



ABERDEEN
CITY COUNCIL

SUPPORTING CARERS AT WORK

GUIDANCE

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Many people balance caring responsibilities with their employment. For carers, work can be a source of financial stability but may also be important to having a life outside of their caring role. However, undertaking a caring responsibility is often very challenging and stressful and can result in carers having to give up their employment because they are unable to cope with both roles.

The Council aims to create a working environment in which carers feel valued and supported to help them continue working for the organisation and at the same time ensuring that operational requirements are met. It is recognised that there are key benefits for the organisation in doing this including reduced absenteeism, higher retention rates and fewer recruitment costs.

This guidance provides managers with core information and issues to consider for the support of carers within their team(s) to encourage the development of a positive working environment for these employees.

SECTION 2: IDENTIFICATION OF CARERS

An employee is a carer if he/she is responsible for the care and support of a dependant including a disabled, elderly or sick partner, relative or friend, who is unable to care for them self.

Specifically, dependants are:

- The employee's spouse or civil partner;
- The employee's child;
- The employee's parent;
- A person who lives in the employee's household (excluding tenants, lodgers, boarders and employees);
- Any other person who reasonably relies on the employee for assistance in the event of an accident or illness or to make arrangements for care in the event of an illness or injury, for example an elderly neighbour; and
- In relation to the disruption or termination of care for a dependant, any other person who reasonably relies on the employee to make arrangements for the provision of care.

The activities carers undertake are wide-ranging, including help with personal care, help with mobility, managing medication, practical household tasks, emotional support, and help with financial matters or paperwork.

Employees are not required to disclose their caring responsibilities but are encouraged to do so. Managers should therefore seek to provide opportunities for conversations that allow an employee who is a carer to discuss their situation. It may be difficult for an employee who is a carer to identify themselves, so sufficient opportunity should be given to do so when the employee is ready and willing.

Managers should also maintain an awareness of the possibility that where an employee is experiencing difficulties at work this may be linked to a caring responsibility that they have yet to disclose to their manager.

It is recognised that employees with caring responsibilities cannot always plan ahead for time off. Accidents and some illnesses can occur without warning, and care arrangements can break down unexpectedly. The ability to take leave in an emergency is important for carers, who may be called upon at short notice. It should be noted that employees have a statutory right to take unpaid, reasonable time off work to deal with unforeseen and emergency matters regarding a dependant.

Managers should effectively communicate and raise awareness of the support that is available to employees who are carers to their teams. This could be through referring to this guidance in meetings, one-to-one discussions and other forums.

SECTION 3: KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER IN RELATION TO SUPPORTING CARERS

Managers should ensure that a carer's situation is treated both sympathetically and confidentially. All requests from employees for support should be considered based on an understanding of the situation and its impact on the employee. Furthermore, no employee should be unfairly discriminated against because of their caring responsibilities.

The following provides details of policy and guidance provisions relevant to supporting employees who are carers:-

Smarter Working

It may be beneficial for an employee with caring responsibilities to explore the use of a flexible working option. This could include remote or home working or adopting a different work pattern. If working on a rota basis, all due consideration should be given, where possible, within the needs of the service, to ensure that the timing will not negatively affect the employee. Managers should also be aware that the employee's working times may need to be amended at short notice if they are required to respond to an emergency in relation to their caring responsibility. Further information on a range of flexible working options can be found in the **Smarter Working** guidance on the Zone and is also available from line managers.

Further to this, an employee who is a carer may also feel that reducing their contracted hours may benefit them and their dependant. This could be either on a permanent or temporary basis and managers should consider any request for this from the employee, taking into account the requirements of the service.

Special Leave

In cases where the employee cannot attend work due to their caring responsibilities, managers can consider, where appropriate, granting special leave such as 'compassionate leave' or agreeing with the employee that any time off required is taken as annual, flexi or unpaid leave or that hours lost are made up at a later point. Details of the special leave provisions can be found on the Zone and are also available from line managers.

Career Break

An employee with a caring responsibility could consider applying for a career break if they feel that they require an extended period away from employment due to their caring responsibility. The qualifying criteria for a career break would need to be met by the employee. Full details are contained in the Career Break policy which can be found on the Zone and is also available from line managers.

Purchase of Additional Annual Leave

An employee with a caring responsibility may wish to consider the purchase of additional annual leave to assist them to achieve a better work-life balance. The Council has available an annual leave purchase scheme that provides employees with the opportunity to purchase up to 5 days' leave in addition to their contractual leave entitlement. To take part in the scheme, the employee is required to enter a salary sacrifice arrangement under which they agree to a reduction in gross salary equal to the value of the purchased annual leave. In return, they receive entitlement to the agreed annual leave which is added to the standard contractual entitlement. The advantage is that tax and national insurance is not paid on the amount that is salary sacrificed. As a result, the actual cost of the additional leave is reduced. Details of this salary sacrifice scheme can be found on the Zone and are also available for line managers.

Converting Annual Leave into Hours

Where an employee's annual leave entitlement is currently calculated in days, consideration can be given to allowing the employee to convert annual leave into hours, where this can be practically accommodated. This may be appropriate where an employee needs flexibility but due to the restraints of their caring responsibilities it is difficult for them to make up any lost time. This would allow them to use one or more hours' of leave at a time, rather than full or half days, operational requirements permitting.

Timing and Location of Meetings

If a manager is aware of times that may or may not suit the employee due to their caring responsibilities, these should be taken into account where possible when arranging meetings. Moreover, the location of meetings should also be considered as this may have a detrimental impact on the employee and their dependant.

Access to Mobile Phones

Where employees are not normally permitted to carry and use personal mobile phones during working hours, consideration should be given to waiving this rule and allowing those with caring responsibilities to carry and use (in relation to their caring role) their own mobile phones during working hours. There is Council guidance on the use of work phones for personal use which makes provisions for an employee to make private calls in certain circumstances, including in relation to a caring responsibility. This would enable the employee to be easily contactable in emergency situations relating to their dependant. In certain circumstances, employees who are carers may benefit from access to the Internet (for example to track the location of a dependant with dementia), so consideration can be given to smart phone or computer access for this where appropriate and practicable.

Time Off for Appointments

Managers should consider, where possible, granting reasonable unpaid time off for employees who need to accompany a dependant to a medical appointment. An employee may also wish to consider using annual leave or a flexible working arrangement or making lost hours up at a later point (with management agreement) to cover these instances.

It is important to understand that a carer's situation may not remain as a constant and could be subject to change at any time. This means that any supporting provisions in place for the carer may require to be reviewed and amended. It is advisable that the manager maintains regular contact with the employee to discuss their caring situation and that the employee is encouraged to inform their manager of any problems.

Employee Assistance Service

Is the Council's counselling service which provides psychological guidance and emotional support to employees experiencing personal difficulties and may be of particular relevance to those in a caring role. It operates for 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The service is free, confidential and available to all employees and members of their immediate family, living at the home address and over 16 years of age. Contact details are on the Zone or available from line managers.

Chaplaincy Service

Faith and emotional support is also available to employees through the Council's workplace chaplaincy service. Details are on the Zone or available from line managers.

SECTION 4: CARERS – RELEVANT POLICY & GUIDANCE

Annual Leave Purchase Scheme

[http://thezone/AskHR/MyBenefits/BEN annual leave purchase.asp](http://thezone/AskHR/MyBenefits/BEN_annual_leave_purchase.asp)

Career Break Policy

[http://thezone/AskHR/YourEmployment/annual special other leave/EMP career break.asp](http://thezone/AskHR/YourEmployment/annual_special_other_leave/EMP_career_break.asp)

Provision of Special Leave

[http://thezone/AskHR/YourEmployment/annual special other leave/EMP special leave.asp](http://thezone/AskHR/YourEmployment/annual_special_other_leave/EMP_special_leave.asp)

Smarter Working

[http://thezone/job_zone/communication/Welcome to Smarter Working.asp](http://thezone/job_zone/communication/Welcome_to_Smarter_Working.asp)

Use of the Council's Telephone System by Employees for Private Calls

[http://thezone/AskHR/YourEmployment/additional employee info/EMP private phone calls.asp](http://thezone/AskHR/YourEmployment/additional_employee_info/EMP_private_phone_calls.asp)

SECTION 5: FURTHER SUPPORT

Carers Trust www.carers.org

This organisation provides support and advice for carers and offers help in finding local support groups.

Carers UK www.carersuk.org

This organisation can provide help, support and guidance to carers whilst also connecting them with each other and providing details of local carer support groups.

VSA Carers

This is an Aberdeen-based support organisation that offers help, advice and guidance to carers.

Address: 38 Castle Street, Aberdeen, AB11 5YU

Telephone: 01224 212021

Email: carers.info@vsa.org.uk

Working Families www.workingfamilies.org.uk

This is an organisation which helps parents and carers achieve work-life balance.