caring responsibilities are treated fairly and consistently, whilst taking into account the individual needs and circumstances of each case.
 - Employees are not discriminated against, harassed, victimised or disadvantaged because of their caring responsibilities.

Note: This policy is separate to and therefore not designed to cover issues relating to employees with childcare responsibilities (as separate parental leave arrangements exist in relation to childcare) unless the child in question has a disability or serious long term health condition.

5. Definition of a Carer

- 5.1 For the purpose of this policy, a “working carer” is defined as “a Council employee who spends a significant proportion of their life providing unpaid support to family in addition to their working role. This could be caring for a relative or partner who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or substance misuse problems.”

6. Carer’s Responsibilities

- 6.1 Staff are under no obligation to tell their line manager that they are a carer but we would encourage them to do so, wherever possible. By speaking with their line manager, and explaining their caring commitments to him/her, they are able to discuss how these impact on their ability to balance work with caring responsibilities. Staff are also encouraged to seek advice and information from the sources of support available to them (for example, from their line manager, HR, the Carers Centres, Occupational Health or the Employee Support Programme).
- 6.2 We would also encourage staff to inform their work colleagues of their caring responsibilities, if they feel able to do this. Work colleagues can often be very supportive and understanding of the commitments people have outside of work and may find that colleagues are carers themselves, therefore aware of the difficulties that are faced in managing work and caring responsibilities.

7. Manager’s responsibilities

- 7.1 To actively encourage employees with caring responsibilities to meet with them and to openly and honestly discuss the difficulties they are experiencing balancing their work and caring commitments. Managers, have a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of their employees.
- 7.2 To consider requests from employees with caring responsibilities for leave or flexibility in their working arrangements favourably, wherever possible, where business or service needs allow, to enable these valued members of staff time to attend to their caring commitments.

8. Support Options

- 8.1 Employees are encouraged to discuss their individual circumstances with their line manager and bring options/suggestions to the meeting as to what leave or flexible working arrangements would assist with their caring commitments, having also considered the impact their request could have on the delivery of the service.

8.2 The options open and available to employees include the following leave and flexible working provisions, but this list is not exhaustive. Managers have the discretion to agree to specific/individual requests, which take account of the circumstances their employee is experiencing, if they feel this course of action is reasonable and it is something they are able to accommodate. The following options should therefore be considered alongside more short term, informal, options such as working from home, mobile working or allowing employees to make up the time they owe over an agreed period of time.

8.3 **Support Options – Leave**

The following provisions are available to support employees who require leave to attend to their caring 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
- Purchase of additional annual leave
- Special Leave – Time off for Dependants or Emergencies (Unpaid)
- Special Leave (Unpaid)
- Extended Authorised Absence (Unpaid)

Further details on the above provisions and how to request them can be found within the Leave and Work Life Balance Policy which can be accessed via the Council website.

8.4 **Support Options - Flexible Working Arrangements**

It is important that flexibility is available to all employees and in particular to carers who have to balance work with caring responsibilities. Offering flexibility often means that carers are able to continue working effectively and add value to the organisation whilst at the same time cope with the pressures they face outside of work.

Often the arrangements that have to be made are relatively straightforward and can easily be put into place by the line manager.

Most caring emergencies for which specific arrangements have to be made will be relatively short term, and it is therefore important to emphasise the need for an on-going flexible approach between employees and managers.

In addition to considering formal flexible working options, employees and line managers are also encouraged to consider informal, short term, alterations to working practices to help employees cope with a caring emergency or unforeseen situation.

The following formal flexible working provisions are available to support employees who require flexibility in their working arrangements on a more long term basis to attend to their caring commitments. It is important to note that a number of the flexible working arrangements are subject to qualifying criteria. This does not, however, prevent a

manager from agreeing to or proposing a variation in working arrangements for an employee who does not meet the qualifying criteria if agreeing to this request will assist the employee with their caring commitments and does not adversely impact on business or service needs:

- Flexible Working Hours
- Working from home
- Annualised Hours
- Compressed Hours
- Term Time Working
- Voluntary Reduced Working Time (V Time)
- Extended Authorised Absence
- Job Share
- Part time Working

Further information on the above options and details of how to submit a flexible working request can be found within the Flexible Working Policy which can be accessed via the Council website.

9. Additional Sources of Support

9.1 If further help and assistance is needed, the following sources of support are available to both employees and line managers:

- HR Section
- Occupational Health
- Employee Support Programme
- Carers Centres (Carers Hub Lancashire or Blackpool Carers Centre)
- Carers Direct – Tel. 0300 123 1053
- Carers UK – Tel. 0800 808 777

10. Equality Impact Assessment and Monitoring

10.1 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.

15. Data Protection

15.1 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.

