

Career Break Scheme policy

This policy can be made available in other languages and formats such as large print and audio on [request](#).

What is it?

This policy gives guidance on the council's career break scheme which gives all Wiltshire Council employees the opportunity to take a period of unpaid time away from work, in the form of a career break.

Please note that the parents and carers employment break policy and procedure has now been integrated with this policy.

Who is covered by this policy?

This policy applies to all Wiltshire Council employees, with at least 12 months continuous service, unless a separate contractual policy applies to a transferred employee to whom separate TUPE terms and conditions of employment apply. This policy does not apply to teaching and non-teaching staff employed in maintained schools or academies. This policy also applies to centrally employed teachers.

This policy also applies to all Wiltshire Council employees who take a career break to undertake the Step Up to Social Work or Frontline programme to qualify as a social worker. For more information, please see the Grow Our Own Social Workers policy.

What is a career break?

1. There may be times when an employee may want or need to take a period away from work. A career break can provide employees with an opportunity for personal development, to fulfil personal or domestic commitments, or to take an extended break to look after children or other dependent relatives.
2. A career break is unpaid and can be for a period of between 6 months and 5 years.

Main points

3. Employees may want to take a career break for a number of reasons. These could include:
 - Personal development
 - Voluntary or community work
 - Education or training – e.g., **qualifying as a Social Worker under the Grow Our Own Social Workers policy.**

- Extended foreign travel
 - Caring responsibilities for children or dependants
 - Caring for a dependent relative with terminal illness
 - Caring for a relative recovering from an illness where the recovery time is unknown
4. A career break can be between 6 months and 5 years.
 5. Employees will be required to resign from the council and whilst they are on the career break they are no longer an employee of Wiltshire Council.

How to apply for a career break

6. Employees should discuss their request for a career break with their line manager.
7. Formal applications for a career break should then be made using the [career break request form](#). This should be at least 3 months before the intended start date. However, there will be some flexibility in exceptional circumstances.
8. The employee's application should include reasons for seeking an employment break and an indication of the anticipated length of absence.
9. The employee's line manager will review their application and discuss it with their Head of Service and/or Associate Director. **Line managers must treat all requests fairly, within timescales, giving clear reasons for approval or non-approval of a career break.**
10. A decision will be made within 28 days of the request and the line manager will confirm the outcome in writing.
11. **If the career break is approved, managers should forward paperwork to HR as soon as possible. Managers should complete a leavers form and return it directly to the HR Payroll team for action.**

Keeping in touch and reorientation to work

12. Employees will need to keep in touch with their line manager to ensure that they are kept up to date with their role and with any developments within the council. This is the responsibility of both the employee and their manager. The employee will need to agree how this is done in advance with their manager.
13. When the employee's application for a career break has been accepted, they should agree how they will keep in touch with service and corporate developments and how they can remain professionally up to date. This will help to ensure that they are able to return to work with confidence and that they are able to restart work at similar performance levels to

when they left. It will also help to ensure that their skills are maintained sufficiently to allow them to become rapidly updated and to compete for jobs of a similar nature at the end of the break, if they are applying for internal vacancies.

14. The employee should update their manager of any changes in personal circumstances, including intention to increase or shorten the time away.
15. Depending on the length of their break, the employee should give their manager/HR between 6 weeks to 3 months' notice of their availability for work.

Return to work

16. Employees should give 3 months' notice of their intention to return to work.
17. Re-employment cannot be guaranteed. However, for shorter career breaks of less than a year and where practicable the manager, in discussion with HR, will give consideration to the employee returning to the job in which they were employed before their career break began. They will still, however, be required to resign in order to go on the career break.
18. For career breaks of longer than a year, the employee will not be able to return to the job in which they were employed before commencing their career break. To facilitate the employee with their return to work at Wiltshire Council after an extended career break, they can register their availability with the Recruitment team. The employee should regularly monitor the council's careers website to identify suitable roles in which they may be interested. Where they meet the requirements of the person specification, they are guaranteed an interview for suitable posts within the council.
19. The employee should advise HR and the Recruitment team of any applications they make so that they can ensure they are interviewed (subject to the requirements of the job being met).
20. These provisions will operate for a maximum of six months from the date of the employee's availability for work. If the employee unreasonably refuses an offer of employment, the council's obligations to help them secure a job will cease.
21. If an ex-employee is returning to a role requiring a DBS check (previously CRB), NPPV or other security vetting, line managers should ensure that their record is up to date and assess whether it needs to be reviewed. The line manager should seek advice from the HR Advisory team should they be unsure whether a change of circumstance or incident needs to be reported.

22. On return to work report any changes in health to the HR advisory team as they may require a referral to the Occupational Health department.
23. If the employee returns to the same service area, or to a new role and service area, the line manager will need to make suitable arrangements for the reintroduction into the workplace. Depending on the length of the break, this may include an induction period and assessment of any training and development needs, including ensuring access to IT systems if necessary. Any reasonable adjustments required previously will need to be retained.

Declined requests

24. The scheme operates at the discretion of the council and is not a right of the employee. It depends on the existing and longer term operational requirements and business needs. The employee's manager has the right to refuse a career break request but must give the employee the reasons why they have declined the request.
25. Circumstances where a career break request may be declined or postponed are:
 - Where the employee has been appointed to cover another member of staff to carry out a specific task
 - Where the employee is on an approved training course funded by the council
 - Inability to recruit additional staff or reorganise work amongst existing staff
 - There is a substantial negative impact on service delivery
 - The activity could affect the council's reputation. E.g. volunteering for a political organisation involved in criminal activity.
 - The need to retain the employee's skills, knowledge and experience
 - There is substantial cost of covering the role i.e. by an agency / interim member of staff
26. As there is no guarantee that an application for a career break will be accepted, the employee should not commit themselves to any plans unless their career break has been approved.
27. If the request is refused the employee will be informed in writing. The letter will include the reasons for refusal.

28. There is no right of appeal if the career break is refused.
29. Managers must keep a written record of all refused requests and the reason for refusal. Copies should be sent to the HR Advisory team.

Leaving the Scheme

30. If an employee decides to leave the scheme, they should inform their line manager, in writing, as soon as possible. If they leave the scheme then the Council will not be able to assist in facilitating a possible return to work as detailed in the policy above.

Scheme implications

31. Employees must return all council equipment whilst on a career break.

Pension

32. In taking a career break, the employee has resigned and ended their employment with Wiltshire Council and they will have changed from being an active member of the pension fund to a deferred member. If they re-join the council they start as a new member again but they can have their service joined. Deferred benefits can be aggregated with their active pension account. However, the date when their break occurred is important and aggregation is dependent on the rules of the pension fund that apply at the time they re-join. Employees should, therefore, contact the Wiltshire Pension Fund to find out the impact on their pension.

National Insurance contributions

33. Employees only make contributions during paid periods of employment. If they wish to maintain payments during a career break, they will need to make arrangements with the Benefits Agency.

Continuous service and annual leave entitlement

34. Employees are expected to take any outstanding leave prior to the start of the employment break. From 1 April 2002, if an employee's career break is for maternity reasons or for reasons concerned with caring for children or other dependents, their continuous service will be broken but they will be able to have previous service taken into account for the sickness and maternity schemes, providing their break does not exceed eight years and they have not been in paid full time employment. For annual leave, the eight years' time limit does not apply provided the employee has not been in full time employment. In the case of a TUPE transfer there are specific regulations in the green book (national agreement on pay and conditions of service) about continuity of service.

35. The implications on continuous service differ for employees taking a career break in order to qualify as a social worker under the Grow Our Own Social Workers policy. Please see this policy for further information.

Other salary deductions, e.g., salary sacrifice schemes

36. As the employee has resigned from their employment with Wiltshire Council, their membership to all schemes will cease. The employee will have to repay any outstanding balance with salary sacrifice schemes, and this amount will exclude the tax benefit. The employee will need to contact HR Payroll to arrange full payment of any outstanding amounts.
37. After their career break, if the employee returns to work with Wiltshire Council there is no guarantee that these salary sacrifice schemes will still be available, or in what format they will be operating if they are still available.

Pregnancy during career breaks

38. If an employee falls pregnant whilst on a career break, they may be entitled to a Maternity Allowance. Employees should seek advice from the Benefits Agency.

Equal Opportunities

This policy has been [Equality Impact Assessed](#) to identify opportunities to promote equality and mitigate any negative or adverse impacts on particular groups.

Related policies and documents

- Flexible working policy
- Maternity leave
- Adoption leave
- Shared Parental leave
- Annual leave
- Ordinary parental leave
- Leave for carers

Further advice and information

 [Template letter - Career Break acceptance.docx](#)

For further information please speak to your manager, or contact a member of the HR Advisory team.