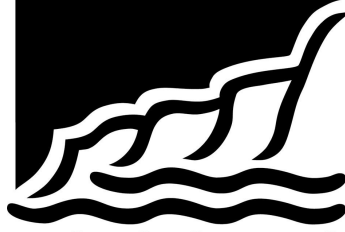


**VALE of GLAMORGAN**



**BRO MORGANNWG**

# **CARERS POLICY**

**November 2009**

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# **CARERS POLICY**

## **1. Introduction**

This policy aims to address the needs of carers working for the Vale of Glamorgan Council. The Council intends this policy to support employees with caring responsibilities and enable them to balance these effectively with their employment responsibilities. It also ensures that managers apply a consistent and equitable approach in supporting employees in this situation.

The benefits of providing a carer-friendly workplace will include:

- reduced recruitment and retention costs;
- reduced absenteeism;
- improved productivity from improved morale and reduced stress;
- greater ability to recruit/retain staff with key specialist skills;
- enhanced reputation as a good employer.

This policy aims to provide a framework that will support employees to remain in employment and provide flexible working arrangements.

A Carers in Employment Working Group has been established which will seek the views of carers and monitor the implementation of the policy.

## **2. Statement of intent**

The Vale of Glamorgan Council:

- values employees and their skills and loyalty.
- is committed to support employees with caring responsibilities to achieve and maintain a work-life balance.
- welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership with employees to explore all viable options to enable them to remain effective workers.
- affirms that employees will not be discriminated against on the grounds of their caring duties.

## **3. Definition of a carer**

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has announced a definition for the regulations of the Work & Families Act 2006. For the purposes of this Act, a carer will be an employee who is or expects to be caring for an adult who:

- is married to or the partner or civil partner of the employee; or

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- is a near relative of the employee; or
- falls into neither category but lives at the same address as the employee.

The `near relative` definition includes parents, parent-in-law, adult child, adopted adult child, siblings (including those who are in-laws), uncles, aunts or grandparents, guardians, half brother or sister and step-relatives.

In this policy we adopt the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) definition for entitlement to all the support measures for carers.

Carers provide unpaid care by looking after an ill, frail or disabled family member, friend or partner. They are **not** people looking after children who do not have a disability or life-limiting illness, or people in care professions such as care workers, medical staff or community workers.

## **4. Flexible Working**

### **Right to request flexible working**

The legal right for parents to apply to work flexibly, subject to eligibility, applies to carers from April 2007. The scope of the law now includes people who have caring responsibilities for adults.

There has been a revision of guidance issued under the right to request flexible working to include the new provisions and further details are to be found in the summary - Right to Request Flexible Working. Appendix 1

### **Working Carer Career Break Scheme**

The Council recognises that carers may have compelling reasons to apply for a career break in order to meet their caring responsibilities. In order to assist carers to meet their needs, a discretionary career break may be granted to assist an employee who requests a break due to carer responsibility.

In order to apply for a working carer career break, a carer must fit the BIS description outlined in Section 3 of the Carers Policy.

Although periods of extended leave, whether paid or unpaid, are neither appropriate for nor sought by large numbers of employees, they can be beneficial in particular circumstances.

Carers should refer to the Working Carer Career Break Scheme for further details.

## 5. Leave

### Special Leave

The Council's Special Leave Scheme provides for leave when 'assuming essential care duties or when partner/immediate dependant or primary carer is incapacitated'. Employees may use this provision when someone for whom they have caring responsibilities:

- is ill and needs their help
- is involved in an accident
- needs them to arrange their longer term care
- needs them to deal with an unexpected disruption or breakdown in care, such as a nurse failing to turn up

The amount of leave provided is a maximum of 37 hours prorated for part time employees within any 12 months rolling calendar period. For example, if the individual for whom you have caring responsibilities has a fall you may be able to take time off to deal with their initial needs, such as taking them to the doctor and arranging for their care. Leave to deal with the immediate situation, subject to the above limitation, can be granted subject to the agreement of your line manager. You will need to make other arrangements if you want to stay off work longer to care for them yourself.

Unpaid leave, or annual leave can be requested when the special leave entitlement has been exhausted or is not agreed.

The Council's Special Leave Scheme also refers to the consideration of reassignment/alternative work pattern to enable caring support in the first instance.

You can request Special leave if no contingency arrangements are possible to cover these circumstances, within the limitations of the Special Leave Scheme.

The above arrangements build on the requirements of the Employment Rights Act 1996 which entitles an employee to unpaid time off work to care for a dependent. Further advice on this is available from Human Resources.

You must advise your line manager, or appropriate person, as soon as possible as to the reason why you need to be away from work and how long you expect to need off work. If you are unable to contact your line manager, you should make every effort to contact an appropriate person about the reason for your emergency and request a leave of absence when you return to work.

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To apply for special leave you must use the Leave of Absence request form (VOG1) which must be agreed and authorised by the line manager prior to the leave being taken. Transact must receive all completed leave of absence forms.

## **Carers unpaid leave requests**

Carers can request unpaid leave to undertake specific care responsibilities, as set out in the definition of carers. This is separate to the Council's Special Leave provision.

Carers are able to request the following: -

5 days UNPAID leave, which can be broken down and taken as hours, in any 3 months period totalling a maximum of 20 days unpaid leave per 12 month rolling calendar period, (pro rata for part time staff). In extenuating circumstances, carers can request an extension by formal application to the Head of Human Resources.

To apply for Carers' unpaid leave use the Leave of Absence request form (VOG1). The line manager must agree and authorise all leave in advance. Transact must receive all completed leave of absence forms.

The requests to the line manager must outline the reasons for the request. Carers will be required to produce evidence for their reasons for requesting carers leave wherever practical, for example appointment cards, hospital letters, etc.

If a longer continuous period of absence is required, the Working Carers Career Break Scheme may be considered.

## **6. Workplace Support for Carers**

### **Communication**

Raising awareness via good communication will help ensure that the working carers within the Council are aware of the Carers Policy, helping to build a supportive culture, encouraging and enabling a two-way dialogue between line managers and working carers.

We will communicate new developments around support for carers, signposting information and information regarding any new initiatives to staff via:

- email – to Carers Network members
- Human Resources – People News
- carer events
- Changing Times

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- Staffnet
- trade unions

## **Carers Register**

We will establish a Carers Register as a means of ensuring that line managers and Human Resources personnel are aware of employees who have caring responsibilities outside work and as a way of managing fair and equal access to support provided under this policy. Carers will be encouraged to discuss their caring role with their line managers in order for them to benefit from the support available.

It is not compulsory for carers to register and an employee can choose remove himself or herself from the register at any time. A carer will be required to register to be eligible for practical support such as the Carers Unpaid Leave, Carers Network, use of telephone/email and information updates.

An employee must provide evidence to demonstrate the level and frequency of the care provided (for example hospital/clinic appointment cards). Further evidence may be required if line managers have concerns about the validity of the claim or the level and nature of the care provided.

Appendices 3 and 4 show details of the registration process and application.

## **Carers' Network**

The Carers Development Officer will establish and support a Carers network group. In addition, we will develop a dedicated Staffnet discussion forum for group members to contact and support one another. The Carers Network will send information to members. Line managers' approval to attend meetings or other events is required.

Carers can attend internal carers' events during working hours. However, for external events, carers must attend in their own time.

## **Carers information**

Information is made available via the communication channels listed above under the heading 'Communication'. This information includes signposting to external agencies and organisations who provide support and services, which may be of benefit to carers.

Information for new employees is included in the documentation issued as part of their induction process. This information will be subject to review and update annually by the Carers Development Officer.

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## 7. Practical Support for Carers

### Use of Telephone/ e-mail

Registered carers should be able to keep in regular contact with the person they provide care for by telephone/e-mail, without the permission of their line manager on each occasion. Reasonable use of the telephone/e-mail would be considered no more than 10 minutes each a day, although this may be increased in times of emergency with the agreement of the line manager.

Where access to a telephone and/or e-mail is available to a registered carer as part of their normal duties, they will also be able to make use of these facilities in their own time for making arrangements for or on behalf of the person they care for, for example arranging for social care services.

If a registered carer does not have access to these facilities, the carer can make a request to the line manager to facilitate access wherever reasonable and practicable.

The carer must keep a record of all occasions where they make use of this provision. Carers must make these records available on request, for audit purposes.

### Time out

At times of crisis, when carers are experiencing heightened levels of stress, the opportunity to take **'time out'** away from their desk or workstation is sometimes valuable. Managers may identify a quiet space for a carer, which could be a designated rest area or a manager could facilitate this by making his or her own room available for a short period, for example. A break of 20 minutes would be considered reasonable time out period in most circumstances. In cases where more time is required, consider alternative or additional space.

### Working from home

Individuals who have declared caring responsibilities can make a request to work from home for an agreed period to manage their care responsibilities as one of a number of considerations (see page 3). Line management should consider the request and if not supported, give reasons in writing for the decline. The Council will only consider requests for working at home if the nature of the individual's work warrants it and is in accordance with the needs of the service.

Permanent Home-working arrangements are dealt with under the Council's Home-working Policy

## **8. Implementing the Carers Policy**

### **Awareness raising and promotion**

Managers will be encouraged to appreciate the business case for supporting working carers and to understand the particular challenges presented by maintaining employment while fulfilling a caring role.

We will promote the Policy via internal communications channels such as Core Brief, Changing Times and the Staffnet.

Promotion of the support and services offered by the Carers Policy will take place. Awareness of the Council as a carer-friendly employer will enhance its reputation as an employer of choice to prospective employees.

We will include details of the information and support available to prospective employees via the website recruitment pages.

During corporate induction, new staff will receive an overview of the general conditions of service that support carers.

### **Training and Development**

There may be implications for current policies such as Management of Absence and awareness of the carers policy will need to be included as part of management training.

## **9. Monitoring and Evaluation**

The success of this policy will depend upon the support and recognition given to working carers by all employees, but particularly senior managers and members of the Council.

We will judge its effectiveness by careful monitoring and reporting on a regular basis. The Equalities Section will monitor the take up of support made available via this policy to include the -

- number of carers registered
- amount of carer's leave accessed
- number of carer's career breaks requested and approved
- number of flexible working requests made by carers, and numbers approved

In addition, we will review the policy, involving members of the working carers support group, to ascertain their views on the effectiveness of the policy.

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Following the adoption of the Carers Policy , a Carers in Employment survey will be carried out every 3 years by the Carers in Employment Working Group and a questionnaire issued seeking information about the number of carers, their needs and support provided.

**We intend this Policy to provide support for working Carers. Any abuse of the Policy may be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedures.**