Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Carers Policy

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Issued: March 2024

Version Control

This document is intended for:

☐ Council staff only ☐ School-based staff only ☒ Council & School-based staff

Version	Key Changes	Approved By
Apr 2020	Reformatted and added reference to EAP	DMT
Mar 2024	Updated following the Carer's Leave Act 2023 and incorporated the Carer's Support Pack	DMT

This document may be reviewed and amended at any time and without consultation in response to legal requirements or in response to an organisational requirement and where the changes do not reflect a fundamental change or affect the spirit or intent of the document.

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1. Introduction

There are a large number of people providing significant levels of unpaid care, enabling people to live longer in the community. There is also the growing awareness around demographic changes and the need for employers to address the needs of carers in the workplace and older workers.

Carers are a valuable resource and their contribution and continued health and well-being is vital.

2. Scope of the Policy

This Policy applies to all Council/School staff who have substantial caring responsibilities, regardless of length of service or type of contract with the exception of those employed on a relief basis. Part-time staff will receive an entitlement on a pro-rata basis related to their full-time equivalent status.

Under the Carer's Leave Act 2023, the statutory carer's leave is 5 days **unpaid** leave per year, however, the Council/School provides 5 days **paid** leave during any 12-month period (pro-rata for part time). Employees are not entitled to the statutory and Council/School entitlements separately.

If an employee is responsible for a dependent that would only require support for occasional illnesses or emergency leave, (such as a sudden serious illness that would require hospital treatment) this is not applicable under this Policy, they will need to refer to the Schedule of Leave of Absence for guidelines of what support and provisions are available. Employees with parenting responsibilities can also refer to the Parental Leave Policy for further information.

3. Definition of a Carer

To be eligible to use this Policy, an employee will be regarded as a carer if they have significant caring responsibilities for a dependant who is disabled, sick, or elderly which will have a substantial impact on their working life.

Employees who are able to use this Policy will either be a registered carer or care for an individual with long-term caring requirements.

The Carer's Leave Act 2023 states a person is a dependant of an employee if they:

- are a spouse, civil partner, child or parent of the employee,
- live in the same household as the employee, otherwise than by reason of being the employee's boarder, employee, lodger or tenant, or
- reasonably rely on the employee to provide or arrange care, and

It also states a dependant of an employee has a long-term care need if:

- they have an illness or injury (whether physical or mental) that requires, or is likely to require, care for more than three months,
- they have a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, or
- they require care for a reason connected with their old age.

Although it is not possible to define significant in terms of hours or days of care provided, the employee will be the first point of contact. As the sole carer, they will have responsibility for the individual at all times, including emergencies and would not just provide support for one off hospital appointments/recuperation periods.

Should two people in the same family both provide caring responsibilities (and are classed as joint Carers) and are both employed by the Council/School, these provisions will be shared. The employee(s) should disclose this to their manager/Headteacher when an initial request is made, further advice can be sought from Organisational Development.

4. Aims & Objectives

The Council/School recognises that some employees currently have long-term or permanent caring responsibilities for seriously sick, elderly, or disabled relatives, partners, family and we also recognise that other employees may have these responsibilities in the future.

The Council/School is appreciative of the demands that such responsibilities make on the employee, and we are aware that, at times, it may be difficult to combine paid work with caring. We recognise the importance of supporting employees whilst they are caring, in order to ensure that they can successfully manage the balance between domestic and employment responsibilities.

“Caring responsibilities” can take many forms and may occur on a long-term, short-term or emergency basis and it is inevitable that caring responsibilities place additional strain upon an employee. In some cases this may affect their performance at work; it may also hinder developing a career, in terms of being able to consider promotion or job moves.

The aims of this Policy are to:

- Encourage and enable staff to combine the demands of employment with the care of dependants, whilst continuing to make a full contribution to the work of the Council/School.
- Provide help and support to staff and managers by maximising the opportunity to balance home and work life for those with caring responsibilities (e.g. elder care, disability care).
- Assist the recruitment, retention and return of staff with caring responsibilities, addressing issues of access to flexible working opportunities, staff motivation and the delivery of quality services.

Having recognised its role in supporting employees who are carers the Council/School has committed to the following:

- Promoting the adoption of good practice in carer friendly employment policies and working practices, thereby encouraging more carers into employment.
- Ensuring policies are effective and welcome feedback from carers on how our policies work in practice.
- Actively encouraging a working environment that supports carers to ensure that they feel comfortable and confident in the workplace and to ask for any help they may need.
- Increase recruitment and retention of employees by ensuring carers feel valued and supported in the workplace.
- Recognising and acknowledging as part of our recruitment and selection processes the transferable skills and experience gained and developed by carers.
- Dealing with issues in a confidential manner that may be raised between employees and their manager, or Organisational Development.
- Enabling managers to support their staff who have caring responsibilities by providing information, guidance and advice as appropriate.
- Ensuring there is consistency of treatment between employees with caring responsibilities, whilst taking into account the individual and business needs of each case.
- Ensuring our employees are not discriminated against or disadvantaged on the grounds of caring responsibilities.
- Maintaining links and effective communication with partner organisations in order to provide information and access to services and benefits for staff.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 Managers/Headteachers

- To be aware of the needs of carers and understand the conflicting demands.
- To be responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of the Carers Policy. Managers should be flexible and assess all options to encourage and support staff to remain in work for as long as possible.
- To ensure that absences, which may have been caused by caring responsibilities are dealt with appropriately.
- To keep in touch with employees during periods of leave.
- To be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing increased stress outside work because of caring responsibilities. This could include a referral to Occupational Health or the Council's Employee Assistance Programme.
- To ensure good communication between management and staff, especially where there may be organisational changes which may affect the employee's hours of work. Reasonable notice should be given to the employee to make alternative caring arrangements if shift patterns are to change, or overtime or working away from home/work base is required.
- To provide access to a telephone, if required, (with privacy) to enable the employee to check on the person they are caring for or to arrange

appointments if necessary (payment for calls will be in line with the Policy on the Use of Authority-Mobile Telephones).

- To be consistent in adhering to equal opportunities and be fair in their approach to requests whilst having the discretion within the parameters of the Policy to respond appropriately to individual circumstances.

5.2 Organisational Development

- To advise managers and individuals on existing policies/procedures/working practices (e.g. Flexible Working Policy, Leave Policy) and changes to legislation around "special" leave policies/entitlements.
- To provide continuing support to managers and individuals in the workplace and encourage referral to Occupational Health or the Council's Employee Assistance Programme.
- To provide confidential advice, information and support to employees who have caring responsibilities.
- To raise awareness of the rights of carers and to signpost staff to relevant carer information and support agencies.

5.3 Employees

- To inform their manager/Headteacher in writing that they are a carer and/or if there are any changes in their caring responsibilities. This is to ensure the manager is able to/continue to provide support.
- To accept opportunities for counselling or other appropriate support from Occupational Health or a registered medical practitioner when recommended.
- To provide reasonable notice of a request to accommodate caring responsibilities and an indication of how long this need is likely to last.
- To be flexible in assessing options and suggest alternative ways in which responsibilities and tasks could be undertaken and to be prepared to consider alternative solutions when their preference cannot be accommodated.
- To keep in touch with their manager during periods of leave.

6. The Nature of Care

The nature of the care will indicate the likely impact on work and what support options may be appropriate for managers to provide, this could include:

- An employee who has just become a carer and needs time and flexibility to set up alternative caring arrangements.
- Employees who have interim caring responsibilities and need time at certain intervals, which can be accommodated in work patterns or through leave arrangements.
- Emergency circumstances which could result in an employee needing immediate support at short notice in the form of a short period of time off, which will require understanding from managers and colleagues.
- An increase in caring responsibilities, which may change an employee's personal circumstances and therefore may need more flexibility or a change in work patterns, whether this is on a short or long-term basis.

Carers can work some distance away from the people they provide care for and in some cases may only provide care at set or specific times. However, they often feel responsibility for arranging care. The Council/School recognises that carers will have differing needs, some of which are listed below:

- Ability to leave work promptly on time.
- Advance notice if requested to work extra hours.
- Supportive managers and understanding colleagues.
- Policies in place to cover both planned and unplanned needs.
- Flexible working opportunities.
- Signposts to local support services.

7. Advance Notification of Status

To provide reassurance an employee may request the appropriate manager to confirm that they will be regarded as a carer in the context of the provisions of this Policy.

8. Leave Arrangements

Employees with caring responsibilities will be entitled to request time off. This may include sudden short-term or planned leave arrangements being agreed with the relevant manager/Headteacher (in addition to normal leave entitlements) in order to deal with caring responsibilities. Employees are encouraged to discuss their individual circumstances with their manager/Headteacher and are eligible for the leave and support arrangements as set out in this Policy.

8.1 Paid Carer's Leave

Carers are entitled to 5 days (37 hours) paid carer's leave during any 12-month period, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees. This leave may be granted in full or half days and where it can be accommodated, in the case of employees operating under the flexible working hours scheme, leave may be granted in hours. Leave requests will be considered and granted at the discretion of the employee's manager/Headteacher based on individual circumstances and the reasonableness of the request in line with the spirit of this Policy.

Leave entitlement will begin from the first instance that it is taken and in a rolling year thereafter.

The entitlement is to a reasonable amount of time off to deal with the immediate problem, which will vary according to the circumstances. For time off to be justifiable the employee's presence or attendance must be crucial to resolving the problem. In most cases one or two days will be the most that are needed to deal with the immediate care issues. This will not affect annual leave provisions and employees are not required to use up their annual leave before carer's leave is granted.

This type of leave can be split into two categories: **Planned Leave** and **Emergency Leave**.

Planned Leave

Planned carer's leave will last for a defined period, will be agreed in advance and will be paid in line with the carer's leave provisions in the Schedule of Leave of Absence Policy. This leave is primarily designed to cover the following situations:

- Nursing care following serious illness or discharge from hospital for carers that meet the definition.
- Removal situations (i.e. to or from carer's home or into residential care).
- Attending benefit or legal hearings.
- Arranging an educational setting.

This list is not definitive and other situations may be considered within this category.

Employees should contact their manager/Headteacher to request Planned Leave and this leave will not normally be unreasonably refused. There are circumstances whereby managers/Headteachers can consider requesting such leave be postponed. Please contact your OD Business Partner to discuss this due to the additional obligations that arise.

Carer's Leave – Emergencies

Whilst it is important to give as much notice as possible when requesting leave, it is recognised that this may not always be possible and that – particularly when seriously ill or infirm individuals are involved – employees' circumstances and needs may vary.

Emergency leave may be authorised by the employee's immediate manager/ Headteacher or next level management if the manager/Headteacher is not available. The employee must inform the manager/Headteacher as early as possible on the first day that leave is taken or in line with departmental procedures for reporting absence prior to the commencement of the shift.

Leave granted will be based on the individual circumstances and will be short term in nature to deal with an emergency situation. It will be paid in line with the carer's special leave provision. The emergency will require the immediate attention of the employee. Situations where leave might be taken include:

- Unexpected disruption or breakdown in normal care arrangements.
- If a dependant falls ill or has been assaulted or in an accident including when the victim is hurt or upset rather than physically injured.
- There is a sudden onset of carer status.
- To make longer term arrangements for the provision of care for a dependant who is ill or injured.

This is not an exhaustive list and carer leave may be granted for other purposes, which fall under the spirit of this procedure. This type of leave is not designed to provide extra time off where circumstances allow sufficient time to plan ahead.

8.2 Unpaid Dependants Leave

There are also statutory rights to unpaid absence to look after dependents in certain unexpected or sudden emergency situations as laid down by the Equality Act 2010. This means employees have a right to take a 'reasonable' amount of time off work to deal with an emergency involving a dependant.

If a carer has exhausted all paid forms of support, they may apply for unpaid absence for a period of time. This may be granted as unpaid 'dependants leave'. If the unpaid leave required is for an extended period of time please see the Unpaid Carer Break scheme detailed below.

8.3 Unpaid Carer Break Scheme

Employees with caring responsibilities will be eligible to request a 'carers break', to cover an intensive period of care or where longer-term caring responsibilities are involved. The carer break will be unpaid and will be subject to a maximum period of one year. During this time employees will not accrue annual leave.

Employees requesting a carer's break must give their manager/Headteacher the longest notice period possible. Wherever practical this should be ideally a minimum of one month to allow alternative cover arrangements to be put into place.

Employees should discuss this with their manager/Headteacher, who will then discuss it further with Organisational Development, in order to ensure that the request is given full and proper consideration.

If a 'carers' break is approved, full support, including retraining where necessary, will be provided when the employee returns to work. The manager/Headteacher should keep in touch with the employee and offer support wherever possible, although the employee may choose to contact their manager more frequently, should this be preferable. The employee will continue to receive all appropriate communications unless they request not to receive them.

Treatment of Benefits

The following benefits will cease to accrue or apply during an unpaid Carer's break:

Salary – Carer's leave will be unpaid. However, employees may use all or part of their pro-rata holiday entitlement to enable them to be paid for part of the period of Carer's leave.

Employers Pension Contributions – for further information please contact:

Pensions and Technical Officer
Tel: (01495) 355170
E-mail: pensions@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

National Insurance Contributions – the employee will not pay national insurance contributions during the unpaid period they are not in work. Should they wish to make their own payments, they should contact their local Department for Work and Pensions office for advice.

Mobile Phones, Laptops and other company property – managers/Headteachers should assess and advise employees whether employees should return these, depending on the duration of the carer's break agreed.

8.4 Unpaid Parental leave for carers of disabled children

Eligible employees may be entitled to up to 18 weeks unpaid leave per child until the child reaches 18 years of age. For full details on the scheme and the qualifying conditions please refer to the Council's Parental Leave Policy.

8.5 Paid Bereavement Leave

In the event of the death of a near relative or a person who is solely dependant on the employee the Council/School's special leave provisions provide for up to 5 days paid bereavement leave to include the day of the funeral. For full details please refer to the Schedule of Leave of Absence.

In addition to this special leave employees may request additional unpaid leave in circumstances where there are additional arrangements/adjustments to be made outside of the immediate bereavement period. This additional unpaid leave may be granted at the discretion of the manager/Headteacher.

9. Requesting Paid and Unpaid Leave

To request a period of carer's leave the employee must complete a "Request Form for Carer's Leave" (appendix 1) and submit this form to their manager, stating the reason for the leave and the amount of leave requested. The form should be submitted by double the number of days leave requested before the first day of leave or three days before, depending on which is earlier. i.e. to request 3 days carer's leave you must submit your form at least 6 days before the first day of leave. To request 1 days carer's leave, you must submit your form 3 days before the first day of leave.

However, the Council/School recognises that a request for carer's leave will often need to be made at extremely short notice and can often be in difficult or upsetting circumstances for the staff member concerned. In an immediate and urgent situation, the employee should be released from duty and arrangements made with them to contact their manager/Headteacher to confirm the duration of the leave and submit the relevant paperwork when appropriate. In the event of an emergency prior to commencing work the employee must contact the relevant manager/ Headteacher for verbal approval and complete the request form on return to work. Guidance on the process for requesting leave is outlined below.

It is the manager's responsibility to ensure that the employee completes the request form (ensuring the employee does not exceed their annual entitlement to paid leave) and once completed by the manager a copy of the form needs to be sent to Organisational Development. If the manager/Headteacher approves an unpaid period of carer's leave it is also their responsibility to complete an online Notification

of Amendment Form and send this to Organisational Development for the necessary deductions to be made from the employee's earnings.

If individual needs are not met by the scope of this Policy there are alternative options that can be explored in relation to flexible working that can be further explained by contacting Organisational Development.

Abuse of the Provisions

Any abuse of the provisions of the Carers Policy will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Policy & Procedure or School's Disciplinary Procedure.

Equal Opportunities

All carers in the workforce should be treated fairly, and offered the level of support dependant on their caring situation and work commitments. They should be well informed of the policies in operation for supporting carers. These policies should be accessible to all carers regardless of post held or any of the protected characteristics.

Employees with caring responsibilities will have the same opportunities to get a job or stay in work with the Council/School regardless of their responsibilities outside of work.

An employee will be protected from detrimental treatment due to the fact that they took, sought to take or were likely to take, carer's leave.

10. Further Information

Additional resources, signposting and advice that can help during the times that employees may need to utilise their entitlement for Carers Leave, or similarly in helping to decide if this is an option for them, can be found in appendix 2.

Request Form For **Carer's Leave**

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND RETURN TO HRpayroll@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

SECTION 1 – TO BE COMPLETED BY EMPLOYEE

Full Name:

Job Title:

Personal Reference Number (please note this is mandatory):

Type of Carers Leave required: ☐ Planned ☐ Unplanned ☐ Paid ☐ Unpaid

Leave Date(s) Required:

Total Number of Days: Identified as a Joint Carer? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Employee's Signature: Date:

SECTION 2 – TO BE COMPLETED BY MANAGER/HEADTEACHER

Date Request Received: ☐ Agreed ☐ Declined

Total number of days used of annual **paid** entitlement:

If unpaid leave taken – basic amendment completed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Manager's Signature: Date:

Appendix 2: Carers Support

Flexible Working

It is important to ensure that flexibility is available to all employees, in particular to those who have to balance work and caring. Offering flexibility can ensure that employees are able to continue working effectively and add value to the Council/School, whilst at the same time coping with external pressures. Often the arrangements that have to be made for carers are straightforward and can be easily put in place by the manager/Headteacher or Organisational Development. Most caring emergencies for which specific arrangements have to be made will be relatively short term, and therefore it is important to emphasise the need for an ongoing flexible approach.

Arrangements at Work

There may be a need, either temporarily or permanently, for working arrangements to be adjusted to meet individual circumstances. The work life balance approach recognises that people have different interests and responsibilities they want to fulfil.

Listed below are a range of options available, which may help:

- Part time working
- Job share
- Right to request flexible working
- Flexible working hours scheme
- Special and annual leave provisions
- Parental leave
- Paternity and maternity support leave

Telephone Access

Employees with caring responsibilities are encouraged to approach their manager/ Headteacher to agree access to a telephone at work in connection with their role as a carer. A confidential telephone may be made available, where appropriate (payments for calls to be made in line with the Private Use of Authority-Owned Telephones Policy).

Occupational Health Service

The Council/School has an occupational health provision that provides support and advice to staff on health and wellbeing. As part of the Attendance Management Policy employees can be referred to Occupational Health for advice and assistance on their health and its impact on their work. The service is confidential and impartial and employees can request to see an advisor to seek help and assistance.

Employees should speak to their manager/Headteacher if they wish to use this service or contact Organisational Development to seek advice on what type of help can be provided by the service.

Employee Assistance Programme

An Employee Assistance Programme in place with an independent provider called Vivup. With Vivup, you can benefit from confidential access to fully qualified counsellors and support specialists to discuss any emotional, personal, or work-related issues – 24/7, 365 days a year.

Whether you are facing problems at work or at home, you will be able to access impartial, confidential advice for issues such as anxiety, bereavement, stress, depression, workplace issues, trauma, relationships, family difficulties, finances, etc.

The service is free of charge and you don't need to ask your manager to use it. Contact details are below and additional information is available on the intranet.

HOW TO CONTACT VIVUP

Call the free 24/7 helpline on
0800 023 9387

Visit the Vivup website to access self-help workbooks, podcasts and blogs.

Visit Vivup's "Your Care" proactive health and wellbeing platform and create an account to carry out wellbeing assessments, set goals and much more.

Family Information Service

In order to provide additional support to parents with caring responsibilities the Council operates a comprehensive Family Information Service. It is a one stop shop offering information on local childcare provision, children's clubs, emergency childcare places and leisure activities. The service is confidential and impartial with up to date information provided by friendly, helpful staff. The Family Information Service can be contacted on 08000 32 33 39.

Financial Information

Carer's may be entitled to benefits from the Government. The benefits system is complicated and finding out what an individual is entitled to can be difficult. If an employee is not sure whether they can claim any benefits advice is available from the Carers UK Adviceline 0808 808 7777.

Practical Support

As well as financial help employees may need more practical help to look after someone. This could be someone to sit with the person they care for while they go out for an hour, equipment to help them care or information about local carer support groups. Social Services can provide carers with a range of support. To determine what is needed and how they can help social services will first carry out an assessment.

Rights to a Carers Assessment by Social Services

To be eligible for a carers assessment under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, the definition of a Carer is "a person who provides or intends to provide care for an adult or disabled child".

A carer's assessment needs to include whether the carer is able/willing to care, the outcomes the carer wishes in day to day life and whether the carer works, or wishes to, or would like to participate in education/training and recreation.

An assessment is the carer's opportunity to talk about their own outcomes and things that could make caring easier for them. Individuals can have a carer's assessment whether or not the person they care for has had an assessment or wants one themselves. The overall focus for the carer's assessment is to explore outcomes such as:

- The level of care the carer is able to provide
- The sustainability of the caring situation
- The carer's health
- The carer's personal circumstances; abilities and strengths
- Facilitating services to support the carer; and
- Signposting the carer to appropriate agencies for further assistance e.g. work, training and leisure

Carer's Assessments can look at the support available from a range of organisations. The assessments should be a face-to-face discussion between carer and the person carrying out the assessment. A carer may ask for the assessment to be carried out in private away from the person being cared for. Following the assessment the care would be sent a copy of the care plan Social Services produce, which will outline the services and support they can give.

Some things carers need to think about:

- Do they get enough sleep?
- Is their health affected in other ways?

- Do they get any time for themselves?
- Do they want information about benefits?
- Are they worried they may have to give up work?
- Is the person they care for getting enough help?

Please contact C2BG on 01495 315700 to request a referral to the Social Work Team for a carer's assessment.

Further Information and Advice

Carers UK/Carers Wales
There may be a number of local carers' organisations in the area where you live where you may be able to get a range of support, advice and information. To find out more about resources in your area go to the Carers UK website www.carersuk.org or call carers line 0808 808 7777.

The Care Collective
1-3 Central Mews, Market Street, Pontypool, NP4 6JN
Tel: 01495 769996
Email: info@thecarecollective.wales
Website: www.thecarecollective.wales

Age Cymru
Tel: 029 2043 1555
www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru

Citizens Advice Bureau
Tel: 03444 772020
https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
Headquarters, St Cadoc's Hospital, Lodge Road, Caerleon, Newport, NP18 3XQ
Tel: 01633 435956
Email: abhb.enquiries@wales.nhs.uk
Website: www.wales.nhs.uk

Family Information Service
Tel: 08000 32 33 39
Email: FIS@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
Website: http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/resident/health-wellbeing-social-care/support-for-children-families/family-information-service/

Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO)
The Innovation Centre, Festival Drive, Victoria Business Park, Ebbw Vale, NP23 8XA
Website: www.gavo.org.uk

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council - Social Services Duty Referral Team
Tel: 01495 315700