

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	8
Report No	RES/16/24

Committee: Corporate Resources

Date: 6 June 2024

Report Title: Carer's Positive Policy Review

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Carers' Leave Act 2023 came into effect in April, providing for one week's unpaid carers' leave for employees to undertake caring responsibilities for dependants and this has been included in the policy. The Carers Positive Policy was approved by Council in May 2023 and 49 staff are currently registered on the Council's confidential Carers Register.
- 1.2 It was agreed any significant changes would be brought back for consideration. It is proposed in this report that the current maximum 5 days paid leave should no longer be shared if two employees require to take time off to caring for the same individual and instead 5 days should be available per employee.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. **Note** the statutory provision of up to 5 days unpaid leave per year which came into effect from 6 April 2024 and is in addition to the maximum 5 days paid leave where an employee meets the qualifying criteria.
 - ii. **Agree** paid carers leave is provided to individual employees who are eligible and not shared between employees if they are caring for the same dependant who requires the long-term care.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource: Service managers should assess impact on service delivery to ensure time-off can be managed appropriately.
- 3.2 Legal: The policy has incorporated the statutory provision of a week's unpaid leave for staff to request time off to care for dependants which is a day one provision. The policy is fully compliant with legislation.

- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island): There is an anticipated there will be a positive impact on equalities and poverty as there is an improvement to paid time off which can be taken. It is also anticipated there will be a positive impact on rural and island community implication as improved carer leave may enable individuals to remain and be cared for in rural or island communities.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: There is no impact.
- 3.5 Risk: Non-compliance with statutory provision would result in potential legal challenge.
- 3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people): No specific impact identified. The Carer's Positive Policy is intended to have a beneficial impact on staff wellbeing.
- 3.7 Gaelic: No implications identified.

4. Background

- 4.1 As part of the Council's commitment to promoting Highland Council as a Carer Friendly Organisation, a Carer Positive policy was approved in May 2023. The policy provides employees who join the confidential carer register held in HR up to 5 days paid carers leave per year. Members agreed the policy and guidance would be reviewed in approximately 6 months by the HR Sub Group which includes trade union representatives; with any significant changes brought back to Corporate Resources Committee for consideration.
- 4.2 The guidance recognises the valued role employees play who are unpaid carers in the support they provide to individuals who may be affected by long term illness, disability or addiction and could not manage without their help.
- 4.3 A carer support network has been set up to provide a forum for caring staff to share their experience and to raise awareness regarding support available. The meetings have taken place virtually and has included input from external individuals who have specific expertise. The feedback received demonstrates these sessions have been well received by staff.

5. Review of Policy

- 5.1 Carers' Leave Act 2023 came into force on 6 April 2024 and provides all staff from day one of their employment to take up to a week of unpaid leave over a 12 month rolling period to help a dependant who requires long term care. As this is a statutory provision there is no need for employees to provide evidence or register on our Carers Positive Register. An additional one week's unpaid statutory leave has been included in the Carers Policy and can be taken as part days or full days.
- 5.2 If employees would also like to take advantage of the HC additional 5 days paid carer leave, they must have 26 weeks continuous service, join the register and provide evidence of caring responsibilities. Currently there are 49 staff who have joined the Council's Carer Positive Register. Where more than one employee shares caring responsibility for one individual, currently they would share up to 5 days paid leave. It is proposed that the paid leave is not split between 2 members of staff if they have joint caring responsibility for an individual and instead 5 days can be available per employee. Based on the current number of employees who have registered as carers, it is not anticipated this will impact negatively on service delivery as valuing staff in this way will have a positive impact on retention and motivation of our staff.

- 5.3 Carers who participated in the virtual carers connect forums, expressed the view that they valued the time which can be taken to assist carers and flexibility when time off can be taken, which included short notice in emergency situations as well as for planned appointments. Understanding from their manager was also valued.
- 5.4 The review has also been raised at the HR Sub, which comprise trade union and service representatives.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 27 May 2024

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