Bereavement and Compassionate Leave Policy

South Oxfordshire and

Vale of White Horse District Councils





Change Record

Change Record	
Policy Title	Bereavement and Compassionate Leave Policy
Version Number	5
Owner(s)	People and Culture Team
Author(s)	People and Culture Team
Change details	Included the unpaid bereavement leave, Bereaved partner's paternity leave and Employment Rights Act (2026). Changed ‘Head of Service’ to ‘Service Director’ to show the change in job description title.
Approved by	People and Culture Team, UNISON and SMT
Approved date	Oct 2026
Effective date	1 November 2026
Renewal date	31 October 2029



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1 Vision and Values

Our Vision

We are customer focused and approachable. We are honest and open and are committed to providing high-quality cost-effective public services.

Our Values

Working Together
We are a committed professional team, who embrace change and help one another improve

People and Planet
We care about each other and the environment we share

Respect
We act with integrity, and champion diversity and inclusivity

Accountability
We take ownership, do what we say, strive for clarity and welcome feedback

Approachability
We are open, honest and accessible



2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose

The councils' Bereavement and Compassionate Leave policy outlines the bereavement provision for employees.

2.2 Scope

This Policy applies to all permanent and temporary employees of the councils, excluding Contractors/Agency Workers, who are the employees of third parties.

The councils reserve the right to revise, withdraw or replace policies at any time and to introduce new policies from time to time to reflect the changing needs of the organisations.

This policy document supersedes any previously existing or alternative policies, agreements or arrangements relating to Bereavement and Compassionate Leave at the councils.

2.3 Contractual status

This policy does not form part of your contract of employment. The councils are entitled to introduce minor and non-fundamental changes to this policy by notifying you of these changes in writing.

2.4 Relevant legislation

Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
Employment Rights Act 1996
Equality Act 2010
Data Protection Act 2018
General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679 EU)
Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018
Parental Bereavement Leave Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/249)
Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (General) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/233)

Employment Rights Act (2025)



2.5 Alternative formats

Please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Equalities Team if you would like this policy in an alternative format, via: equalties@southandvale.gov.uk.



3 Policy

3.1 Introduction

The councils recognise that dealing with a bereavement can be amongst the biggest challenges of an employee's life. This policy sets out the councils' commitment to support employees through their grief/bereavement/loss by providing bereavement leave, keeping in touch while they are off work and supporting their return to work.

The councils acknowledge that every bereavement is different, and grief/bereavement/loss impacts everyone in different ways. This policy is intended to cater for a wide range of circumstances and the differing impacts that a bereavement can have, while also recognising the needs of the councils to deliver services.

3.2 Process for requesting bereavement or compassionate leave

If an employee faces the death or terminal illness of an immediate relative, they should inform their line manager as soon as is practicable and indicate how long they expect their absence from work to last. This will allow the councils to provide support and make any arrangements to cover work.

Employees should discuss with their line manager what they would like colleagues to be told about the situation and make the line manager aware of any urgent tasks that other employees can pick up or meetings that need to be cancelled or rearranged.

Following the initial contact, the employee and line manager should keep in touch and agree the level of contact that is appropriate.

Managers should log any request for leave via MyView there are options for paid and unpaid leave. There is MyView Manager Guidance on how to do this on OurSpace.

Employees can also use Carer's Leave, Annualised Hours, unpaid leave or Annual Leave to support a close family member who is ill.



3.3 Bereavement Leave (for a close relative)

As of 6 April 2026, employees have a legal entitlement to unpaid bereavement leave. There are different arrangements where the bereavement relates to a child (under the age of 18), the death of a partner (where the partner has given birth/adopted to the child dies within the first year of a child's birth or adoption) or if a child is stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy. The sections below will outline these difference and signpost to other relevant policies where appropriate as well as outline where South and Vale offer enhanced entitlements.

Paid bereavement leave:

Paid bereavement leave is discretionary leave that may be granted by your Service Manager along with the Strategic HR Business Partner Team. Up to ten working days may be given for paid bereavement leave (pro rata for part-time employees) in any one calendar year.

Whether paid bereavement/compassionate leave is approved depends on an employee's relationship with the person who is deceased or ill, the amount of time spent on making funeral arrangements or caring for a terminally ill relative, and the time spent travelling to attend a funeral or hospital. It may be that the time off is split between bereavement leave, annual leave, annualised hours and / or unpaid absence.

For the purposes of this policy, an "immediate relative" is defined as a:

- spouse or civil partner
- partner (including same-sex partner)
- parent (including step-parent)
- child under the age of 18, including still-birth after 24 weeks of pregnancy
- adult child (i.e. who is aged 18 or over)
- sibling (including step-sibling)
- grandparent
- grandchild



- partner of a child's parent, where you live in an enduring family relationship with the child and their parent

3.4 Parental Bereavement Leave (Death of a child under 18)

The councils recognise that, while dealing with any bereavement is difficult, the death of a child is among the most devastating events that an employee can ever face. The councils are committed to supporting staff coping with the loss of a child by ensuring that bereaved parents can take parental bereavement leave. This is a legal entitlement for bereaved parents to be absent from work for up to two weeks where their child passes away.

Whatever an employee's length of service, they can take parental bereavement leave if they have lost a child (i.e. under the age of 18) and are the:

- parent of a child (natural or adoptive) who has passed away; or
- partner of the child's parent, where you live in an enduring family relationship with the child and their parent; or
- "parent in fact" of a child who has passed away, which means that, for a continuous period of at least four weeks before the child passed away, they have been living with the child and had "day-to-day responsibility" for the child (but who is not being paid to look after the child).

In practice, this means that most employees with parental responsibility for a child who passes away can take parental bereavement leave.

Parental bereavement leave is available in several other scenarios, including for adoptive parents whose child has passed away and where a parent suffers a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy. If an employee experiences a still birth after the 24th week of pregnancy they are still entitled to maternity benefits (where they meet the usual eligibility criteria). More information can be found in the Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Surrogacy Policies.



If an employee has suffered a bereavement but is unsure if they are entitled to parental bereavement leave, they should contact their Strategic HR Business Partner Team for clarification.

Bereaved parents can take the leave as:

- a single block of two weeks; or
- two separate blocks of one week at different times.

A bereaved parent can take parental bereavement leave at any time from the date of the death of the child until 56 weeks after of the date of the death of the child.

Recognising the need to provide bereaved parents with support, the councils will continue to pay normal pay during parental bereavement leave in line with this policy discretion.

3.5 Bereaved Partners Paternity Leave

Bereaved partner's paternity leave (BPPL) provides a legal entitlement to unpaid time off work to look after your child if the mother, main adopter or main intended parent of your child dies.

The person who has died must fall into one of these categories:

- the mother or parent who gave birth
- the primary adopter
- an intended parent having a baby through surrogacy

Employees can take up to 52 weeks' Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave (this includes under South and Vale terms in this policy up to 10 days paid leave for a full-time employee and the remainder is unpaid), to care for their child. They can choose the amount of time and must take this in one continuous block. This can be taken until either:

- the child turns one



- the first anniversary of the child's adoption placement (or arrival in England, Scotland or Wales or overseas adoptions)

This leave can be taken before or after another parental leave and pay that you are eligible for.

For further information, please refer to the Gov.uk website. A Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave Policy will be available on OurSpace shortly.

3.6 Bereavement leave (general)

The councils recognise that employees may be grieving/experience loss following the death of an individual who is not an immediate family member, but with whom they nevertheless have a close relationship, for example an aunt, an uncle, a cousin, or a close friend.

If this is the case, you can request up to 10 working days' paid bereavement leave and it will be up to Strategic HR Business Partner Team and your Service Manager to decide whether to grant bereavement leave and, if so, how much bereavement leave to grant. The decision will depend on the circumstances, considering issues such as:

- the closeness of the employee's relationship with the deceased
- the employee's obligations towards the deceased (for example, if they are responsible for arranging the deceased's funeral)
- travel required (for example, if the employee needs to travel a significant distance to be with relatives)
- any bereavement requirements in relation to religion, such as an extended period of mourning (the councils ask employees to ensure they inform the line manager about these requirements).

In the unfortunate event that an employee loses more than one immediate relative in a leave year additional bereavement leave may be granted and approved by the Service Director in consultation with the People and Culture Manager.



3.7 Other types of leave

Where you may have exhausted the bereavement leave offered or are not entitled to bereavement leave under this policy, you can still apply for annual leave in the usual way or use annualised hours.

If you are not entitled to bereavement leave under this policy, you may be able to take unpaid time off, please see the councils' Additional Leave Policy for further information.

3.8 Support during bereavement

The councils also provide a range of additional support for employees the details of which are below. In addition, there is access to a wellbeing room at Abbey House.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

Free and confidential support to help you and your family with a wide range of personal and professional problems, from medical to legal and bereavement assistance.

Employees can call them on the 24/7 EAP telephone support service on 0800 028 0199 or via a live chat on the wisdom app

The Wisdom App

The Wisdom app is available on mobile, tablet and desktop to ensure continuity throughout.

To download now or access head to wisdom.healthassured.org

Employees will need to use the code MHA001808

Here is a guide to help employees with downloading the app.



Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA)

The councils also have council employees who are trained and available to speak with confidentially. They are not therapists or psychologists, but they can give employees initial support as well as signpost them to the appropriate help if required.

There is a list of available MHFA on OurSpace, employees can email them directly if they would like to speak to them in confidence or email wellbeing@southandvale.gov.uk and the group can arrange for employees to speak to someone.

Bereavement Advocates

The council have several trained bereavement advocates who are available for support. Their details are available on the wellbeing pages on OurSpace.

3.9 Death in service – financial support for your next of kin

If an employee dies in service and they are a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), a lump sum of three times their assumed pensionable pay at their date of death is paid, no matter how long they have been a member of the LGPS, provided the employee is under age 75 at the date of death. Please visit the LGPS website for further information.

In addition to the above, the councils will provide your nominated next of kin with a one-off bereavement payment of £2,000 to provide some immediate financial assistance.

This payment may be used to cover the costs of funeral arrangements or help with every-day bills. There are no restrictions as to how the bereavement payment may be used and is intended to provide support to the next of kin.



3.10 External support

External sources of help and support for bereaved employees include:

- Cruse Bereavement Care / Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland, which offers support to bereaved people, for example via a telephone helpline.
- Child Bereavement UK, which offers support to families when a child passes away, for example via a telephone helpline.
- Age UK, which has a website that includes guidance and support on coping with bereavement;
- WAY Widowed and Young, which specialises in supporting people aged 50 or under whose partner has passed away; and
- Marie Curie, which supports families living with a terminal illness.
- Hub of Hope, which is a directory of different mental health charities that offer support.

3.11 Returning to work

Once an employee is back at work, they can discuss with their line manager what further support the councils can provide.

The councils recognise that a bereaved employee may not be able to return immediately to their full duties or way of working. The councils understand the value of temporarily adjusting a bereaved employee's duties or phasing the employee back to work when it is appropriate to do so.

The council will consider reasonable requests to make temporary changes to working arrangements, such as allowing employees to work reduced hours or working from home on certain days (where the role requires some level of office attendance for example removing someone from the rota). Ideally the temporary changes would last for a duration of 4 to 6 weeks, however this may be extended following a discussion with the relevant line manager and the Strategic HR Business Partner Team



Depending on the nature of the temporary changes, an employee's line manager and the Strategic HR Business Partner Team may agree temporary adjustments informally with the employee.

The councils recognise that some bereavements will result in employees being permanently unable to return to their full duties or way of working. For example, an employee with children whose partner passes away, may have increased childcare responsibilities. Permanent changes that could be requested include moving to part-time working or working from home on certain days.

Line managers and the Strategic HR Business Partner Team will consider requests for permanent changes, which may involve the employee making a formal request for flexible working in line with the councils' Flexible Working Policy.