

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIC FORUM**DISCUSSION PAPER – CARERS AT WORK****Introduction**

This is topic that has been getting a significant airing in the media with a number of articles in national newspapers. To quote Jeremy Hunt, Health Secretary in a piece from the Times, Saturday August 24th, we have “an aging population and an impending dementia time bomb”

What is the definition of a ‘Carer’?

We traditionally think of Carers as those who are, or expect to be responsible for a child under 18.

An employee can also be a carer if they are caring for a partner, relative or someone who lives at the same address as the employee.

We have an aging workforce and many people in the age range of mid 40’s to retirement, which can now mean working well beyond 60 to 65. These people are increasingly undertaking caring responsibility for elderly parents or relatives while they work.

What support does NHDC have in place?

We already have an extensive range of Flexible Working practices including part time, job share, home-working and flexi-time. All these can help to balance domestic responsibilities with work. For working Mums and Dads there are Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Policies and a new salary sacrifice childcare voucher scheme.

For parents and the carers of adults and elderly relatives we have policies that allow an employee the right to request flexible working, this can be a request for a temporary or permanent change to working arrangements. The most common form of request we get is for reducing hours from full to part time.

We also have a range of other policies to deal with more short term emergencies.

Special Leave Policy

With the benefit of annual leave and flexi-leave the requirement for special leave should be limited, however it enables individuals to apply for leave in some emergency situations for example a period of up to 6 months of unpaid leave for nursing a dependant or relative. We recently avoided the resignation of a valued member of staff who was prepared to resign to support an elderly parent recover from a major operation. Instead a period of unpaid leave was given and the employee has since returned to work.

Time off for Dependants Policy

A Dependant is a wife, husband, partner, child, parent or someone who lives in the same household as the employee, but is not a boarder, lodger or tenant. Its is a policy that allows emergency time off for any person who reasonably relies on the employee for assistance in an emergency, or to make arrangements for the provision of care. This policy is designed for short term periods of unpaid leave.

Home-working Policy

If the job is suitable for adhoc or partial home working we can support temporary situations with home-working. We recently had a case where we allowed a member of staff to increase their level of home-working to spend more time with their terminally ill father. This was greatly appreciated by the member staff.

As well as flexible working policies we also have a range of additional support mechanisms for employees, this includes:-

Occupational Health - Staff can be referred if their caring responsibilities are affecting their own health, and line managers are advised on any reasonable adjustments that may support the employee.

Employee Assistance Programme - This is an external confidential advisory service contracted by NHDC. The current provider is PPC and they offer a range of advice e.g. financial, health, bereavement, and can also provide counselling where deemed appropriate.

Well@work Site on Intranet – This web page provides information on health and fitness initiatives, as well as guidance for employees and managers dealing with serious personal or family health issues e.g. cancer.

Other Considerations

Who decides on the most appropriate support to be implemented?

When a Carer requests a change to their contracted role, the line manager is advised by HR.

What are the benefits of this support for the Carer?

The Carer is able to continue working and earning an income and also maintain some element of normality in their life at what is often a difficult time.

How does supporting the Carer benefit NHDC?

The Council invests heavily in training staff to meet the requirements of their role. Through supporting continued working it retains skills and knowledge, which would otherwise be lost if the carer felt the only option would be to resign.