

Working with Cancer or Critical Illness

Introduction

The council believes it has a clear responsibility to provide help and support to any of its employees who are affected in some way by the diagnosis of cancer. Each year approximately 90,000 people of working age are diagnosed with cancer. Each year, as treatments improve, more and more people who have cancer are learning to live with it as a chronic rather than a terminal illness, as are their families, friends and colleagues at work.

This guidance is designed to support employees who are diagnosed with cancer. It also covers the council's approach to employees who have a family member diagnosed with cancer and/or who become carers for someone diagnosed with cancer.

This guidance may also be useful to managers and employees facing other critical illnesses. **This guidance is to be used in conjunction with the council's Absence Management policy.**

Employees Diagnosed with Cancer

Telling your manager and HR

Once you are clear about the nature of your cancer and any impact it will have on your work, you should advise your manager. If you feel unable to discuss this with your manager, you can speak to Human Resources instead. Although this may not be easy for you, it is difficult for your manager, and therefore the council, to support you if we are unaware of your circumstances. Practically, it is also difficult to attend treatment, take time off to meet your own health needs or ensure that your work is covered, without your manager knowing the reason why, and what is involved.

If you wish to have a union representative with you, or a work colleague to accompany you, at any time during discussions with your manager or HR, you may do so.

Once you tell your manager, they will need your permission to share that information with HR and any other managers who may be affected. Equally, you may prefer to tell them yourself. If so, you should do this as soon as you can so that the council can quickly take the appropriate steps to help you.

We are aware that in some circumstances an individual may not know how ill they are until they have begun treatment, or had some form of surgical investigation, and there may be a need to take time off at very short notice. As soon as it is possible and appropriate to do so, HR or your manager will discuss with you:

- your need to take time off to come to terms with the immediate diagnosis
- the likely impact of treatment on your work and whether you would like colleagues and clients to be told about this
- your permission to obtain written advice from your doctor about your illness and recommendations for returning to work and time off

You will be offered information on:

- sick leave and sick pay policies
- Occupational Health and other support services
- flexible working
- relevant benefits provided by the Local Government Pension Scheme (as applicable)
- other sources of information and support

Telling your work colleagues and clients

The council respects its employees' wish for privacy and confidentiality concerning their personal circumstances. At the same time, the council will need to make arrangements to cover sickness absence effectively.

HR and your manager will agree with you from the outset what (if anything) to tell your colleagues at work, and if you want your colleagues to know about your illness but cannot tell them yourself. This will also apply to clients and other third parties.

Payment of salary during sickness absence

The council's sick pay scheme provides up to 6 months at full pay and 6 months at half pay for employees with 5 years' service. Employees with

less than 5 years' service will need to check their employment contract for their sick pay entitlement. You will be required to ask your GP for a medical certificate to cover any periods of absence, and should send them to your manager or HR as soon as possible.

Counselling and support

Employees can access telephone counselling provided by specialist professionals through our Employee Assistance Programme. This is strictly private and confidential; there is no individual feedback to the council.

Employees diagnosed with cancer should also be referred to Occupational Health to ensure that any necessary adjustments are made and the employee is given the best level of support possible.

Working during treatment

Depending on your illness, you may wish to carry on working during your treatment, either full-time or part-time. Before treatment, it is often difficult to know exactly how the treatment may affect you, and it is helpful to let your manager know this so that they are aware you may need to change your work plans at short notice.

If you decide you want to remain at home for the majority of the time and work from there, either on a full-time or part-time basis, you should discuss this with your manager and HR, so they can consider the feasibility of this and arrange for technological support to be provided. In summary, we can help you by:

- planning a reduced or more flexible schedule, for example changing your hours so that you can travel to and from work at less busy times (outside the rush hour)
- arranging for you to undertake 'light duties' for a period, where possible and appropriate
- asking colleagues to be supportive and to help with some of your work
- allowing you to take a short break every now and again to rest
- allowing you to work from home, if possible.

Equally, you may decide that you cannot continue to work but that you just want to keep in touch with what is happening. Again, we can make arrangements for this.

Time off for treatment

If you decide to return to work either during or after treatment you may need to take time off for medical appointments and follow-up procedures. When it is necessary to do this during working hours, you should, as far as possible, let your manager know in advance so that any cover arrangements can be made.

Extended period of absence

If you need to take an extended period of absence, this time off will be treated as sickness absence. You might find you need to take a few days or weeks off. This may be as one period of sickness, or could be a few days every month for a period of time.

Keeping in touch

In the case of an extended period of absence, your HR department or manager will ask you if you would like your colleagues to keep in contact with you to keep you up to date on work matters, and, if so, how frequent you would like that contact to be. We will also provide the option of having regular discussions by phone or in person to review how your absence is being managed.

After treatment - returning to work

After your treatment has finished, and if you have not been working during this period, you'll need to decide with your manager whether you want to return to work and, if so, whether this will be on a full-time or part-time basis. Clearly this will depend on your prognosis as well as your personal circumstances and wishes. Very often a diagnosis of cancer will lead individuals to rethink their lifestyle and their priorities. Some choose not to return to work, others want to resume their everyday lives, including their working lives.

We are aware that returning to work after a long period away can be physically and emotionally stressful. We will provide whatever support we can to assist individuals at this stage in their recovery.

Meeting your manager and HR to discuss options

Coming back to work after a break of a few weeks or months can be difficult to adjust to, and you should take the time to think about what is right for you. If you are still coping with some of the effects of treatment, you should discuss any changes that can be made to your work to help you.

Before coming back to work we will arrange an appointment with Occupational Health. Their advice can then be discussed with you, HR, and your line manager, so that the options for making the transition back to work are clear. Options you might want or need to consider, which the council will do all they reasonably can to accommodate, are:

- making a 'phased return' to work within a fixed timescale, where you increase your hours gradually over a period of time (this is done on the advice of Occupational Health only)
- working from home some of the time (if appropriate for the role) or working more flexibly or reduced hours
- changing your role or some of your responsibilities for a temporary period
- making alterations to your physical location or workstation

Disability caused by critical illness

If your illness causes disability that affects your return to work, the council will make reasonable adjustments to enable you to continue to work. In cases of permanent incapability to work, you may be eligible to receive an ill-health early retirement pension. If you feel this may apply to you, you should contact HR who will be able to discuss with you and arrange an appointment for you with Occupational Health.

Giving up work: Is early retirement an option?

Some people choose to give up work completely when they are diagnosed with cancer. This allows them to focus on their illness and its treatment and to reassess their lives. If work has been a major focus of your life, it can be difficult to adjust to not working.

If a prognosis is given that means that the cancer is likely to be terminal, you may decide that you are unable to continue to attend work. However, it might not be wise for you to formally retire, as death and pension payments attached to your employment may be important to the welfare of your family or dependents. Remember that you cannot

choose to retire early (on an enhanced pension) if you are medically fit to work.

If, having considered your options, you decide that you want to take early retirement on health grounds, or for personal reasons, it is essential that you take appropriate advice. Consider your own circumstances carefully, taking your health into consideration, as well as your finances, before deciding what to do.

If you are a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme your options may include ill-health retirement, early retirement or flexible retirement, depending on your individual circumstances. Other options that may be available to you include taking a period of unpaid leave, or you may even choose to resign.

Everyone reacts differently in these circumstances and HR will be able to work through the options with you so that you are well informed about the best way of dealing with your own personal situation.

When, at the date of retirement, the council is satisfied by the medical advice received that there is a life expectancy of less than a year, your pension may be commuted into a lump sum equal to five times the annual amount of pension given up.

If you are considering giving up work you are strongly advised to contact HR to discuss what options are, or may be, available to you.

Unfair treatment

If you feel that you have been treated unfairly as a result of your illness, you should raise this with your line manager and/or HR, who will try to resolve the problem informally. If you are unable to resolve the issue, it will be considered under the council's grievance procedure.

Carers or Family Members Affected by Cancer or Critical Illness

If you are a partner or family member of someone who has cancer, you may need to take time off work to look after them or deal with issues arising from their condition.

The council believes it has a responsibility to support employees affected in this way and will be as flexible as possible in its approach, bearing in mind each individual's personal circumstances and the needs

of the business. This guidance may also be useful to employees with family members facing other critical illnesses.

Telling your line manager and Human Resources

Once you are clear about the nature of the illness and its potential impact on your work and family life, you should tell your line manager about your circumstances. Although this may not be easy for you to discuss, it is difficult for your manager, and therefore the council, to support you if we are unaware of your circumstances. Practically, it is also difficult for you to take time off to support your partner or family member without your manager knowing the reason why, and what's involved.

Once you disclose your situation to your manager, they will need your permission to share that information with HR and any other managers who may be affected by your absence. Equally, you may prefer to tell them yourself. If so, you should do this as soon as you can so that the council can quickly take the appropriate steps to help you. The kind of help we can give you is:

- planning a reduced or more flexible working schedule
- allowing emergency leave
- asking colleagues to be supportive and to help with some of your work
- allowing you to work from home, if possible.

Telling your work colleagues and clients

The council respects its employees' wish for privacy and confidentiality concerning their personal circumstances. At the same time, the council will need to make arrangements for any absence arising from the situation.

HR and your line manager will agree with you from the outset what, if anything, to tell your colleagues at work. This will also apply to clients and other third parties.

Counselling and support

Employees can access telephone counselling provided by specialist professionals through our Employee Assistance Programme. This is

strictly private and confidential; there is no individual feedback to the council.

Impact on work: family and parental leave

You are entitled to reasonable time off to make necessary arrangements to deal with an unexpected or a sudden problem concerning a dependant. This leave can be taken as flexi-leave or as unpaid or annual leave.

Dependants are defined as your parents, spouse, partner, children or someone who lives as part of the family. Where a dependant is critically ill, compassionate leave may be taken in the following circumstances:

- to make emergency or longer-term care arrangements
- to deal with the death of a dependant
- to deal with an unexpected disruption or breakdown in care arrangements with a dependant

In addition, up to 5 days discretionary leave can be authorised by your Head of Service.

If you are the parent of a child who is critically ill, you will be entitled to up to 18 weeks of parental leave to look after your child. The council may allow you a longer period of leave depending on your individual circumstances. Parental leave is unpaid.

Advice

Please contact your HR Officer to go through the options available to you.