

# Working carers policy

## 1. Background

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 ongoing 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.

At Lancashire County 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.

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.

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.

This policy should be looked at in conjunction with the carers leave policy.

## 2. Purpose

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.

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

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 with effect from April 2007. In addition, the Carers Leave Act 2023 gave working carers statutory rights to request unpaid leave to give or arrange care for a dependant for up to one week every 12 months.

This policy pulls together the existing provisions that Lancashire County Council operates for employees needing time away from work with the flexible working provisions that form part of the County Council's Working Flexibly Policy, and the right to request unpaid leave as part of the carers leave policy. This Working Carers Policy should therefore be read in conjunction with these statutory provisions, County Council policies and approved practices/procedures.

### 4. Policy Statement

- 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, or AskHR, 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

For the purpose of this policy, a "working carer" is defined as "a Lancashire County 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

You are under no obligation to tell your line manager that you are a carer but we would encourage you to do so, wherever possible. By speaking with your line manager, and explaining your caring commitments to him/her, you are able to discuss how these impact on your ability to balance your work with your caring responsibilities. You are also encouraged to seek advice and information from the sources of support available to you (for example, work related advice from your line manager or AskHR; non-work related advice, information and support from [Carers Lancashire](#), the [NHS](#) and [Carers UK](#)).

We would encourage you to inform your work colleagues of your caring responsibilities, if you feel able to do this. Work colleagues can often be very supportive and understanding of the commitments you have outside of work and you could find that some of the people you work with are carers themselves, therefore aware of the difficulties you face in managing your work and caring responsibilities.

## 7. Manager's responsibilities

To actively encourage employees with caring responsibilities to meet with you and to openly and honestly discuss the difficulties they are experiencing balancing their work and caring commitments. As a manager, you have a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of your employees.

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

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.

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 and informal arrangements such as working from home, working from other offices, mobile working or allowing employees to make up the time they owe over an agreed period of time.

## **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
- Special Leave for Care of Dependants (Unpaid)
- Special Leave (Paid and Unpaid)
- Carers Leave

Further details on the above provisions and how to request them can be found on the HR website.

## **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 ongoing flexible approach between employees and managers.

In addition to considering formal flexible working options, employees and line managers are also encouraged to consider informal and short term alterations to working practices (such as working from home, working from a different office base, mobile working and shift swapping) to help employees cope with a caring emergency or unforeseen situation. Working flexibly from any location (such as other county council offices, from home, on a mobile basis in the community or any combination of these) may be an option that employees and line managers want to consider on a longer term basis, if job roles and service delivery can support agile ways of working.

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

- Homeworking
- Annualised Hours
- Compressed Hours
- Voluntary Term Time Working
- Reduced hours (formerly known as V-time)
- Sabbatical
- Job Share

Further information on the above options and details of how to submit a flexible working request can be found on the HR website.

## 9. Additional Sources of Support

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

- AskHR
- Carers Lancashire
- NHS
- Carers UK

Contact details and further information can be found on the HR website.

## Policy Version Control

Version	Date	Change
1	06/04/24	○ Policy amended to reflect the Carer's Leave Regulations 2024