



St Hugh's School

Career Break Scheme

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A career break scheme is an arrangement by which employees can take a period of unpaid absence from work, with the option of returning to work and continuing in the same or very similar post.
- 1.2 The scheme is part of the council's commitment to help employees to achieve an acceptable work/life balance. It is intended to help employees overcome some of the problems caused by career interruptions such as, taking care of young children or elderly relatives, undertaking a specific course of study or undertaking a period of voluntary work.
- 1.3 The scheme gives employees the opportunity to maintain their skill level and knowledge while away from the council and to seek re-engagement within the authority once personal circumstances allow them to return to work.
- 1.4 The scheme will enable the council to retain experienced and valued employees.
- 1.5 Every effort will be made to agree to a career break request but if the needs of the service cannot be satisfied, e.g, in cases of known recruitment difficulties, employees' requests may be declined or a compromise may be suggested.
- 1.6 Consideration will also be given to requests for a reduced hours break where employees, in agreement with their line manager, wish to reduce their hours for a specified period of time.
- 1.7 The scheme applies to all permanent employees of the council other than those employed by schools with delegated powers.

2. ELIGIBILITY

- 2.1 To be considered for a career break employees should have not less than two years' continuous service with North Lincolnshire Council. Subsequent requests will be considered following a further two years' continuous service.
- 2.2 Career breaks will normally be considered for the following reasons:
 - domestic responsibilities such as the care of young children or elderly or infirm relatives or dependants
 - following a period of maternity/paternity or adoption leave
 - to undertake a course of study which should be relevant to, and will facilitate, career development or career change within the council. (If the course is longer than two years a longer term may be agreed)
 - to allow for convalescence after serious illness.
 - to take up public services, e.g. local councillor (this cannot be with NLC), charitable or voluntary work.
- 2.3 An employee must not take up any paid or voluntary work with any other employer during the period of the career break, without prior written permission from the council.

- 2.4 Whilst recognising that there may be an economic need for an individual to take up part-time, or casual work, this scheme is not intended to enable employees to look for any other work, or work experience, whilst holding open their post with the council. Any request to take up employment with another employer must be in writing, giving full details and valid reasons for the request. Such requests will be considered sympathetically.
- 2.5 Failure to notify the council in accordance with points 2.2 and 2.3 above may result in an employee being withdrawn from the scheme and disciplinary action may be taken.

3. TERMS OF THE SCHEME

- 3.1 The career break will be without pay.
- 3.2 Subject to agreement, which should not be unreasonably withheld, the scheme will allow for a break of up to 2 years with a guarantee to return to work in accordance with the following conditions:
- 3.3 The period of the career break does not count for incremental progression. The employee will return on the spinal column point, or its equivalent, which applied immediately prior to the start of the career break. Where an employee requests to return to work on a lower graded post with less responsibility, this will be considered.
- 3.4 The period of the career break will not count as continuous service for the calculation of annual leave and other service-related, contractual benefits. See section 5 for specific information regarding pension contributions.
- 3.5 Attendance at work for meetings and training mentioned in paragraph 6.3 will be paid at the hourly rate applicable to the employees' spinal column point, at the date of commencement of the career break.
- 3.6 Every effort will be made to ensure an employee can return to the post in which he/she was employed under the original contract of employment, immediately prior to the commencement of the career break, and on terms and conditions not less favourable than those which would have been applicable at the time. Arrangements to cover the post in the interim period will be through normal recruitment procedures.
- 3.7 Where there is a redundancy situation which affects the career break post, the employee on a career break will be treated in accordance with the council's Redundancy Selection Procedure and, if appropriate, the Redeployment policy as though he/she were attending work normally.
- 3.8 If there are any other issues which affect the career break post, such as a review, the employee will be informed and consulted as though he/she were attending work normally.
- 3.9 For employees who apply for a career break whilst on maternity leave, the 2 year period will begin from the commencement of the week in which they were due to return from ordinary/additional maternity leave (maximum 52 weeks), regardless of when the application for a career break is received.

- 3.10 If the break follows directly from such leave the employee will be required to repay the payments made over and above the six weeks' allowance, excluding the SMP element, received under the occupational maternity scheme. In such cases the break will have deemed to start at the end of the ordinary/additional maternity leave (maximum 52 weeks).
- 3.11 If an employee wishes to return to work following maternity leave and wishes to take advantage of a career break scheme at a later date, favourable consideration will be given to this request. The employee should return to work for a period of at least three months as a qualifying condition to the 12 weeks' half pay received under the occupational maternity pay scheme. If the employees seek a career break before the three month period is worked she will be notified of any monies that will be repayable.
- 3.12 Employees may request to return to work at any time during the break subject to giving two months' written notice of the intention to return to work.
- 3.13 Should an employee return earlier than the original request, the postholder covering the career break may be entitled to be placed on the redeployment register as per the Redeployment policy A.9.
- 3.14 The council's normal grievance, disciplinary and other relevant employment procedures will apply throughout the scheme.
- 3.15 The council may terminate an individual career break scheme at any time provided it has good reason for doing so and subject to giving two months' notice.
- 3.16 If an employee wishes to terminate their employment with the council whilst on a career break, the notice period stated in the Principal Statement of Main Terms of Employment will apply.

4. THE PROCEDURE

- 4.1 Employees who wish to be considered for a career break should apply as far in advance as possible but, in any event, at least 2 months before the actual date when they would wish the break to begin. This applies to all employees including those on maternity, paternity or adoption leave. However, favourable consideration will be given to those who cannot meet this requirement for reasons beyond their control.
- 4.2 Applications must be made in writing using the form at Appendix 1. After initial discussions with their immediate line manager, the HR service should be consulted to ensure fairness and consistency.
- 4.3 The application will be subject to final approval by the Director. Where approval is given, applicants will be given a copy of the career break application form for their records and the original will be placed on their personal file.
- 4.4 Before the career break commences the employee should be given the opportunity to discuss training received to date and identify future training needs. Planned work experience, coaching and encouragement for self-development should be discussed as should opportunities for training or re-training during the period of the career break.

5. PENSION IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Prior to offering a career break, the implications for the payment of pension contributions should be discussed with the employee. Further advice and guidance should be sought from East Riding Pension Fund.
- 5.2 If an employee chooses to pay contributions for the whole period of the career break then an option form should be signed to that effect before the break commences. The payroll section will then default the first 30 days' contribution from the last salary payment. Following the employee's return to work, the contributions the employee would have paid over the career break period had he/she remained at work will be calculated. The council will also be responsible for paying their relevant pension contributions.
- 5.3 If the employee elects not to pay contributions throughout the break, but subsequently reconsiders the original option and then decides he/she wishes to pay he/she may do so. However, in any event, the election of the employee to make contributions on the period of approved leave of absence must be made within 30 days of the date of return to work.

6. DURING THE CAREER BREAK

- 6.1 The line manager should maintain regular contact (at least quarterly) with the employee during the career break and ensure they are kept up to date of any developments which may be relevant to, or have an effect on, his/her career.
- 6.2 Employees should receive regular updates on policies and procedures and any newsletters that would have been made available as though he/she was attending work normally.
- 6.3 Employees should have the opportunity to attend relevant training courses, team and section meetings. Employees may be required to provide evidence of continuing professional development.
- 6.4 Employees will be notified of opportunities for temporary or casual work relevant to their section during the career break. Pressure to undertake such work will not be applied but, flexibility and commitment on the part of the employee, where possible, within the spirit of the scheme and dependant on the urgency of the situation, will be an integral part of the agreement.

7. RETURN TO WORK

- 7.1 Employees wishing to return to work should make a formal application by returning the relevant section of the career break application form to their line manager at least two months before their intended return. The return date will be confirmed in writing and arrangements made for their return in accordance with the terms of the scheme.
- 7.2 Employees may need to be re-inducted to the workplace. If necessary, dependent on the nature of the work and the changes which have taken place in the job, this may involve retraining during the month prior to the employees' return from the career break.
- 7.3 In the year of return, annual leave will be pro-rata for the complete calendar months still to be worked. The employee must return to work before any annual leave can be taken.