

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Staff Governance
DATE	2 February 2026
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Family Friendly Project
REPORT NUMBER	CORS/26/011
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Andy MacDonald – Executive Director – Corporate Services
CHIEF OFFICER	Isla Newcombe – Chief Officer People and Citizen Services
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TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.5

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for a revised Family Leave Policy and also amendments to the Special Leave Policy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee:-

- 2.1 Approves the updated Family Leave Policy, with an implementation date of 1 April 2026 to allow for necessary training to be arranged, communications to be undertaken and other administrative arrangements to be completed.
- 2.2 Notes the accompanying guidance documents to the Family Leave Policy which provide employees and managers with relevant information on the range of family leave options, including details on the available provisions, eligibility criteria, application requirements and support options.
- 2.3 Approves the updated Special Leave Policy, amended to account for changes to the Family Leave Policy and in response to the requirements of the Council's gold accreditation of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Background

- 3.1 The Family Friendly Policy was approved in December 2015, and is supported by accompanying guidance documents covering the following specific leave provisions; maternity, adoption, paternity, shared parental leave, carer's, neonatal, IVF and parental bereavement. These guidance documents have been introduced and/or reviewed and updated in recent years, as required, including in response to legislative changes.

3.2 The Family Friendly Project represents a proactive initiative by the Council to ensure that its policies and practices reflect the evolving needs of its workforce in a changing legislative, national and organisational landscape. With the new Employment Rights Act 2025, and other family leave government reviews in progress, it is more important than ever to review our family leave provisions and prepare for changes that will come into effect during 2026 and 2027. With consideration also to the Council's key strategic drivers, the project ensures inclusive policies that support a diverse range of caring responsibilities and compliance with best practice standards. In turn with a focus on building a supportive and flexible workplace, this will create a working environment where all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to balance their work and family commitments effectively.

3.3 Aberdeen City Council's vision is for Aberdeen as a place where all people can prosper. This means all people being able to access our services, regardless of their background and circumstances, so that we help all people, families, businesses and communities to do well, succeed and flourish in every aspect.

3.4 The Council's Workforce Strategy and Delivery Plan aims to enable employees to thrive personally and professionally with a key strategic objective which states that Aberdeen City Council is a supportive, caring employer that provides a range of mental health and wellbeing interventions and support; supports staff through the cost of living crisis; recognises and supports work/life balance and enables individuals to remain in work or return to work effectively. The family friendly project links to these aims as a component which seeks to enable this objective.

3.5 The employee experience survey undertaken between December 2024 and January 2025 provided valuable insights into employee perspectives, with the associated action plan including the Family Friendly policy review. The survey:

- highlighted that flexible and hybrid working arrangements are highly valued by staff. 92% of those in roles that support flexible/hybrid working enjoy the flexibility, and 85% agree it helps their work/life balance. 72% believe flexibility supports equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) across the organisation. This is a cornerstone of a family friendly workplace, as it enables employees to better manage caring responsibilities and personal commitments.
- identifies wellbeing as a priority, with 66% feeling supported by their manager to maintain positive wellbeing and 61% able to strike the right balance between home and work life. However, only 45% agreed the Council is a caring employer, and 41% that employee wellbeing is seen as a priority, indicating room for improvement in demonstrating care and prioritising wellbeing - key aspects of a family friendly culture.

3.6 The Scottish Women's Budget Group Action Plan, approved at the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee on 26 November 2025, recommends ensuring employees who are kinship carers can access paid leave and flexible working to support a child/young person moving into their care.

3.7 A family friendly workplace, characterised by flexible working, supportive leave policies, and a culture of inclusion, directly contributes to several LOIP priorities, including:

- Supporting carers and parents: By providing paid leave and flexibility, the Council and its partners help prevent carers from leaving the workforce, reducing the risk of poverty and supporting positive outcomes for children.
- Promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion: Family friendly policies help ensure that all employees, regardless of caring responsibilities, can participate fully in work and community life.
- Improving health and wellbeing: Supporting employees to manage caring and work reduces stress and improves overall wellbeing, which is a key LOIP outcome.

3.8 The Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan, approved at Staff Governance Committee on 25 August 2026, sets out Aberdeen City Council's commitment to fostering an inclusive, diverse, and equitable environment for all employees. This commitment is foundational to a family friendly workplace, as it ensures that policies including family leave are designed and implemented with fairness, respect, and the needs of all employees in mind.

Legal Landscape

3.9 The Employment Rights Bill 2024, which received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025, introduces reforms to enhance family related rights in the workplace. These changes aim to provide greater support and flexibility for employees, while also outlining new responsibilities for employers.

3.10 Better support for new parents is high on both parents' and government agendas, with Working Families', the UK's national charity for working parents and carers reporting that a 2024 poll revealed that 92% of parents think it's important for new fathers and partners to take time off work to care for their new baby in its first year, with active campaigns calling for a comprehensive review of parental leave, which the government has now launched.

3.11 The government's review of shared parental leave, launched on 1 July 2025, and anticipated to last 18 months, will look at the whole system – including the maternity, paternity and shared parental leave and pay frameworks, to see how it can work better for parents and employers. Currently the system is complicated and doesn't always give families the support they need. One in three dads do not take paternity leave because they cannot afford to, and take up of shared parental leave remains very low.

Scope of review

3.12 In scope of the review is the Special Leave Policy and Family Leave Policy, along with accompanying guidance documents, which apply to all employees of the Council except teachers and those other employees on Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) terms and conditions.

3.13 Employees on SNCT terms and conditions have, under Part 2 Section 7 of the SNCT Handbook, separate family leave provisions, which are agreed at

national level, with a locally agreed Leave of Absence Policy. This policy, along with any accompanying guidance documents, will be reviewed as a separate exercise in collaboration with teaching trade union colleagues. This will take into consideration proposals under this report.

3.14 In respect of the workforce in scope the workforce data shows that the Council has a female dominated workforce and that it is predominantly female employees who work part time across the organisation:

	Part Time	Full Time
Male	559	1781
Female	4533	1866

How the review was conducted

3.15 A project team was formed to fully review and develop the Council's family leave provisions, including an update to the current Family Friendly Leave Policy and accompanying guidance documents to:

- ensure employees have access to a range of family leave provisions available to assist them with a variety of family and caring responsibilities, aimed to create a well-managed, flexible working environment that supports employees to meet both work and caring commitments.
- provide clarity for managers in applying the leave options to support employees accordingly and ensure consistency.
- ensure they are reflective of ACAS guidelines, CIPD best practice guidance and any current or upcoming legislation.

3.16 Research was undertaken, alongside benchmarking with other local authorities, partner organisations as well as with other private and third sector organisations, to identify best practice examples of family friendly provisions and workplaces. This has included consideration of the following:

- Best practice guidance (CIPD, ACAS)
- Current and potential future legislation, including the Employment Rights Act 2025
- Council's Workforce Delivery Plan
- Employee Experience Survey 2024/2025 Results and Actions
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan
- Scottish Women's Budget Group Action Plan
- Local Outcome Improvement Plan
- Related accreditations and pledges e.g. Carer's Positive accreditation, Equally Safe at Work accreditation and Baby Loss Pledge
- Flexible Working
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Returning to Work after Family Leave

3.17 Engagement has taken place over the course of the project with Trade Unions, managers and employees to establish how well the current provisions support the needs of the workforce, capture any concerns and identify areas for

improvement both in respect of the range of provisions and the application of these.

- 3.18 The research and engagement feedback reinforced the importance of ensuring employees and managers are aware of the family leave provisions available, with good access to policies, guidance and supporting resources to help navigate through their options, make informed choices, with managers well positioned to provide consistent and appropriate support and decisions.
- 3.19 Data on special leave and family leave was gathered and analysed to understand the current usage of current provisions and practice. This suggested opportunity to improve family leave recording via the HR/Payroll system to provide better data reporting, and also the expansion of options to enhance support and help ensure consistency in the leave type approved.
- 3.20 Job Families have been considered so that information is accessible in a way that suits the needs of different employee groups.
- 3.21 The policy and accompanying guidance have given consideration to other related policies, such as the Flexible Working Policy to ensure that these provide consistency and clarity.

Policy Changes

- 3.22 Taking all the feedback and research into account, a revised Family Leave Policy, and accompanying guidance documents have been developed. The table below sets out a summary of the areas where there are proposed changes.
- 3.23 Through these proposals the Council is reaffirming its commitment to being a supportive, inclusive and forward-thinking employer. The Council's intent is to ensure that all employees have access to fair, flexible, and comprehensive family leave provisions that reflect both the evolving needs of the workforce and latest and upcoming legislative requirements. By aligning the revised policies with current and forthcoming legislation, the Council is not only ensuring legal compliance, but also demonstrating leadership in best practice. Employees will have access to a wider range of leave options, acknowledging the diversity of family and caring responsibilities, and ensuring support during some of life's most challenging moments.

Topic	Current Provision / National Requirement	Proposal / Change(s)	Rationale
Special Leave Policy	Includes details of family leave provisions in appendix summarising leave options.	<p>Removal of any details on family leave provisions with those now fully incorporated in the Family Leave Policy, to remove duplication.</p> <p>Employee is directed to the Family Leave Policy for full family leave provisions.</p>	Clarity on which provisions fall under which policy to avoid any confusion.
Special Leave Policy	<p>Reservists leave payments subject to the deduction of service pay and allowances received from the forces.</p> <p>Cadet Force Adult Volunteers eligible for maximum of 5 days paid special leave</p>	<p>Reservists leave payments NOT subject to the deduction of service pay and allowances received from the forces.</p> <p>Cadet Force Adult Volunteers eligible for a maximum of 10 days paid special leave.</p>	In accordance with the Council's gold accreditation of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.
Family Leave Policy	Policy title: Family Friendly Policy	Policy Title: Family Leave Policy	Amended to take account of feedback from corporate policy group to give clarity around scope of policy. Aligns with existing Special Leave Policy.
Family Leave Policy	Out of date policy format and doesn't cover all family leave options.	<p>Format updated to reflect corporate policy template.</p> <p>All family leave provisions are now reflected in one central policy.</p>	<p>Alignment with corporate policy template and governance arrangements.</p> <p>Central reference point for all family leave provisions, with clear sign posting to the accompanying guidance documents – responds to feedback relating to lack of clarity on options available.</p>
Parental Leave	Entitlement to unpaid leave to look after child's welfare, in accordance with statutory provisions.	Day one employment right	Employment Rights Act will remove any length of service requirements for parental leave. Roadmap indicates that this change will take effect in April 2026.

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	<p>Up to a maximum of 4 weeks unpaid leave per child per year, up to a total of 18 weeks leave for each child up to their 18th birthday – available to each parent of the child.</p> <p>Requirement to have at least 1 year's continuous service with the Council in accordance with statutory provision.</p>		
Time off for dependants/ family emergencies	<p>Aligned with statutory right to unpaid reasonable time off to deal with unforeseen and emergency matters regarding a dependant.</p> <p>Day one employment right.</p>	<p>Entitlement to 1 day paid leave per unforeseen and emergency matter, up to a maximum of 3 days per year.</p> <p>Statutory right to unpaid leave remains</p>	<p>Benchmarking showed that provision across other local authorities varies, with some providing up to 5 days paid leave, and others in accordance with statutory provisions.</p> <p>Proposed provision reduces ambiguity, with managers and employees knowing what to expect, preventing confusion during a crisis. Employees feel supported and potentially less stressed, in a situation which may already be difficult or worrying, without then being concerned about leave provisions. Helps to manage requests fairly and avoid potential uncertainty over what equates to 'reasonable time'.</p>
Supporting Carers	One week unpaid carer's leave per year in accordance with statutory requirements under the	<p>One week unpaid statutory carer's leave per year (no requirement to be a registered carer)</p> <p>OR</p>	Benchmarking showed that other local authorities provide an option for one week paid leave, including Renfrewshire Council, Moray Council, Highland Council, Edinburgh Council,

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	<p>Carer's Leave Act 2023 for employee's who are caring for a dependant with a long term care need.</p> <p>Day one employment right.</p>	<p>One week paid registered carer's leave per year subject to the employee being registered as a carer. Evidence to be provided from either a GP or other health professional signature, local carers centre or social work department for confirmation.</p>	<p>St Andrews University, and Disclosure Scotland (2 weeks paid leave). Requirement for evidence to qualify for paid leave consistent with others and assists in preventing abuse.</p> <p>Focus Group feedback told us that paid leave would be beneficial as taking unpaid leave is not possible due to financial constraints. Employees tend to use annual leave/flexi for appointments, and in extreme circumstances due to stressful situation has resulted in sickness absence.</p> <p>The government is currently undertaking a review of Carer's Leave, launched in autumn 2024 and being carried out in 3 key phases. Anticipated to conclude by the end of 2026. Review is considering the merits of further policy development such as the introduction of: a paid leave entitlement, a one-off, extended unpaid leave entitlement, a paid leave entitlement for the parents of seriously ill children and other situational paid leave entitlements to support carers in specific circumstances (such as individuals providing end of life care)</p>
<p>Supporting Carers</p>	<p>Statutory unpaid carer's leave can be taken as half days, full days or a whole week in accordance with statutory provisions.</p> <p>Employees who use annual leave for caring</p>	<p>Provision for 1 week carers leave per annum remains unchanged. Ability to take the leave in hourly blocks, as well as the current options of half days, full days or a whole week.</p> <p>Employees can request for their annual leave to be converted to hours so that they do not</p>	<p>Increase flexible way in which carer's leave can be used and help the employee to maximise use of available leave and minimise time away from work.</p> <p>Carer Positive Scotland advise it is best practice to offer flexibility to suit individual needs.</p>

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	responsibilities, where leave is managed in days can only request a minimum of a half day off, in accordance with ACC leave arrangements.	need to request a minimum of half a day leave for caring responsibilities, when they may only require 1-2 hours to attend an appointment with their dependant.	<p>Feedback from the Carer's Focus Group told us that the ability to take leave in hours would help employees plan and utilise their leave better to attend appointments etc with their dependant.</p> <p>Research tells us that 40% of working carers reported that they needed more flexibility at work. Previous research by Carers UK has found that 600 people a day have given up work to care.</p>
Supporting Carers	Kinship Carer's Leave – no current provision	<p>Up to 2 weeks paid Kinship Carer's Leave, regardless of the kinship situation, for employees entering into a new kinship carer arrangement, and have the child/ren living with them or are preparing for them to live with them. To be taken in blocks of one week, at time of kinship arrangement or within the first 3 months.</p> <p>For formal kinship arrangements, leave to attend up to 5 appointments during the assessment approval process up to a maximum of 7 hours for each appointment. This would be comparable to leave provided for adoption assessment.</p>	<p>Supports wider council aims and outcomes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - corporate parenting with a focus on reducing the risk of poorer outcomes for looked after children, care experienced young people and care leavers. - The LOIP - Stretch outcome 5 - By meeting the health and emotional wellbeing needs of our care experienced children and young people they will have the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026. - SWBG Action Plan recommendation: ensuring employees who are kinship carers can access paid leave and flexible working to support a child/young person moving into their care. <p>Research by charity KINSHIP tells us that where no support is offered by an organisation 41% left employment altogether. Where an individual</p>

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			<p>leaves employment there is a greater likelihood that the family unit will move into poverty and can lead to the children entering the care system.</p> <p>Feedback from colleagues working in the areas of kinship and fostering indicated that the proposals would help support vulnerable children and their family unit.</p>
Supporting Carers	Foster Carer's Leave – no current provision	<p>Up to 4 days paid leave to attend training for fostering, under stage 3 of the fostering process.</p> <p>Leave to attend up to 5 appointments during the assessment approval process up to a maximum of 7 hours for each appointment. This would be comparable to leave provided for adoption assessment.</p>	<p>Corporate drivers – as above for kinship carer's leave.</p> <p>Focus group feedback indicated that an identified barrier to becoming a foster carer was around the time required to attend training. By offering paid leave this barrier is removed, and foster carers no longer need to use annual leave or request unpaid leave.</p> <p>Feedback from colleagues working in the areas of kinship and fostering indicated that the proposals would help support vulnerable children and their family unit.</p>
Supporting Carers	No Carer Passport	Introduce a Carer Passport, similar to the Reasonable Adjustment Passport, to gather information, support conversations and provide for consistency of support throughout the employee's employment.	<p>Feedback from Carers Focus Group that this would support employees to share their caring situation.</p> <p>Carer Positive Scotland, which the council is accredited with, require organisations to be able to identify their carers to demonstrate their</p>

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			<p>commitment to being carer positive. They suggest using a Carer Passport or Register.</p> <p>A workplace should have a supportive and comfortable environment where there is no stigma attached to carers identifying themselves. However, the choice of carers to identify themselves should still be respected, understanding that some people may not want to disclose their situation.</p> <p>Benchmarking showed that other organisations have in place a carer's register (e.g. Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service, Renfrewshire Council, Highland Council, NHS Education Scotland) and/or Carers Passport (Highland Council, Scottish Government)</p>
Supporting Carers	No Carers Support Group	<p>Introduce a peer led carer support network.</p> <p>The network would advertise events and offer support and share experiences with colleagues within the Council.</p>	<p>Focus Group feedback told us that a Peer Support Group would be welcomed and felt that it would enable carers to work better if able to attend groups and be supported</p> <p>Carer Positive Scotland accreditation require organisations to have peer support available. Knowing that they are 'not alone' and that others understand the demands and challenges is an important element of support.</p> <p>Benchmarking showed us that others have similar in place (e.g. Dumfries and Galloway Council, Highland Council, West Dunbartonshire</p>

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			<p>Council, South Lanarkshire Council, Standard Life, Wheatley Group, Disclosure Scotland)</p> <p>Workforce delivery plan - Employee Networks are in place that provide communities of common interest with collective support / Support a diversity of voices that build powerful collective action: Create “alumni” style groups – communications, ongoing learning, benefits, shared learning and development, ongoing involvement and engagement and support the expansion of networks across the organisation including a focus on ED&I, mental health and wellbeing and frontline engagement</p>
Supporting Carers	<p>Leavers Support Scheme - provides for employees who leave employment to care for a dependant to maintain work related contact with the council for a period of 5 years, with the opportunity for a minimum of 2 weeks work in each of these years.</p> <p>Approved 1997 by Personnel Committee.</p>	Remove Leavers Support Scheme.	<p>The Leavers Support Scheme was introduced in the 1990s and has rarely been utilised by employees, and is now no longer fit for purpose.</p> <p>The introduction of new digital tools to enable employees to work more flexibly, legislative changes giving the right for employees to make flexible working requests, as well as the introduction of policies and guidance such as the Flexible Working policy, Supporting Carers in the Workplace, providing flexibility in an employee’s work-life balance, and access and support for those with caring responsibilities has superseded the need for this scheme.</p>
IVF	There is no legal right for time off work for IVF	Introduce paid IVF Leave for the purpose of receiving and recovering from fertility	Benchmarking showed that other organisations provide for specific paid IVF leave, including e.g.

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	<p>treatment or related sickness.</p> <p>For the employee undergoing IVF treatment appointments are treated the same as any other medical appointment.</p> <p>For the employee who is supporting their partner undergoing IVF treatment they are required to take annual leave, unpaid or work flexibly to attend appointments.</p>	<p>treatment and to attend appointments specifically associated with the process:</p> <p>For employees undergoing IVF treatment - 5 days paid IVF Leave per treatment cycle, limited to one cycle in a 12 month period, up to a maximum of 3 cycles in total.</p> <p>For employees supporting their partner undergoing IVF treatment - 2 days paid IVF Leave per treatment cycle, limited to one cycle in a 12 month period, up to a maximum of 3 cycles in total.</p> <p>Over and above this leave, medical appointment leave would apply and/or other leave options (e.g. annual leave, unpaid leave, flexi leave) could be considered, as is the current position.</p>	<p>St Andrews University, RGU, Tesco, Angus Council, East Ayrshire Council, Fife Council and Moray Council</p> <p>Research tells us that each year about 7,000 patients and partners are referred from primary care to secondary and tertiary care across Scotland with about 4,300 treatments performed in the four NHS tertiary Fertility Centres located in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. (Scotland NHS Statistics).</p> <p>IVF births are making up a higher proportion of all UK births over time, increasing to over 3% in 2023 from less than 1.5% in 2000, around 1 in 32 UK births – roughly one IVF child in every classroom.</p> <p>In line with CIPD best practice that highlights that employees value paid time off to attend appointments, understanding from the manager that it can be a challenging time, understanding from colleagues that it can be a challenging time, flexibility of working hours and option to work from home when needed.</p> <p>Identified barriers include employees needing to use annual leave to attend IVF appointments (in contrast to other medical appointments)</p>
Parental Bereavement	Up to two weeks paid leave, at normal	<p>Extend entitlement to cover pregnancy loss which occurs before 24 weeks, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Miscarriage: the loss of a pregnancy 	Employments Rights Act 2025 will extend bereavement leave to include pregnancy loss that occurs before 24 weeks of pregnancy.

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	<p>contractual pay, following the death of a child.</p> <p>2 weeks leave, day one employment right, is in accordance with statutory provisions, with a child regarded as being under 18 years of age, including a baby who only lives for a short time after birth – this can be at any stage of the pregnancy, or a baby that is still born after at least 24 weeks of pregnancy.</p> <p>Payment at normal contractual pay, is an enhancement to the statutory provision which is for 2 weeks statutory parental bereavement pay at 90% of average weekly earnings or £187.18 a week, whichever is lower and where qualifying criteria are met.</p>	<p>before 24 weeks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abortion: a medical or surgical procedure to end a pregnancy. • Ectopic pregnancy: when a fertilised egg implants and grows outside of the uterus. • Molar pregnancy: a rare form of pregnancy in which a non-viable fertilised egg implants in the uterus and will fail to reach full term. <p>To support this extension inclusion of new information and advice in relation to pregnancy loss / miscarriage for employees and managers.</p> <p>New supporting information on pregnancy loss in the workplace and protection for time off after a miscarriage.</p>	<p>Consultation in progress with new measures expected to take effect in 2027.</p> <p>Implementation of changes now mean we are not only demonstrating our commitment to staff wellbeing, but we are also recognising being one of the first local authorities to have in place such a provision.</p> <p>CIPD research highlights that supporting employees when they experience pregnancy or baby loss has a positive impact on their mental wellbeing (60%), performance in their job (55%), as well as their commitment and intention to stay with their employer (58% and 57% respectively).</p> <p>If employees feel supported and can access helpful adjustments at work, resources and/or flexibility, they are more likely to feel able to carry on working to the best of their ability. Conversely, having to negotiate for time off and pay can add to emotional distress, resulting in the need to take a longer period off work or even leaving the organisation.</p> <p>ACC data suggests that there is an under reporting of pregnancy loss pre 24-weeks, with only 3 miscarriages being recorded in the last 2 years. Engagement suggests that where pregnancy loss does occur paid special leave / compassionate leave may be being used and/or employees may use annual leave or take time</p>

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			<p>off work due to sickness. Proposed change will support in consistency.</p> <p>The Council has made a commitment under the Pregnancy Loss Pledge to support employees who experience pregnancy loss, of which includes implementing a pregnancy loss policy or guidance, or ensure it is included in sickness, bereavement or other workplace policies.</p>
Adoption Leave	<p>Primary Adopters are eligible for paid leave for 5 appointments, up to 6.5 hours per appointment.</p> <p>Secondary Adopters are eligible for unpaid leave for 2 appointments, up to 6.5 hours per appointment.</p> <p>Current provisions are in accordance with statutory provisions.</p>	<p>Change max time for appointment to up to 7 hours.</p> <p>Introduce paid leave for Secondary Adopters to attend appointments in line with the paid time off for Primary Adopters – 5 appointments, up to 6.5 hours per appointment.</p>	<p>Align max appointment time with Council's standard working day of 7 hours. Support employees and managers in managing the time off needed and remove any issues around the 30mins of the standard working day currently not provided for under the leave provisions.</p> <p>Both potential parents are required to build a relationship with the child prior to being matched therefore increasing the secondary adopters entitlement as a supportive approach.</p> <p>Research tells us that the number of families adopting has increased since 2018/2019 – potentially therefore more employees will be seeking support.</p>
Adoption Leave	No specific leave provision for employees attending adoption training.	Introduce Adoption Training Leave for up to 6 days (5 full days and two half days) paid time off to attend training.	Children's Social Work have confirmed there are 5 full days training and 2 half days in person training that adopters are required to attend along with online pre-recorded courses which employees can undertake in their own time.

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			<p>Currently an employee would use annual leave or unpaid leave to attend.</p> <p>There are shortages of adopters across Scotland with Children's Social Work campaigning to try to increase fostering and adoption numbers.</p>
Adoption Leave	<p>For surrogacy arrangements, unpaid leave to accompany the mother/birth parent at up to 2 ante-natal appointments – in accordance with statutory provisions.</p>	<p>Reasonable paid time off to attend ante-natal appointments, taking into account the complexities of the pregnancy.</p>	<p>Recognise important role of the employee in supporting the surrogate mother during pregnancy, and being involved throughout.</p>
Maternity Leave	<p>Overview of maternity process checklist provided which is limited in detail and not specific to the employee or line manager.</p>	<p>Introduce checklists specific to the employee and manager, covering all stages of the process.</p>	<p>Feedback told us that the current maternity overview is not very user friendly or fit for purpose. Suggested that checklists structured by the key stages of the process for employee and manager would be helpful as support mechanisms and to inform discussions.</p>
Paternity Leave	<p>Up to 2 weeks paid paternity leave on full pay for eligible employees – day one employment right.</p> <p>Statutory provision & SJC Red Book Pay & Conditions of Service is for up to 2 weeks for employees who have been continuously employed for</p>	<p>Enhance to 4 weeks leave. First 2 weeks paid at the normal contractual rate of pay for the job and weeks 3 and 4 paid at 90% of average weekly earnings.</p>	<p>Political commitment to double paternity leave for Aberdeen City Council staff and encourage other employers in the city to do likewise WorkinginPartnershipPolicyStatement.pdf</p> <p>Government review is exploring options for improvement and potential for enhanced leave provisions. Alongside this there is significant campaigning for increased leave provisions for paternity leave, to recognise the important role of the father/ partner.</p>

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	<p>at least 26 weeks up to any day in the 'qualifying week'.</p> <p>Payment at full pay for both weeks, is an enhancement to the SJC Red Book Pay & Conditions of Service, which provides for the first week paid at full pay and the second week paid at statutory paternity pay. Statutory provision is for 2 weeks statutory pay.</p>		<p>Payment of weeks 3 and 4 at 90% is comparable with maternity and adoption payments in the first 6 weeks.</p> <p>A report published by the Women and Equalities Committee said paternity leave rules "entrench outdated gender stereotypes".</p> <p>Significant enhanced provisions available in other European countries including: Spain - new fathers can take 16 weeks off work at full pay, France - working fathers can now spend 28 days at home while being paid, Sweden - entitled to 480 days of paid parental leave, with 90 days reserved for fathers.</p>
Paternity Leave	<p>Unpaid leave to accompany the mother/birth parent at up to 2 ante-natal appointments, for a maximum of 6.5 hours for each appointment – in accordance with statutory provisions.</p>	<p>Reasonable paid time off to attend ante-natal appointments, taking into account the complexities of the pregnancy .</p>	<p>Recognise important role of the father/partner in supporting the birth mother during pregnancy.</p>
Paternity Leave	<p>An employee cannot take paternity leave after they have taken shared parental leave, in accordance with statutory provisions.</p>	<p>An employee can take paternity leave after they have taken shared parental leave in agreement with line manager – preference to still be taken before.</p>	<p>Employment Rights Act 2025 will provide for employees to be able to take paternity leave and pay even after they have taken shared parental leave and pay. Expected that this change will take place in April 2026.</p>

Topic	Current Provision / National Requirement	Proposal / Change(s)	Rationale
Shared Parental Leave	The guidance document can be complex to understand and makes reference to the specific shared paternity pay rates applicable. Arrangements are in accordance with statutory provisions.	Content streamlined with greater focus on sign posting to the government website, to simplify the document and ensure the employee is always referring to current information on shared parental leave pay and utilising the Shared Parental Leave calculator which assists in planning leave and can be shared with People Services to support processing.	<p>Feedback from employees and managers that the guidance is difficult to follow, further complicated by the different processes for birth parents and adoptive parents. Sign posting to the government website helps to provide clear concise information, ensures accurate pay information taken into account and tools are utilised by employees to inform their plans for SPL, for what is a complex process.</p> <p>Shared paternity pay rates are reviewed and updated on an annual basis. Removing reference to specific statutory pay rates, reduces risk of guidance content becoming out of date on an annual basis. Similar approach with other guidance documents e.g. maternity and paternity.</p> <p>Provisions are comparable with other local authorities.</p>
Support and Wellbeing	The content on support and wellbeing is not consistent across the guidance documents, with some containing very little and outdated signposting and guidance on available support options.	More comprehensive section around areas of support included in all guidance documents. Signposting and descriptions of available support – internal and external, including to the Employee Assistance Programme, Mental Health and Wellbeing resources, flexible working, and subject specific materials are detailed in the documents.	<p>Feedback from both employees and managers that not always clear to know what support options are available and helpful to have further guidance/sign posting on this. Helpful to have clearer guidance on flexible working.</p> <p>Employee's expressed concerns that managers have a lack of knowledge on these. Increased awareness help to support informed considerations of available options and good discussions between the employee and line manager – in turn helping to ensure consistency in leave application.</p>

Next Steps

3.24 To ensure the successful implementation of the revised Family Leave Policy by 1 April 2026, should the policy be approved, the following actions will be taken:

- An ACC Learn training module rolled out for managers to access, as an optional training resource, to increase their knowledge and awareness of family leave provisions, and guide them in how to support their employees and manage associated conversations.
- Practical guidance for employees and employers on navigating family leave will be provided with the introduction of a Family Leave Planning Toolkit. This will be a supplementary resource to the guidance documents, bringing to life through case studies how family leave can be supported. This will complement the managers training.
- A central SharePoint Family Leave Hub on People Anytime will be launched. This will host the policy and accompanying guidance with dedicated pages for each. In addition links to related guidance (e.g. Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing) and further details on useful support options such as the employee health and wellbeing pages will be provided, with the hub regularly updated and promoted through internal communications.
- An internal communications campaign will be undertaken to raise awareness of changes. This will include leadership forum posts, intranet blogs, targeted communications for frontline including posters and toolbox talk updates, and trade unions and employee networks will be engaged to support messaging and encourage feedback.
- A calendar of family leave related events (e.g. carer's week, world prematurity day) will be developed and published, with significant dates promoted to recognise their importance and raise awareness.
- A feedback statement has been incorporated into the family leave guidance documents. This will be supplemented with a mechanism built into the Family Leave Hub providing the opportunity for visitors to the pages to share questions, and suggestions from employees and employers who have been users of the policy and guidance.
- Updates made to the HR/Payroll system to cover the enhanced range of family leave provisions, which will improve recording and reporting.

3.25 Carer's Positive Employer award – subject to approval of the carer proposals, which ensure the Council continues to meet the Level 1: Engaged award, and time afforded to embed the enhanced provisions and practices, target exploring achievement of the Level 2: Established award in approximately one year.

3.26 Kinship Friendly Employer standards – subject to the approval of the kinship care proposals, explore potential for the council to be recognised as a kinship friendly employer.

3.27 Usage and impact of the policy will be monitored through absence and leave trends, alongside feedback from managers and employees.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial implications of family leave include costs incurred for salary of absent employees, where paid leave is provided for. This may have a direct resource implication and lead to additional costs incurred for any temporary cover that may be required to ensure continuity of business delivery – this is most likely to arise in cases of long term family leave (such as maternity, adoption or shared parental leave – for which there are no proposals to amend the long term leave and pay provisions, with current provisions continuing to apply), or for short term leave to provide cover in frontline roles.

4.2 It is anticipated that uptake of several proposed new leave provisions such as paid leave for IVF, kinship carers leave, foster carers leave, extension of parental bereavement leave to cover pregnancy loss before 24 weeks will overall be limited due to their nature. Additionally, feedback and data suggests that currently other paid leave provisions are being utilised in some of these situations, such as paid compassionate leave, paid special leave, annual leave, and/or sick leave. As a result, introducing these proposed provisions is unlikely to result in significant additional cost, with the salary expenses already accounted for and any short term temporary cover required likely to be minimal - instead these changes will help ensure greater consistency in the support provided to employees. The wider intended wellbeing and productivity of officers would be an intended balance to any additional costs that may be incurred to provide temporary cover.

4.3 In respect of the proposed enhanced paternity leave provision - again there will be costs incurred for salary of the absent employee, already accounted for, and potentially any temporary covered required. The average number of employees taking paternity leave in a year, based on the last 5 years is 29. Based on an average salary of £32,810 plus oncosts, the average cost of salary per employee is £41,340. Under the proposals, and based on these averages, the estimated cost of salary is £87,609 per year. This is only a truly incurred cost if back fill is utilised, which in the vast majority of cases will not be the case.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Family Leave policy and accompanying guidance documents ensure that the Council remains compliant with all current legislation relating to family leave and is well positioned and prepared for changes under the Employment Rights Act 2025 when its provisions come into force.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

7. RISK

The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small>	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Risk that delivery of strategic objectives is affected if leave levels are high and/or retention challenges.	Management of leave in accordance with policy and guidance, with management training to reinforce. Governance in place for approval of temporary cover. Range of family leave options to support work/life balance and mitigate retention challenges.	L	Yes
Compliance	Ability to meet our obligations under the Equality Act (2010) and risk of non-compliance with specific family leave legislation.	Policy supports compliance with current legislation, and well positioned to respond to future legislation.	L	Yes
Operational	Risk that delivery of Council services is affected by leave levels and/or retention challenges.	Range of family leave options for existing and prospective employees is intended to support mitigation of retention challenges, helping to support employees to stay in work and contribute to service delivery, whilst balancing caring responsibilities.	L	Yes
Financial	Costs incurred for salary for employees on leave and additional costs for	Management of leave in accordance with policy and guidance, with management training to reinforce. Governance in place	L	Yes

	temporary cover. Risk that non-compliance with legislation leads to legal challenge.	for approval of temporary cover. Policy compliant with legislative position.		
Reputational	Risk that the council is not viewed as an attractive employer.	Providing family leave options for current and future employees supports the Council being seen as an employer of choice.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified			

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26</u>	
<u>Impact of Report</u>	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement: Valuing Our Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognise that the council depends upon its staff to deliver the services it provides and believe the council must properly reward, train and support its staff, and - Double paternity leave for staff
<u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	
The proposals support the delivery of: Stretch Outcome 1: 20% reduction in the percentage of people who report they have been worried they would not have enough food to eat and/or not be able to heat their home by 2026. The introduction of additional paid leave provisions demonstrates a caring and supportive framework offered by the Councils to its employees. This supports employees not to lose income during family crises or caring responsibilities and helps to reduce the risk of financial hardship and support household stability. Stretch Outcome 2: 74% employment rate for Aberdeen City by 2026. The report's policies are designed to help employees remain in work or return after family related absences, directly	

	<p>supporting the LOIP's employment rate target by reducing involuntary exists from the workforce.</p>
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>The proposals support the delivery of:</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 3: 95% of children will reach their expected development milestones by their 27-30 month review by 2026. Adoption of the approach enables parents and carers to take leave for caring responsibilities, attend appointments, and support children's early development, directly contributing to this outcome.</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 4: 90% of children and young people report they feel listened to off of the time by 2026. The report's focus on wellbeing, flexible working, and support for parents/carers helps create a supportive home environment, which is crucial for children's mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 5: By meeting the health and emotional needs of our care experienced children and young people they will the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026. Provisions for kinship and foster carers, and support for parents experiencing bereavement or crisis, help ensure stability and positive outcomes for care-experienced children.</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 6: 95% of children living in priority neighbourhoods will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026. By supporting parents and carers to remain in work and avoid poverty, the policies help children in disadvantaged areas achieve better outcomes.</p> <p>Stretch Outcome 10: Healthy life expectancy (time lived in good health) is five years longer by 2026. The report's emphasis on wellbeing, flexible working, and support for carers and parents contributes to improved health outcomes for employees and their families.</p>
Regional and City Strategies	<p>This report links directly with the Council's Workforce Delivery Plan – specifically Right Support: enabling employees to thrive, personally and professional -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Objective 2: Aberdeen City Council is a supportive, caring employer that provides a range of mental health and

	<p>wellbeing interventions and support; supports staff through the cost of living crisis, recognises and supports work/life balance and enables individuals to remain in work or return to work effectively: Family friendly policy review including paternity and shared parental leave provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Objective 4: Aberdeen City Council understands its diversity needs and responsibilities and meets its statutory obligations relating to ED&I: As an employer, Aberdeen City Council signs up to and works towards relevant pledges, accreditations and commitments to provide frameworks and accountability around ED&I such as Pregnancy Loss Pledge.
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9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	An integrated impact assessment has been completed for this policy.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	Not required

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 [Report to Staff Governance Committee 4 September 2023 – Family Friendly Policies Project Update](#)
- 10.2 [Report to Staff Governance Committee 24 June 2025 – Family Friendly Policies Project Update](#)
- 10.3 [Employee Experience Survey 2024 – 2025 – Summary of Results](#)

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Family Leave Policy
- 11.2 Special Leave Policy
- 11.3 Adoption Guidance
- 11.4 Maternity Guidance
- 11.5 Paternity Guidance
- 11.6 Supporting Carers in the Workplace Guidance

- 11.7 Carer Passport
- 11.8 Parental Bereavement Leave Guidance
- 11.9 Shared Parental Leave Guidance
- 11.10 Neonatal Care Leave and Pay Guidance
- 11.11 Supporting Employees undergoing IVF Treatment Guidance

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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