



# St Edmundsbury Borough Council & Forest Heath District Council

## Working with Cancer or Critical Illness Policy

Principles of working with cancer for Managers, Employees  
diagnosed with Cancer and Carers or Family Members  
affected by Cancer

This Policy may also be useful to those affected by other  
critical illness

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**Forest Heath**  
District Council



*St Edmundsbury*  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**St Edmundsbury Borough Council & Forest Heath District Council**

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## **Working With Cancer**

### **1 Introduction**

St Edmundsbury Borough Council & Forest Heath District Council believe they have 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 policy is designed to support employees who are diagnosed with cancer. It also covers the Councils approach to employees who have a family member (parent, spouse, partner, child or sibling) diagnosed with cancer and/or who become carers for someone diagnosed with cancer. This policy may also be useful guidance to managers and employees facing other critical illnesses.

### **2 Principles**

Both Councils will do all they can to support employees who are affected in some way by cancer. This policy is based on the following principles, which will inform a framework for all concerned:

#### **2.1 Respect the employee's dignity and privacy**

The Councils should respect the privacy of any employee affected directly or indirectly, via close family or friends, by cancer. No sensitive information of any kind should therefore be shared with anyone without the employee giving prior consent.

#### **2.2 Maintain employee involvement and engagement**

The Councils will make every effort to communicate with the employee during any absence from work, and reassure the employee that they have continuous employment in the same, or a comparable, position.

#### **2.3 Ensure the employee suffers no financial detriment**

To the best of its ability the Councils will ensure that an individual's compensation – salary and benefits – are maintained and increased as laid down by HR policy, as if the employee were not affected by cancer. Actual pay will be handled in accordance with the SEBC Sick Pay Scheme and FHDC Sick Pay Scheme. If an employee is absent from work on a long-term basis because of ill-health they are not excluded from progression arrangements. Detailed Information is given in the PDR Guidance - please refer to page 10. (SEBC only)

**2.4 Continue to provide employment benefits**

The Councils will work with the employee to ease the stress of any issues in relation to benefits offered by the organisation. The payment of essential car user allowance will continue during an extended period of sick leave, at a rate of 3 months full allowance and a further 3 months at 50%.

During a period of sick leave the employee will pay pension contributions on contractual pay (before any reduction on account of Statutory Sick Pay or Incapacity Benefit). If the employee is on unpaid sick leave, he/she will not pay any contributions. In both cases, pension benefits will continue to accrue as if the employee was working normally and receiving full pay.

**2.5 Adopt a flexible approach**

Managers should work to structure the employee's work schedule and workload in such a way that gives the employee maximum flexibility to manage their medical treatment and related needs, while maintaining effectiveness and efficiency at work.

**2.6 Continue to provide access to development opportunities**

The employee should continue to have access to appropriate professional development opportunities, subject to their availability to attend.

**2.7 Provide the employee with information and support**

The Councils should make every effort to link the employee with available resources that will enable access to cancer information and support about, among other things, treatment, absence from work, as well as successful reintegration into work. They should direct employees to sources of financial and, if needed, legal advice. The organisation should also make these resources and information available to family members and friends as well as work colleagues, where appropriate. Legal Advice is available to Union members through the Union stewards. Useful websites that have accurate information and are regularly updated are listed in Appendix A – further information can be sourced through Human Resources.

**2.8 Support the team affected by the employee's situation**

Managers should remain sensitive to the impact on co-workers and provide practical support where necessary.

**3 Enquiries and Change Control**

This document can be found on the intranet. All enquiries relating to it should be directed to Human Resources. This policy will be reviewed every 4 years in consultation with our recognised trade unions.

## **Employees Diagnosed with Cancer**

### **1 Scope of the policy**

This policy applies to all St Edmundsbury Borough Council & Forest Heath District Council permanent employees (full-time and part-time). The Councils believe they have a responsibility to support employees affected by cancer and will be as flexible as possible in its approach, bearing in mind each individual's personal circumstances, operational issues and the needs of the business.

### **2 On Diagnosis – Support from Occupational Health**

The Councils occupational health service is provided by Workfit. Employees can access, in confidence, the Occupational Health Manager and arrange for a meeting to discuss any concerns, worries and issues. Appointments can be made through Human Resources (HR) and can take place at the Councils' premises or at the premises of Workfit. Appointments are normally made in work time.

### **3 Telling your line 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 line manager. If you feel unable to discuss this with your line manager, you can speak to the HR department instead. Although this may not be easy for you, it is difficult for your manager, and therefore the Councils, 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 colleague to accompany you, at any time during discussions with your line 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 Councils 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 line 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
- relevant benefits provided by the Local Government Pension Scheme (as applicable)
- counselling and other support services
- flexible working and work adjustment policies
- other sources of information and support.

#### **4 Telling your work colleagues and clients**

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

HR and your line manager will agree with you from the outset what (if anything) to tell your colleagues at work (both orally and in writing), 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.

#### **5 Payment of salary during sickness absence**

The SEBC sick pay scheme and FHDC sick pay scheme are detailed on the intranet and it provides up to 6 months at full pay and 6 months at half pay for employees with 5 years service. You will be required to ask your GP for a medical certificate to cover any periods of absence, and should send them to your line manager or HR as soon as possible.

In cases of extreme financial hardship you are advised to contact HR to discuss whether any further support is available to you.

#### **6 Counselling and Support**

We provide a counselling service for employees, which is strictly private and confidential. There is no individual feedback to the Councils. The counselling can be accessed through HR or through Occupational Health. Your line manager will not be told that you are being supported with counselling unless you have given your permission.

Counselling can be made available in normal working time, with the agreement of your line manager. If you do not wish your line manager to know that you are receiving counselling, it can be arranged to take place either in your own time and/or within the provisions of the flexi-time / flexible working schemes where applicable.

In addition to this, we would like to encourage the development of a support network to provide advice and guidance to employees affected by cancer or other critical illnesses. Please contact your HR department for further information.

## **7 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 line 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.

## **8 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 line manager know in advance so that any cover arrangements can be made. Where the time off required is less than half a day special paid leave will be given to attend these appointments.

## **9 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 sick time, or could be a few days every month for a period of time.

## **10 Keeping in touch**

In the case of an extended period of absence, your HR department or line 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.



**11 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 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.

**12 Meeting your line 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 a 'return to work' interview with the Occupational Health Manager. 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 Councils 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 (at least to begin with) for one day a week or more
- working flexible or reduced hours
- changing your role or some of your responsibilities for a temporary period
- telephone conferences to reduce the need to travel
- help with transport to and from work
- making alterations to your physical location or workstation
- support from a counsellor

Don't be over-optimistic about what you can manage at the outset.

**13 Disability caused by critical illness**

If your illness causes disability that affects your return to work, the Councils 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. See pension scheme. 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 our Occupational Health provider, Workfit.

**14 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. You may want to seek counselling about this to talk this through (see above).

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 Councils are 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.

**15 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 relevant Councils grievance procedure.

## **Carers or Family Members Affected by Cancer**

### **1 Scope of the policy**

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 Councils believe they have 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.

### **2 Telling your line manager and Human Resources (HR)**

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 Councils 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.

### **3 Telling your work colleagues and clients**

The Councils respect its employees' wish for privacy and confidentiality concerning their personal circumstances. At the same time, the Councils 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 (both orally and in writing), to tell your colleagues at work. This will also apply to clients and other third parties.

### **4 Counselling and support**

The Councils will provide confidential counselling for employees, at the discretion of the Head of HR. This service is strictly private and confidential and there is no individual feedback to the Councils. You should contact a member of the HR Team to discuss a referral to the counsellor. We also have an Occupational Health Manager (at Workfit) who can advise and offer support, including discussing types of counselling and coping strategies for employees who would like support. Again, appointments are made through HR.

In addition, we would like to develop a support network to provide advice and guidance to employees affected by cancer or other critical illnesses. Please contact the HR department for further information.

**5 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.

Up to 3 days compassionate leave can be authorised by your Head of Service.

Compassionate leave in excess of 3 days is given at the discretion of your Corporate Director who will consider all aspects of the situation and authorise HR to make the necessary arrangements.

**6 Parental leave**

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 Councils may allow you a longer period of leave depending on your individual circumstances. Parental leave is unpaid.

## **Appendix A**

### **Useful Websites**

Some websites are excellent, others have misleading or out-of-date information. The sites listed below have accurate information and are regularly updated.

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk) (Macmillan Cancer Support)

[www.cancerbackup.org.uk](http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk)

[www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk) (Cancer Research UK)

[www.healthtalkonline.org](http://www.healthtalkonline.org) (Database of individual patient experiences).

[www.intelihealth.com](http://www.intelihealth.com) (drug and medicines information)

[www.nci.nih.gov](http://www.nci.nih.gov) (National Cancer Institute – USA)

[www.workingaftercancer.co.uk](http://www.workingaftercancer.co.uk) (Working after Cancer)