



## Support for employees who combine paid work with unpaid care: 4

### Summary

This policy brief draws on the experience of five **public and third sector employers** who were either members of the Employers for Carers (Carers UK) forum (in England and Wales) or recognised as a Carer Positive Employer (in Scotland). These employers have between 80 and 40,000 employees each. We asked them about well-established initiatives to support working carers and if they would recommend them to others.

[Mandy Cook](#) draws on her ongoing research to explore support for employees who combine paid work with unpaid care in the public and third sectors.

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### EMERGING FINDINGS

All five employers were taking different yet innovative approaches to support their employees with caring responsibilities, whilst continuing to meet their organisational and service needs. For four of these public and third sector employers, support for working carers was set out in a specific **Carers' Policy** (as opposed to including carers in their existing HR policies). Having a specific Carers' Policy was a way of helping working carers understand the support offered in a clear and easily accessible way. One employer explained:

*"The aim of this policy is to describe our commitment to supporting the specific needs of carers in the workplace and sets out the range of services available to help support carers to combine work with care. Improving employees' ability to handle pressure and to balance work and home life will ultimately lead to improved individual and organisational performance."*

Diversity and Inclusion Team Member

The information provided in the policy included:

- The organisation's definition of carers.
- A statement recognising the needs of carers and how they differ from the needs of employees with mainstream childcare responsibilities.
- A statement encouraging identification and disclosure of caring responsibilities.
- References to other relevant policies, including flexible working, equality and diversity, health and safety, health and wellbeing and special leave.
- Signposting to other support for carers, including an Employee Assistance Programme and contact details for local Carers' Centres.
- Details of the role of line managers and support available to them.

*"In the policy, we define what carers are, we talk about different circumstances, flexible working, which is a key bit of support, when people are having to juggle work and home commitments, you know, what happens in a crisis situation, what other support is available externally to the organisation. Also the relationship with other policies, for example, our special leave policy is one to highlight. So, our policies do tend to dovetail with each other quite a bit, so there's cross-referencing between policies."* Diversity and Inclusion Team Member

These public and third sector employers recognised the importance of engaging working carers within their organisations in the development of their carers' policy, making sure their views, opinions and needs were included, and that the policy was fit for purpose.

*"The carers' policy we have was actually put together with the staff, it wasn't HR who put the policy together. Initially it was the staff, and the group was made up of people who were carers at that time. That has gone on to develop, and the group's wider now, with people on our group who aren't currently carers, e.g. the union are on it, and there's always a representative from HR, but it was predominantly the staff who instigated it really, and that's how it got off the ground".* HR team member

There are several ways that employers can learn which of their employees are also carers. One example of a more formalised system of identification is having a **Carer Register**. Employees who have identified themselves as carers are listed on this register, enabling access to carer's leave and other benefits ([Carer Positive Employer in Scotland](#)).

In one public sector organisation, a Carer Register was open to any member of staff with significant caring responsibilities (i.e. they look after a partner, child, relative or friend who cannot manage without help because they are physically or mentally ill, frail or disabled). Carers who apply for the register have an appointment with a welfare officer from the Employee Assistance Programme, who assesses each individual's caring responsibilities before making a recommendation as to whether they should, or should not, be placed on the register. While staff are encouraged to discuss their application with their line manager, there is no requirement for individuals to disclose the nature of their caring responsibilities to their manager. Placement on the Carer Register provides entitlement to a range of supports and benefits:

*"What we did was to put in place the Carer Register. So, we have a form that's available on our intranet, that if somebody is experiencing significant caring responsibilities they can complete this form, and they would send it directly to HR, and what we'd do would be to set up a welfare consultation for them with our Employer Assistance Programme, and a Welfare Officer would actually have a telephone conversation with the member of staff to discuss their carer requirements. So, that initial application form doesn't detail what the caring responsibilities are, it just indicates that the member of staff has got these responsibilities, and that's the initial starting point. It asks them on the form to let their line manager know that they're applying, but it doesn't give any details of actually what that's about. So, it's up to the individual member of staff how much they disclose to their manager."* HR Team Member

Systems such as these need to incorporate flexibility, to reflect changing situations for individuals and to be

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monitored to ensure information is accurate and up to date.

Existing **staff surveys** or monitoring systems can be useful ways of capturing information about the scale and nature of caring responsibilities across the organisation and its workforce.

One of the small third sector employers had added a specific section about caring responsibilities to its existing online staff survey, tied into its focus on the mental health and wellbeing of employees:

*"So, we are doing another employee survey and we're focusing on mental health. But there will be a section in there for carers as well. So, hopefully we'll get some figures back about how well carers feel supported, where there's room for improvement, etc. We haven't included the section on carers in the past, and this is the first survey we've done since implementing the carers policy."* HR Team Member

### CHALLENGES

The challenges of providing support for working carers were specific to the type, size and location of these public and third sector employers. One small third sector employer felt its support for working carers was restricted by the nature of its work, which was often based on short term projects and funding, and the need for new staff to be in post for six months before the Carers' Policy applies:

*"We have a 6-month probationary period for all new staff, and the Carers' Policy would apply after that. Plus, most of this organisation is project funded, rather than what we would term core funded by the local authority. We've got one new post up just now that's only funded for 6 months, and it would be impractical to have that person come in and then immediately need carers' leave from the word go, because it wouldn't be productive. So, yes, we have a lot of short-term projects."* HR Team Member

One public sector employer, operating in a remote part of the UK, recognised that support for working carers is

*"Because of the nature of our area, it encompasses some of the remotest parts of Great Britain, people can be perhaps quite a bit away logistically from sources of support. But if you're living in Inverness, you know, we have a major district hospital, there are lots of organisations, e.g. Connecting Carers, available, but if you were based say in Unst, which is the furthest north island of Shetland, or even Lerwick, which is the main town in Shetland, it's a boat or an air journey away if you like. I know there are different bodies in those different areas, but again, I don't underestimate the complications or the challenges of perhaps directly accessing help."*

Diversity and Inclusion Team Member

not always immediately or easily accessible:

### DEBATES & IDEAS

One public sector employer, recognised as exemplary in its support for working carers, offered a range of practical benefits for employees signed up to its Carer Register, which included:

- Short breaks (respite care) scheme.
- Interest-free loans for specialist equipment (up to a maximum of £5000).
- Access to phone package to support contact with the individual.
- Relocation support to meet the cost of home adaptations:

*"If we ask a member of staff to relocate somewhere and the person they're caring for is moving with them as well, we would look at helping to meet the costs of any home adaptations that they would need to do in their new location."* HR Team Member

- Bi-annual carer conferences, supported by the CEO, enable best practice exchange.

This exemplary employer recognises that *'the majority of staff are in the older age brackets'* (HR Team Member) and are more likely to have caring responsibilities. They want not only to support their existing staff who are carers, but also hope that by offering these practical benefits they will attract new staff with caring responsibilities.

For one of the small third sector employers, **volunteers** play a vital role in helping to deliver their service. Considering the caring responsibilities of volunteers was seen as essential. Volunteers are trained to the same level as paid employees, *'because our volunteers give advice to the public, and it has to be at the same level as a paid member of staff'* (HR Team Member).

*"If volunteers have caring responsibilities, they can just say I won't be in today... A lot of our volunteers have set days and hours that they work each week, and that's by mutual agreement, and if they can't make it for whatever reason, and if it's for caring responsibilities, they'll just phone up and say, look, I won't be in today, but I'll come into tomorrow. So, we've got a lot of long-term volunteers as well, who are getting older, you know."* HR Team Member

### KEY MESSAGES

Based on our research with public and third sector organisations, our **'good practice'** recommendations are:

- Think about writing and promoting a **Carers' Policy** for your organisation. Some organisations find it useful to have a specific policy for employees with

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caring responsibilities, whereas others may want to include carers in existing HR policies. Employers for Carers suggest the best results are often achieved by including carers in generic policies and also having a specific carers' policy or guidance document that signposts to relevant policies and support.

- Think about introducing a **Carer Register** in your organisation. This is a more formalised system of carer identification. It would enable access to carers' leave or other benefits offered. A voluntary [Carers Passport scheme](#) is a less formal option, where employees hold a record detailing their individual needs and working arrangements. These arrangements have the advantage of providing automatic entitlement to carer's supports and stay with the employee if their role changes, if they move departments, or if their line manager changes.
- A **staff survey** is a valuable way of engaging with and identifying carers. It can demonstrate that you are interested in, and keen to support, your employees. Employers for Carers has learned from experience that even with policies and practices in place, some carers won't recognise themselves as such and therefore won't take up the policies.

Equally, there will be carers who are unsure of taking up policies if they can't be certain how their line manager will react. Consider adding carer specific questions to an existing staff survey as a first step.

- Supporting carers in the workplace is not always about changing working hours. There are **practical**, and often very small changes that can make a difference too. These changes can include: telephone access, parking access, health and wellbeing support, and signposting to external sources of support. Carer Positive Employers in Scotland have free access to [resources designed to help employers develop the package of support best suited to their particular circumstances](#).

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### NEXT STEPS

- The [Sustainable Care Programme](#)'s research team studying **Combining work and care** will combine these findings about public and third sector employers with our research findings on support for working carers in private sector organisations and central government departments.
- The research will examine the sustainability of care leave policies and their consequences for employees' well-being and organisational effectiveness.
- Workshops will be arranged, with selected employers and other stakeholders, to explore progress, monitoring and success measurement tools designed to assess the business benefits of supporting working carers.
- The team will also develop a framework, linking working carers' challenges to technological solutions (the "Working Carer's Technology Toolkit").
- The research findings will be disseminated to employer, employee, policy and practitioner audiences.

### ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research focuses on how organisational effectiveness can be enhanced by modernising support for working carers, and is linked to the [Sustainable Care: connecting people and systems](#) programme. Modernising support for working carers is a major and growing issue impeding productivity and organisational effectiveness across all industrial sectors. This research engages with businesses alert to the benefits of eliminating unnecessary costs and of modernising workforce management by helping employees remain active and productive when caring for an older, sick or disabled person, and will extend this approach to a wider and more diverse range of organisations.

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