

# **EMPLOYEES WHO DIE IN SERVICE: MANAGING THE POST-DEATH ARRANGEMENTS**

When employees die in service, we are faced with the difficult task of liaising with the next of kin/relatives on a variety of issues, as well as having to deal with the impact the employee's death will have on work colleagues. Care obviously needs to be taken that this is carried out as sensitively and appropriately as possible. We need to ensure that final pay and pension arrangements are put in place timeously and return any personal belongings. There is also a need for awareness of different religious customs associated with death and funeral arrangements. The following has been devised to help managers identify the steps they need to take to manage the process. Also included later is guidance on the steps that should be taken if the employee's death occurs when they are at work. A Termination of Service checklist (Appendix 1) covers the responsibilities of the line manager and the tasks to be performed by the HR Service Centre and Payroll Section.

For casual workers who die in service the manager and/or service may not be notified at the time of death. In such circumstances the steps below should be followed but sensitive handling of communications would be required, given any passage of time.

## **1. Offering your condolences and informing appropriate colleagues**

On being notified of the bereavement, if it is the line manager who is informed first, then he/she should offer verbal condolence to the caller (who may or may not be the next of kin) on behalf of the Council informing them that they will be in contact with the employee's next of kin at the appropriate time (i.e. usually in the next few days). Contact details of the next of kin i.e. spouse, parent or child, should be obtained at this time.

The line manager should ensure that their Chief Officer and the HR Service Centre via AskHR (email: [askhr@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:askhr@aberdeencity.gov.uk)) are then both informed of the bereavement, with the line manager establishing and confirming the next of kin details to ensure accuracy (with these held on the HR/Payroll system). The Termination of Service checklist (Appendix 1) details the line manager responsibilities in connection with a death in service.

## **2. Informing Pensions and Payroll Sections**

The HR Service Centre will immediately notify the Payroll and Pensions Sections verbally of the death in service, in order that they can begin to prepare relevant paperwork in respect of pay and pensions.

## **3. Notifying work colleagues**

Arrangements should be made by the Chief Officer to inform relevant employees in the Cluster of the bereavement as soon as possible following notification of the death i.e. colleagues of the deceased employee along with relevant others. The employee Counselling Service and the Council Chaplain are available for support and guidance given that sensitive handling of the announcement is required. The availability of the employee Counselling Service and Council Chaplain should be made known to any employee who might want to use these services (with the Counselling Service and Chaplain being informed first of the possibility of contact from employees). Details of these services can be accessed via the People Anytime portal on the Intranet.

## **4. Letter of condolence from Director**

A letter of condolence should be prepared by the Chief Officer (or nominee) and sent out under the Director's name to the next of kin at an appropriate stage, i.e. 1 to 2 days following notification of the death of the employee. The letter should indicate that a further letter will be sent out by the Payroll Section concerning the administrative aspects of the deceased's employment in the near future and that the employee's line manager will be in touch by telephone to enquire as to whether any other support can be offered.

**(Note: it is important that only one letter of condolence is sent from the Council ensuring that communication/contact with the next of kin is tightly co-ordinated)**

#### **5. Follow-up telephone call from deceased employee's line manager**

Shortly after the issue of the letter of condolence, the deceased employee's line manager should telephone the employee's next of kin to express sympathy, to offer to visit them at their home and to establish if there is any other support the Council could provide them with (and to also explain how the administrative arrangements of the deceased employee's employment will be dealt with - assuming it is appropriate to mention this at that point rather than after the funeral). The support could include counselling and the next of kin should be made aware of the availability of the Council's Counselling Service to the immediate family of the deceased (i.e. spouse/partner and dependants living in the same household), should they require this. The appropriate telephone number should be given to the next of kin and the Counselling Service informed, at that point, of the possibility of contact from the immediate family of the deceased, for assistance. The line manager should also enquire as to the date of the funeral and confirm whether it would be appropriate for a Council representative to attend, being mindful and sensitive in respect of specific religious customs. It should be noted that in respect of certain religions, the funeral/burial can take place very soon following the death and hence the timeframes in this process may require to be flexible.

#### **6. Contacting the deceased employee's trade union**

The HR Service Centre should contact the deceased employee's trade union, assuming known membership of a union, to inform the Convenor of the union of the death, as the trade union may wish to offer support to the bereaved family. However, only the name of the deceased employee and the date of their death should be given to the trade union (and not details of the next of kin) to avoid breaching the Data Protection Act.

#### **7. Attendance at the funeral**

On learning of the date of the funeral and assuming that attendance is open to all and not restricted to family/close friends only, the Cluster should make arrangements to be represented at the funeral by an appropriate official.

The Cluster should also make relevant employees aware of the date, time and location of the funeral and allow those who wish to attend appropriate time off in accordance with the Special Leave policy (assuming attendance at the funeral is open to all).

#### **8. Final pay, pension and administrative arrangements**

As far as administrative arrangements are concerned, all relevant actions on the corporate Termination of Service checklist should be undertaken timeously by the HR Service Centre.

The Payroll Section will prepare and send a letter to the employee's next of kin confirming outstanding payments to be made, including any accrued holidays, overtime etc. It will ask the deceased employee's next of kin to provide relevant bank details for the final payments to be made to. The letter will also mention, where appropriate, that the Pensions Section, or Scottish Public Pensions Agency (in the case of teachers/SNCT employees), will be in contact with the next of kin (assuming they have been nominated as the beneficiary for pension purposes) to confirm what pension benefits will be payable i.e. possibly widow/widowers pension, death gratuity, children's pension. This assumes that the employee was a member of the pension scheme.

On occasion a final payment can result in an overpayment. This requires careful handling and discussion with the Chief Officer and the Payroll Section, as appropriate, to identify whether an overpayment should be recovered and if so the means of doing that.

Mention should also be made within the letter of what arrangements will be undertaken to deliver to the next of kin any personal belongings of the deceased employee (or the next of kin can opt to come in to collect them in person if they wish). Normally this should be arranged via the deceased employee's line manager. Likewise, the letter should also ask that any Council property be forwarded to the deceased employee's line manager and that arrangements could be made to collect any such items. Again, careful and sensitive handling by the Cluster is required when the delivery/collection of property is undertaken.

**Note: Care should be taken in respect of all the administrative arrangements to try and avoid any errors occurring, which could cause distress to the bereaved family.**

## **Employees who die whilst at work**

### **9. Death occurs whilst at their normal workplace**

In the event of an apparent death occurring in the workplace, the appropriate emergency service(s) should be called **immediately**, to enable efforts to be made to revive the employee (with a First Aider being in attendance if possible). Assuming attempts to revive the employee fail and a doctor declares the person dead then the employee's next of kin requires to be informed as soon as possible either by a representative of the Council or by the doctor. Liaison with the doctor should be undertaken by the employee's line manager to decide on who will inform the employee's next of kin. If it is decided that a representative of the Council will notify the next of kin, then the employee's line manager should telephone the next of kin immediately. This telephone call requires careful and sensitive handling with an account given of the circumstances of the death (if details are known), condolences relayed and the offer of appropriate assistance provided at that point, if required.

### **Effect on witnesses to the death**

It is recognised that any colleagues who witnessed the death may be extremely distressed/upset by the event and unable to continue working for the remainder of the day, hence consideration should be given to the granting of paid Special Leave to those affected, for the remainder of the particular day and perhaps for longer if required. All employees who were in the vicinity when the death occurred should be made aware of the availability of the Counselling Service, should they wish to use that service and the Counselling Service should also be alerted to expect contact from employees seeking counselling assistance.

### **Notifying the Council's Health and Safety Section**

The Health and Safety Section requires to be immediately notified, if the death occurred as a result of an accident at work, in order that an appropriate investigation can be carried out. Thereafter, the relevant parts of the attached procedure for managing the post death arrangements should be followed.

#### **10. Death occurs whilst away from their normal workplace, including when on Council business outwith the City and on business trips abroad.**

In this scenario, it is likely that the Council would not be the first to be made aware of the death, with the immediate situation being handled by the emergency services based where the employee is visiting (or perhaps by the organisation the employee is visiting, if applicable), with it likely that the Council would be informed sometime soon after the event. The Council may still be the party that informs the next of kin. It should be confirmed, therefore, whether this has already been undertaken, and if not, a Council representative should arrange to notify the next of kin and offer appropriate assistance (see section 9 above). The Health and Safety Section will also require to be notified if the death has been as a result of an accident at work.

#### **Role of line manager**

The line manager should act as the liaison with the next of kin where there is a need to make arrangements for the return of the body, where the death has occurred out of town/abroad. The next of kin should be informed that the Council will meet the cost of the return of the body of the deceased employee and is prepared to make the necessary arrangements for the return on behalf of the next of kin as soon as possible (to enable funeral arrangements to then be made). Alternatively, if the next of kin wishes to make the arrangements themselves, then they should be left to do this but informed that the Council will pay the cost of the return of the body. The line manager should therefore ensure that a purchase order for the cost of the return of the body is administered at the appropriate time.

If the death occurred abroad, there may also be a need for the line manager to liaise with appropriate officials of the particular country i.e. to organise for the return of the body or to co-operate with any investigation into the death. In this connection, the line manager should liaise with the Council's Chief Officer – Governance.

Thereafter, the process for managing the post death arrangements should be followed.

The line manager should also contact the Chief Officer - Finance, in respect of the Council's Personal Accident Policy and Travel Insurance Policy, to ensure an insurance claim is submitted, if relevant, where an employee has died whilst carrying out their duties of employment or when commuting to or from their place of work.

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