

By: Director of Personnel & Development
To: Personnel Committee - 11 September 2008
Subject: Family Leave Pilot Evaluation
Classification: Unrestricted

SUMMARY: Personnel Committee agreed a one year pilot from 1 June 07 providing carer leave and contractual paternity leave and pay which was extended until 31 August 08 to allow for full evaluation. This report presents the evaluation and recommends the provisions form part of Kent Scheme terms and conditions on a permanent basis.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The UK has over 3 million working carers and 1 in 7 of the workforce balance the responsibilities of caring and paid employment.¹ Within KCC, the average age of an employee is 44; at this age many people will have caring responsibilities, often for more than one generation. In 2001, 46% of local authorities already provided leave to care for others² and since then the Government has adopted its National Carers' Strategy which highlights the barriers many carers face in finding and keeping suitable employment which will allow them to fulfil their caring responsibilities. Increasingly, large private sector employers, such as BT, are introducing carer leave after becoming aware of the business benefits.
- 1.2 Carer leave was introduced by this Committee as a pilot to refocus the existing compassionate leave provisions. It gave guidance to managers on their discretionary powers and provided a supportive and flexible framework to assist employees at times when their caring responsibilities make it difficult to attend work.
- 1.3 The family leave pilot also included offering paternity pay and leave of 2 weeks on full pay. The Government are planning developments in this area, giving employed fathers extended rights to take additional paid time off work to care for their child in its first year. In the meantime, offering paternity pay and leave is consistent with the trend towards increased support to the family unit around the time of birth and is in step with provisions already offered by many local authorities and other progressive employers.

¹ Carers UK Policy Briefing on the National Carers Strategy

² 'Finding the Balance', NJC for Local Government Services, September 2001 (currently being updated)

2. Take Up

- 2.1 Through central recording we know that over 100 staff have taken carer leave and over 20 staff have taken contractual paternity leave and pay. Managers have recorded some cases locally.

3. How Feedback Was Gathered

- 3.1 During August, the Personnel Policy Officer conducted a telephone survey to evaluate carer leave, contacting 32 staff who had taken it. A breakdown of the feedback is given in **Appendix 1**. Unions, staff diversity groups, managers and Business Support Personnel Teams were also invited to give feedback and to make suggestions for improvements which could be considered in the event of a decision being made to incorporate carer leave and paternity leave and pay into Kent Scheme core terms and conditions. Over 40 responses were received.

4. Feedback and Evaluation Staff

- 4.1 Staff commented that they really valued being able to take carer leave to help ease the pressure on them at a difficult time. They felt that the organisation was supporting their need to be a carer - being able to take carer leave enabled them to carry on working effectively whilst also fulfilling their caring responsibilities.
- 4.2 Several respondents stated that they co-ordinated their caring with other relatives. One employee shared that because her siblings' employers had also offered paid carer leave of 5 days (Network Rail and the Police Service), together they had been able to support their 87 year old mother to remain in her own home. This serves to show that offering carer leave on a permanent basis would help to keep KCC's package of benefits competitive in relation to other large employers in Kent.
- 4.3 Staff who have taken carer leave were keen to describe the difference it had made to them and welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback which would be presented to Councillors. The following shows a typical example,

"I care for my husband who is severely disabled with Rheumatoid Arthritis and is awaiting more operations on his right ankle, knee and hip. He has been very ill with various infections, recently been diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma (a cancer of the bone marrow) and is currently undergoing chemotherapy. I just want to say how extremely helpful these extra days have been to us enabling me to accompany my husband to his various appointments, some of which are at The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, Stanmore, Middlesex. My husband cannot walk more than a few steps on his own without pain.

Unfortunately I do have to work full time and life can be very difficult. These extra days make a real difference - thank you KCC. I would really

appreciate the provision of carers' leave in Kent Scheme terms and conditions on a permanent basis."

- 4.5 The registration process enabled staff to discuss anticipated needs with their line manager, which meant that if a need for time off subsequently developed it was less stressful for them. Staff felt that just knowing the leave was potentially available if necessary, showed KCC was a caring employer and made them feel less under pressure to continue to cope when the demands placed on them became unmanageable.
- 4.6 Information from the telephone survey shows that the majority of carer leave was taken to support elderly parents. Some respondents in this category shared that in the past they have stored up their annual leave to cover caring responsibilities which has made it difficult to take time to spend with their more immediate family or to have time for themselves to recharge batteries.³ One commented that she felt this had impacted on her work performance.
- 4.7 Often carer leave was used to take the person cared for to medical appointments, where there was little or no control over the timing, eg surgery, speech therapy.

5. The Management Perspective

- 5.1 The vast majority of feedback from managers was positive, with the less so centering on a request for greater clarity to help make operating managerial discretion more consistent
- 5.2 Managers indicated that the ability to take carer leave in small periods, as opposed to whole or half days, was helpful as there was little effect on service delivery. Sometimes the time was taken at the workplace, eg to make or receive telephone calls to medical or other professionals/to discuss a care package.
- 5.3 Some managers were of the opinion that providing carer leave can contribute to reducing KCC's expenditure, eg the flexibility offered by taking carer leave at a critical time meant that one manager in KASS was able to provide essential care at home for her mother after a fall. In her opinion the alternative would have meant formal care would have been provided by KCC after a community care assessment.
- 5.4 Given the age profile of the management population, managers were often in a position to comment from a dual perspective, as they were also a carers.

³ This is consistent with a Carers' Week (2008) survey of 2000 UK carers which indicates that 60% of carers in employment say they have used part of their annual leave to devote more time to their role as a carer.

6. Union, Staff Groups and Equality Champions Perspective

- 6.1 All fully support the provision of carer leave. UNISON would prefer this to be an entitlement rather than a discretionary benefit, without a need to register. There is some concern that managerial discretion to award the leave is not being applied consistently so some requests are being refused.

7. Improvements that could be made if the provision continues

- 7.1 The feedback showed that not everyone was aware of the pilot or how requests should be handled and recorded. If carer leave is introduced permanently we will address this by remarketing it and providing further guidance to managers with case studies showing how carer leave has been used effectively to support the employee at work whilst maintaining effective service delivery.

8. Paternity Leave and Pay

- 8.1 Telephone feedback from staff who received this benefit during the pilot indicated that they found it very helpful to be able to have time off around the time of the birth without any reduction in pay. Managers considered it was important to support staff at such an important time in their life.
- 8.2 Feedback received via the equality impact assessment process of employment policies in Stonewall suggested the provision be renamed, 'maternity support leave' to reflect that it covers not only the biological father but also the civil partner or partner of either sex of the child's mother. We consider this renaming would be helpful clarification.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Evaluation of the Family Leave Pilot has shown that carer and paternity leave and pay have an intrinsic value in supporting staff in managing care needs and are universally welcomed within KCC, enhancing KCC's attractiveness as an employer of choice. Offering these provisions on a permanent basis would be in keeping with the developing trend amongst employers to increase the portfolio of benefits which help reduce pressure experienced when home and work commitments conflict.

10. RECOMMENDATION

- 10.1 That 5 days paid carer leave should be part of Kent Scheme terms and conditions on a permanent basis, with effect from 1 September 2008.
- 10.2 That the Corporate Employee Relations team amend the detail of the provisions in the light of feedback from the evaluation, in relation to providing greater clarity for managers and staff about the circumstances in which carer leave can be taken and to improve the system for recording the leave.

- 10.3 That contractual paternity leave of two weeks on full pay should be part of Kent Scheme terms and conditions on a permanent basis, with effect from 1 September 2008.
- 10.4 That contractual paternity pay and leave be renamed, 'maternity support leave'.

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