

## Career Break Scheme

JSCC Approved – 4 October 2018

P&R Approved –



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

West Lindsey District Council is committed to developing work practices and policies which support work-life balance.

The Council recognises that some employees may wish or need to take an extended break from work for a variety of personal reasons, during the course of their employment.

Employees are not entitled to take a career break, but the Council recognises that there may be circumstances where it may be beneficial to both parties, to allow an unpaid period of time away from work.

This policy sets out the Council's approach to career breaks and the basis on which they may be taken.

### 1.2 Principles

A career break is an unpaid break from work for a period of no less than 6 months and up to 3 years.

- For breaks of 6 months to under 1 year (where approval is given) the employee can be guaranteed a return to their substantive post.
- For breaks of between 1 year and 3 years there will be no guarantee of employment, but there will be an undertaking that every effort will be made to find individual employment at the end of the break.

What are appropriate reasons for requesting a Career Break?

- To care for children, sick relatives, or other dependants
- To undertake temporary voluntary work or overseas travel
- To undertake courses of study

(This list is illustrative rather than exhaustive)

### 1.3 Purpose of the Scheme

The scheme is intended to provide benefits for both employees and the Council.

#### **For Employees**

- It will complement other family friendly policies and initiatives designed to enable employees to work more flexibly, and achieve a balance between home and work commitments.

- It provides support and assistance to employees with child care and other domestic responsibilities e.g. providing employees with an alternative to resigning following the birth of a child, or for female employees returning to work immediately following maternity leave, and allowing them the potential to resume employment with the Council at a later date.
- It allows employees on career breaks to keep their skills and knowledge up to date, making the return to work easier.
- It affords employees the opportunity to pursue voluntary work or developmental opportunities, whilst retaining the potential to resume employment with the Council.

### **For the Council**

- The Scheme contributes towards an effective and active equal opportunities programme.
- It will enable the retention of skilled and experienced employees, and gain maximum benefit from the investment in development and training of those staff, particularly in areas where there are skill shortages.
- The scheme will potentially reduce the costs of recruitment.
- It will enhance the Council's image.
- It will encourage an increase in employee loyalty and commitment.
- The scheme will provide a pool of experienced people who may be called upon for holiday relief, to cover for sickness and peak workloads, reducing disruption and cost to the service.

### **1.4 How long can a Career Break last?**

The minimum length of a career break will be 6 months with the maximum being 3 years. Employees will not be able to take more than one career break.

### **1.5 Who is Eligible?**

The scheme is open to all employees of the Council (full time, part time or job share), who have completed at least 1 years continuous service with the Council.

The decision as to eligibility for the scheme will be made by the Manager in consultation with Human Resources.

The terms of this policy do not apply to [maternity or adoption leave](#), [parental leave](#), [paternity leave](#), [compassionate leave](#), [emergency leave for care of dependants](#) or [flexible working](#) for which separate Council policies are available.

Due to immigration regulations, it may, however, not be feasible to consider requests from individuals who do not have a permanent right to work in the UK.

## 2. TERMS OF THE SCHEME

### 2.1 Process

1. Before the career break commences the employee should receive a full explanation of the scheme from their Manager, and be able to seek clarification of any points as required.
2. An employee wishing to participate in the scheme should initially apply to his or her Manager using the appropriate form (see Appendix 1a and 1b) at least 12 weeks before the employee wishes the break to begin. Where this is not possible, for example in circumstances such as a sudden illness of a dependant, as much notice as possible is required. A copy of the career break application form should be retained by the applicant.
3. The Manager will consider the application seeking the view's of the employee's line manager if applicable.
4. The Manager may discuss the application in further detail with the applicant where needed. A decision will then be made by the Manager. This decision will be recorded on the form, with reasons why the decision was made. A reply will normally be given to the employee within 10 working days.
5. If approval has been given for a period of between 6 months and up to 1 year, the employee need not resign from their post.

If approval has been given for between 1 to 3 years the applicant should resign from his/her current post stating the intention to take a career break. If a suitable post is obtained a new contract commences on the individual's return to employment with the Council.

6. If approval is not given and the applicant wishes to appeal against this decision an appeal should be lodged with the HR department within 10 working days of receipt of the decision. The appeal will be heard within 10 working days of receiving it by a manager not previously involved with the case.
7. For breaks of up to 1 year, during the break the employee may be required to attend his/her normal place of employment for up to 10 days a year subject to service area funding and agreement with his/her Manager. These days may be used by the service area to ensure that the employee is kept up to date with developments e.g. different systems installed, new legislation which affects the job, new staffing structures, updating of skills. Specific training can be included or additional to the 10 days, by agreement. During these periods the individual should be paid at the same scale point as they received before they commenced their career break. These periods of work and training will be counted as service. In certain circumstances it may be that the individual is unavailable to work during his/her career break, e.g. they may be undertaking voluntary service overseas, or it may be considered by the employer that 10 days training per year is not enough, situations such as these must be looked at taking into account the individual circumstances of each case.

In addition, the employing Service Area should ensure the employee continues to receive appropriate information during the career break. This may include:

- Newsletters (corporate or otherwise)
- Information regarding updating in the service area
- Vacancy bulletins (for at least the 12 weeks prior to return)
- Any other reasonable/relevant information as requested

## **2.2 How Does a Career Break affect Continuous Service?**

The Council will treat the career break as a period which suspends continuity. Therefore, upon a return to work, previous service will be counted as continuous for statutory employment rights e.g. redundancy payments, right to claim unfair dismissal etc.

Previous continuous service will also be reinstated for the purposes of service related benefits such as sickness payments, notice, annual leave, long service awards and maternity, provided that the individual has not undertaken any alternative permanent employment during the break.

The career break itself will not be counted as a period of service, except for the times when the employee attends work or attends a work related training course during the break.

## **2.3 Contractual position during a career break**

All career breaks will be unpaid.

Incremental progression will not take place during a period of a career break. This delay to the increment is because annual increments are awarded to reflect the development of skills, knowledge and experience within the role for which an individual is employed.

There will be no entitlement to holiday pay whilst on a career break and the employee will not accrue annual leave. Any annual leave owing must be taken before commencement of the career break. There will be no payment in lieu for any leave outstanding.

It is the responsibility of the employee to ensure that any organisations are contacted to inform them of the career break, such as Benefits, Pensions etc.

## **3. RETURN TO WORK**

Employees wishing to return to work should complete the form attached at Appendix 2a or 2b as appropriate and send it to the relevant section as soon as possible, and certainly not less than 12 weeks before their intended return. For those employees on a Career Break of less than a year this will allow time for the necessary arrangements to be made for them to return to their substantive post. For those employees on a Career Break of over a year this will allow time for any suitable vacancies to be circulated well in advance of the date of return. The intended date of return can be re-negotiated if an appropriate vacancy arises during the relevant notice period originally agreed.

Although for employees on a Career Break of over 1 year no guarantee of employment can be made, every effort will be made to re-employ the individual in the same Directorate, at

the same grade or level, in the same or similar type of post. If this is not possible the person will be notified of any other opportunities within the Authority and given prior consideration (after internal candidates who are in a redeployment situation) for a suitable post. If appointed, the terms and conditions applicable to the post will apply. There are no provisions for protection of previous pay or conditions.

Once the application to return form has been received, a return interview will be arranged to discuss the options available to the returnee, which includes any additional professional updating and to ensure all relevant information is available.

The Council will provide an induction for the employee on return. This should include (where applicable):

- an induction to the new post so that satisfactory performance can be achieved as soon as possible;
- updating of any changes to the staffing structure, or introduction to staffing structure if the service area is new to the employee; and
- support as necessary to build the confidence of the employee.

On return to work, annual leave entitlement will be pro-rata for the remainder of the leave year, as applicable to the grade of the new post and any service related entitlement. A return to work must occur before any annual leave is taken.

Employees may apply for any vacancy at any time during the career breaks. However, they will not be given any priority over other applicants unless they have submitted an Application to Return form.

#### **4. MATERNITY**

If an employee wishes to take advantage of a career break immediately following maternity leave the normal maternity provisions will apply. The career break may begin at the end of the 52 week maternity leave period after the baby is born unless an agreement has been reached to begin the scheme earlier. Employees who have received 12 weeks contractual half pay, who do not return to work after the birth for a required minimum period of 3 months, will be required to pay back all of the 12 weeks contractual half pay.

#### **5. PENSIONS**

Taking a career break will affect your pension. The impact of a career break on your pension is dependent upon the pension scheme you are a member of and your own personal circumstances. The council recommends that you contact the Council's pension provider to find out how taking a career break will affect your pension before you apply for any such break.

#### **6. TERMINATION OF THE SCHEME**

The scheme can be terminated in three different ways:

- Completion; wherein an employee is placed within the Council and returns to work.
- Withdrawal; wherein an employee withdraws from the scheme by giving written notice to his/her Service Manager that they no longer wish to participate and forfeit the right to return.
- Resignation; wherein the employee has a career break of between 1 and 3 years the Council will endeavour to place an individual under this scheme, however, if an individual has not been placed within 3 months of the intended date of return, then all obligations on the Council have been met and the employee's resignation stands.

West Lindsey District Council can withdraw the scheme if an individual fails to meet his/her commitments under the scheme. An employee will be given the opportunity to discuss and explain the situation before the scheme is withdrawn.

## **7. ADMINISTRATION & MONITORING**

The Human Resources department will administer the scheme and keep records of requests for career breaks, and instances of career breaks taking place. Human Resources will then compile a yearly monitoring report which will include this data with other information to assist in monitoring the effectiveness of the scheme.

## **8. GENERAL**

Employees must ensure that the Council has a current contact address.

A week's pay for the purpose of calculating, for example redundancy payments, shall be based on what the employee's pay would be at the date of termination if the employee had remained in post.

The onus is on employees to maintain contact with professional bodies they have membership with.

### **Policy Statement**

West Lindsey District Council has a commitment to equal opportunities. It seeks to ensure that no potential or current employee receives less favourable treatment than another on the grounds of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.



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