



OPTIONS FOR WORK LIFE BALANCE

DEPENDANTS AND CARER'S POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1. East Renfrewshire Council and East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure (ERCL) recognises its responsibilities as an employer to those employees who have the responsibility of caring for a family member or dependant especially at times of emergencies and when dependants fall ill for an extended period.
- 1.2. The purpose of this policy is to provide our employees with a range of solutions for very different circumstances. This will help them balance their working and caring commitments allowing them to continue working and be effective in their job without the need to resort to sickness absence or resigning from work.
- 1.3. The success of this policy will rely on managers and employees having open and honest discussions to resolve any difficulties in a mutually acceptable manner at an early stage. A flexible approach should be considered to support the employee to balance work and caring responsibilities.
- 1.4. The benefits of providing a carer's policy will therefore include:-
 - improved engagement and loyalty
 - improved wellbeing of employees and reduced absence rates
 - reduced recruitment and retentions costs
 - enhanced reputation as a good employer

2. SCOPE

- 2.1. This policy will apply to all ERCL and Council / HSCP employees who have one year's continuous service with the exception of Teachers who are subject to separate terms and conditions for special leave arrangements as outlined in Standard Circular 79
- 2.2. This policy covers the leave provisions for short term dependants and carer's leave and longer term carer's leave.

3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1. A dependant is the partner, child or parent of the employee, or someone who lives with the employee as part of his/her family. For example, this could be an elderly aunt or grandparent who lives in the household. It does not include tenants or boarders living in the family home, or someone who lives in the household as an employee, for example, a live-in housekeeper.
- 3.2. The definition of a carer is a person who provides or intends to provide a substantial amount of unpaid care on a regular basis for a family member who is ill, frail or disabled. This could include someone who is living with cancer or any other critical or chronic mental or physical illness. For the avoidance of doubt, a carer is not someone who looks after young children or has elderly parents who are not ill, frail or disabled.

4. SHORT TERM DEPENDANTS/CARERS LEAVE PROVISIONS

4.1 When an employee accepts an offer of employment it is expected that they will put in place adequate provision for the care of dependants, in particular, young children who will inevitably become poorly and on occasions unable to attend nursery or school etc. It is also expected that working parents and families should share the caring responsibilities where possible rather than one family member taking the full responsibility/burden.

4.2 It is, however, fully acknowledged that there will be a range of daily demands associated with having dependants and being a carer which can be unplanned, unexpected or as a result of an emergency. To support our employees at these difficult and stressful times, employees will be entitled to paid time off subject to the conditions and limits defined, to deal with the emergency and to make the necessary arrangements for the ongoing care. The range of demands are categorised as:

A When a dependant becomes ill or has been involved in or had an accident.

B An unexpected disruption or termination of arrangements for a dependant's care when a nurse or care worker fails to arrive or when a school/nursery/day care for adults unexpectedly closes.

C To respond to an incident which involves a dependant of the employee and which occurs unexpectedly during the working day.

D To attend pre-arranged hospital appointments with a dependant who is unable to travel or cope with the appointment by themselves.

E To attend appointments/meetings with care providers/healthcare specialists in connection with the ongoing/longer-term care of a dependant who is ill, frail or injured.

4.3. In respect of A and B above, paid leave will be granted for up to 2 occasions for each situation in each leave year, and is for the purpose of **providing care** to dependants under the specific circumstances.

For C, D and E the leave is limited to 2 occasions for each situation in each leave year and is for the purpose of **attending appointments or to deal with the unplanned situation** and NOT for providing day to day to care.

In total, an employee may receive an overall maximum of 5 occasions to deal with the full range of caring situations that may arise in any given year. For the avoidance of doubt it is not 5 occasions per dependant and the total is pro rata for part time employees.

4.4. It should be noted that the leave available is limited to a maximum of one day on each occasion and if the evidence of the need to provide care or attend an appointment is less than a day, paid leave will only be given for the period of the required absence. If the employee has access to the flexi scheme, credit will be given up to the maximum of the Notional Working Day for each day or for the period of absence whichever is the lesser. Under such circumstances, it is expected that the employee will return to work after the need to provide care or attend appointment has ended. If the employee requests not to,

then the balance of the day can be made up of flexi time if the employee has access to the scheme or the time can be worked back later with the managers agreement.

- 4.5. It is acknowledged that some employees may need longer than one day for each occasion or may need more than 5 occasions in a year. To support this additional need an employee may also request annual leave, unpaid leave, an arrangement to make up time lost at a later date and/or, if eligible, flexi leave, subject to authorisation by his/her manager and the needs of the service.
- 4.6 Employees who participate in the flexi time scheme and who have a sufficient flexi time balance may request a 2nd flexi leave day in an accounting period. This 2nd day can only be used for the purpose of significant caring responsibilities and family emergencies i.e. the situations defined in paragraph 4.2 A, B and C. This provision will be subject to maximum of 15 flexi days taken in any year (pro rata for part time employees).
- 4.7 There may be exceptional circumstances where an employee has caring responsibilities and requires additional flexibility for a short period. In such cases, the line manager can approve an exception to the rule about the maximum flexi debit balance. Normally, the maximum debit that can be carried over into the next accounting period is 7 hours 10 minutes, (pro rata) however, this debit can be exceeded with the line manager's permission. The manager and employee should agree a period over which this debit can be made up - normally this would be a minimum of two and a maximum of four accounting periods, taking into consideration the nature of the exceptional circumstances.
- 4.8 The Council monitor the level of carers leave as part of the new core HR system. In the meantime, employees should complete the special leave request form either in advance or retrospectively for short term care/dependants leave which should be authorised by their line manager filed in the employees personal file within the Information At Work system..

OPTIONS FOR LONGER TERM CARERS LEAVE/SUPPORT

5 PAID CARER'S LEAVE

- 5.1 There may be occasions when Carer's Leave for a dependant is needed as it is clear from the outset that the situation is very serious and the employee will require more than a day's leave to support the situation. The circumstances may vary, but could include:-
 - Time off to be with a close family member when end of life is imminent after a long illness
 - As a result of an accident or sudden illness and being advised by medical specialists that a close family member is in a critical/life threatening condition
- 5.2 In these situations the Council will allow up to five days paid leave. Thereafter, an employee may apply for unpaid carer's leave or for a temporary flexible working arrangement. In the unfortunate event of the death of a close family member, the employee will then be entitled to paid bereavement leave.

6 UNPAID CARER'S LEAVE

- 6.1 Unpaid carer's leave may be requested where an employee is unable to attend work as a result of their need to care on a long-term basis for a dependant as defined in Section 6.1. The leave can be for a period of up to twelve weeks in a leave year. Time can be requested in individual blocks of no less than one week. Every endeavour will be made to grant unpaid carer's leave. However, in exceptional circumstances, where services would be unduly disrupted if leave were taken during the period identified, the leave may be refused or preferably postponed.
- 6.2 The period of unpaid leave can be an immediate deduction from the employee's salary or the employee can opt for deductions from their salary over an extended period of time up to a maximum of twelve months.
- 6.3 Unpaid carer's leave can be requested using the Carer's Leave Form CAR/1/2016, giving where possible at least 2 weeks' notice. Forms should be forwarded to their line manager in the first instance. Full information and forms can be found on the Council Intranet within the HR Documents/Special Leave section.
- 6.4 At the point of application, the employee must decide how salary deductions will be taken (e.g. single deduction, or spread over either three, six or twelve months / four weekly pay cycles) and authorise payroll to make the appropriate deductions.
- 6.5 Should the employee decide to have the immediate salary deduction and is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme, they have the option to buy back the amount of pension they lost during that period by paying Additional Pension Contributions (APCs). It is recommended to do this within 30 days of returning to work. Should the employee opt to spread the cost of the unpaid leave, they may opt to make other arrangements to top up their pension. Further information is available directly from the Strathclyde Pension Fund Website www.spfo.gov.uk
- 6.6 If the employee leaves employment with East Renfrewshire Council before the amount owed is repaid it will be deducted from their final pay. Where the full amount cannot be deducted from the final pay, the employee will be issued with the appropriate account for the balance owed.
- 6.7 Additional money advice and support can be obtained from the Council's Welfare Rights Team.

7 TEMPORARY FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

- 7.1 An employee may also apply for a temporary flexible working arrangement for a maximum period of twelve weeks. Depending on the circumstances and the working pattern the employee is able to work, a manager has the discretion to award up to two weeks of the twelve week period on full pay. Recommended guidelines are that the employee should be prepared to work at least 60% of their contracted hours and the duration must be for 12 weeks to be considered for the discretionary two weeks on full pay. Only one occasion on full pay for two weeks can be awarded in each calendar year. Shorter flexible working arrangements in terms of duration and working hours can be granted but would not qualify for the discretionary element of the first two weeks on full pay.

7.2 Temporary flexible working arrangements should be requested using the standard Right to Request Flexible Working Form. The normal notice period for a flexible working application is 8 weeks, however, where the circumstances relate to fairly sudden, unplanned situations, the employee should where possible give 2 weeks notice. Every effort should be made to accommodate this request subject to the exigencies of the services, in particular, front line services.

8 OTHER PRACTICAL SUPPORT MEASURES

8.1 Many carers will easily be able to continue working full time with just a little bit of flexibility with standard work place rules and the understanding of line managers and colleagues. Employees who have declared caring responsibilities may benefit from the following arrangements where appropriate and subject to operational requirements.

- Make reasonable use of the telephone and e-mail for up to 10 minutes each day when it is not possible to do so during unpaid breaks e.g. to take a conference call with a consultant at 3pm.
- A variation of working hours and breaks to allow employees to visit dependants in hospital.
- Occasional working from home.
- Consider and implement any adjustments to workload and deadlines on a temporary basis that will support an employee at a time of extreme pressure.

8.2 It is recommended that employees should let their manager know if they are experiencing demanding caring responsibilities. This will allow a discussion to take place to explore possibilities and options and to agree what support measures can be put in place and how they will work on a day day to day basis. It is important to clarify the understanding of some of the special arrangements such as :-

- which type of calls that may be undertaken during the working day and which type of calls that could easily be dealt with during unpaid breaks
- frequency and duration of hospitals visits
- what type of work can be completed at home and expected outputs/outcomes
- what adjustments to targets and workloads can you put in place for a temporary period

8.3 It is also recommended to review any temporary support measures on a regular basis and to agree a phased approach to return to normal working at the appropriate time. It is important to ensure that temporary arrangements put in place to support demanding caring requirements don't become the norm.

9 CARERS NETWORK/REGISTER

9.1 To support the application and effectiveness of this policy, “caring responsibilities” will be added to the workforce monitoring report produced under the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Employees with caring responsibilities will be asked to identify themselves for monitoring purposes.

9.2 East Renfrewshire Carers’ Centre

The Carers’ Centre provides a full programme of support to carers by providing respite and short break opportunities, stress management and relaxation classes, support groups and information and advice on a range of issues. The Carers’ Centre can be contacted as follows:-

The Gatehouse, Eastwood Park, Rouken Glen Road, Giffnock, G46 6UG
Tel No: 0141 638 4888 or e-mail enquiries@eastrenfrewshirecarers.co.uk

10 OTHER RELATED POLICIES/INITIATIVES

10.1 This policy is one of a range of work life balance policies, employee benefits and health & wellbeing initiatives that are available including:

- Right to Request Flexible Working
- Scheme of Special Leave
- Parental Leave
- Flexi Time
- Breast Feeding Policy

- Dignity at Work
- Employee Counselling Service – Time for Talking

- Child Care Vouchers
- Healthshield – Voluntary Healthcare Scheme
- Personal Resilience Training
- Mindfulness Events
- E Learning – Managing Stress and Relaxation