# HR Guidance

## Unpaid Carers in the Workplace

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| **Version Control** | **Changes Made** | **Author** |
| Version 1  Oct 2016 | Updated legislation | People Management |
| Version 2  May 2021 | Updated web links | People Management |
| Version 3  Nov 2021 | Updated guidance on flexible working requests | People Management |
| Version 4  June 2022 | Updated to say Unpaid Carers | People Management |
| Version 5  Feb 2025 | Rebranding | HR |

### Introduction

Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service is committed to helping employees achieve a healthy work-life balance in the best interests of both individual wellbeing and service delivery.

The [New Ways of Working](https://cumbria.gov.uk/newwaysofworking/default.asp) [programme](http://www.intouch.ccc/hr/pay_benefits/default.asp?row=6&tab=1)and other guidance relating to [**time off**](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/hr/annual_leave_timeoff/default.asp) work and [**work-life balance**](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/hr/pay_benefits/default.asp?row=7) play a key part in helping staff achieve this, but we understand that at times some staff may find it difficult to combine work and caring responsibilities and may need particular flexibility and support.

Unpaid carers are those with significant caring responsibilities which can have a substantial impact on their working lives. These employees are responsible for the care and support of disabled, elderly, or sick partners, relatives or friends who are unable to care for themselves. The activities that carers undertake are wide ranging, including help with personal care; help with mobility; managing medication; practical household tasks; emotional support; and help with financial matters or paperwork.

Caring can be unpredictable and emotionally upsetting; it can happen overnight, for example if an employee’s parent has a stroke, or it can creep up on someone, for example if their partner develops a debilitating long term health condition. It is not like mainstream childcare as its circumstances and milestones are different and often more uncertain.

Many people don't talk about their caring responsibilities, and you might not be aware that a colleague has this responsibility.  Employees are not obliged to disclose to their line manager

that they are caring for someone but are actively encouraged to do so and line managers should ensure that they are aware of the range of support which is available.

Over two million people in the UK become carers every year and around the same number of people cease caring; carers are therefore not a static group and the same will be true within any workplace.

Further information and research on the benefits to an organisation of supporting unpaid carers in the workplace is highlighted in Appendix 1.

**Purpose**

This guidance sets out Cumbria Fire & Rescue Services commitment and support for unpaid carers in our employment by summarising the practical ways that the the Service can help staff who combine working with caring for others

**Definition of a carer**

A carer is defined as someone who cares for, or expects to care for, a spouse or partner, a relative such as a child, uncle, sister, parent-in-law, son-in-law or grandparent, or an adult who is not a relative but lives at the same address as the carer.

**How to support unpaid carers at work**

One of the ways to support unpaid carers in the workplace is by making them aware of their statutory rights and to seriously consider agile working. Agile working is not just about part-time working, it can include:

* Flexible starting and finishing times or time in lieu arrangements
* Compressed working hours
* Annualised working hours
* Job sharing or part-time employment
* Working from home
* Flexible holidays to fit in with alternative care arrangements
* Annual leave purchase scheme

More information on the facilities Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service have in place to help managers and employees deal with this can be found by accessing the ‘Time Off’ and ‘Work Life Balance’ pages.

Link to pages: [**Human Resources - Pay, working arrangements and benefits | Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service**](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/hr/pay_benefits/default.asp)

The NHS also provide more information on rights at work for Carers at [Your rights at work](http://www.nhs.uk/CarersDirect/workandlearning/work/Pages/Supportforcarersatwork.aspx)

**Ways in which we can support unpaid carers**

Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service recognise that carers may need special assistance from time to time to enable them to meet their commitments in and outside work, and have in place a range of measures which may benefit and assist them.

The employee and line manager should have a discussion aimed at agreeing the carer’s needs and how these may be best met.  It may be helpful to document this discussion by drawing up an agreed support plan or completing an employee [**passport**](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/hr/absence_wellbeing/default.asp?row=9).

In addition Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service also recognises that not all leave required by an

employee providing care can be planned and as such we have in place an Urgent

Domestic Leave provision. This is designed to assist in emergency situations wherean alternative arrangement cannot be made.

Please see the attendance and wellbeing intouch page to view the procedures we have in place that help in supporting carers in the workplace.

Link to web pages: [**Human Resources - Absence and wellbeing | Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service**](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/hr/absence_wellbeing/default.asp)

**Statutory Entitlements**

There are various employment rights to which employee carers may be entitled.   The Flexible Working Regulations give all employees the right to request flexible working after 26 weeks employment.

Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service operates an enhanced provision in relation to this entitlement which allows all employees to make a request to work flexibly from day one of employment.  Guidance on making flexible working requests is contained within the Work Life Balance procedure.

Employees also have a statutory entitlement to a reasonable amount of unpaid time off

to deal with an incident or emergency involving a dependant.  For carers this could include:

* + to make arrangements for the provision of care for a dependant who is ill or injured.
  + because of the unexpected disruption or termination of arrangements for the care of

a dependant.

Another point of law is the Equality Act 2010.  The Act protects you if the person you care for has a protected characteristic, such as age or disability, and you’re treated unfairly because of this.  This is called discrimination by association.

**Tips for supporting working carers**

1. Make it okay to talk about carer issues - make sure people know there is an open door to talk about any problems before they get worse. Ensure that carers, and not just parents, feel included in diversity and work-life policies.
2. Provide the Carers with information about their local Carers’ organisation.
3. Small things make a difference - access to a phone or a more flexible lunch break so they can fit in a visit to the person they are looking after may make all the difference to a carer.
4. Foster a flexible "can-do" culture - one in which there is give and take on all sides, with shared responsibility for getting the job done while helping individuals who have caring responsibilities.
5. Set realistic goals that have clear outcomes - regular reviews will help you both keep track of progress.

**NB. The following points should be followed only with the carer’s express permission and ensuring strict confidentiality is followed at all times:**

1. Be fair and consistent - give every request for flexible working a fair hearing and talk to other team members to find out their views and gain support for the arrangement. People are more likely to support colleagues if they understand why help is needed and know they would get equal treatment if the same thing happened to them.
2. Treat people as you would want to be treated - get to know them as individuals and learn about other aspects of their life, if they are happy to share this.
3. Have a contingency plan - discuss and plan as a team what back-up might be needed in case of genuine emergencies or if the employee's caring responsibilities change

**Challenges surrounding the provision of employer support for carers**

Many employees do not identify themselves as carers or come forward for support, especially if they are caring at a distance, for example, an employee caring for an elderly parent is likely to see themselves just as a son or daughter; likewise, the carer of a disabled child will view themselves as a parent, not as a carer. Even where employees do recognise themselves as carers they may also be reluctant to identify themselves to managers for fear of appearing less committed to their work. This is likely to be particularly true during times of economic downturn when people may be feeling more vulnerable."

Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service managers should have a flexible and understanding mind set about carers, an appreciation of the often complex range of challenges they may be facing and of the potential loss to the workplace if their talents and resilience cannot be retained.

**Website links to external carer organisations**

Cumbria Carers

There are five Carers support groups throughout Cumbria based in different areas of the county.  Each group is responsible for the support of Carers in their particular catchment area.

Click on the links in the homepage to take you to the support group you require.

Link to Webpage: [**Carers Support Cumbria**](https://www.carerssupportcumbria.co.uk/)

In addition these links will take you to other organisations that offer support and guidance to carers:

<https://www.gov.uk/carers-uk>

[www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org/)

[www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org/)

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

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org/)

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

[Carers at Work - A useful guide for Managers](http://www.intouch.ccc/elibrary/view.asp?ID=31555)

[CADAS](http://www.cadas.co.uk/)

**Appendix 1: Benefits for organisations**

Supporting carers at work benefits your organisation through better staff retention and morale. Research shows that if carers are supported with flexible working and are able to take emergency leave related to their caring role, you will find less absenteeism and more commitment to work when they are there and more loyalty in the long term.

Most people's lives will include at least one episode of caring. Already 1 in 7 in your workforce will be caring for someone who is ill, frail or has a disability. But with the number of carers in the UK set to rise from 6 million to 9 million over the next 30 years, the proportion of carers in your workforce is also likely to increase significantly.

Latest research Caring at a Distance: bridging the gap, shows that less than 1 in 5 employers provide training on caring issues to their managers. Consistent with this is the relatively small number of carers (6%) who identify well trained managers as a significant source of existing workplace support.

Already 90% of working carers are aged 30 plus - employees in their prime employment years. The peak age for caring is also 45-64 when many employees will have gained valuable skills and experience. In the current economic climate there has never been a more important time to focus on the benefits of retaining skilled workers rather than incurring the costs of recruiting and retraining new staff.

Employers who have introduced flexible working and special leave arrangements for carers have judged them a success. Their message is – it makes business sense to care for carers.

According to the evidence base for the Government's strategy document [Next steps for carer's strategy (PDF format, 362K)](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_122393.pdf) (on the Department of Heath website), prepared by Employers for Carers, 90% of working carers are aged 30 or above - employees in their prime employment years. The peak age of caring is between 45 and 64, when many employees will have gained valuable skills and experience. One woman in four and nearly one man in five, in their fifties are carers. Research published by the Department for Work and Pensions and Carers UK shows that as many as one million people give up or cut back work in order to care, which is a real loss for employers as well as families.