Guidance for staff with caring responsibilities

We continue to live and work in unprecedented times and in light of the new National Lockdown it is recognised that this will likely bring additional challenges to our staff, especially those who are now faced with having to balance home schooling and caring responsibilities, alongside their work commitments.

If you are impacted by the new restrictions then in the first instance please speak with your line manager to discuss what limitations this may place on your ability to carry out your role. Whilst we would ask all staff to continue with their best endeavours during this time, managers must recognise that adjustments to working practices may be required in the interim and that everyone’s personal circumstances will be different.

Please note that it isn’t unreasonable for your line manager to ask you to talk through your current childcare/carer arrangements, if you are citing difficulties in balancing your home and work life at present e.g. what is the level of support that is required as part of your responsibilities? Is there anyone else who may be able to support, such as a partner/anyone else in the same household or support bubble? In line with recent Government guidance, are you able to form a childcare bubble with another household? Are other family members able to support with carer needs for an elderly relative, if you are now having to juggle home schooling, alongside carer responsibilities for example.

For those who are able to continue working from home in some capacity, whilst also trying to manage their domestic responsibilities, some recommendations for both staff and line managers to discuss and consider:

- Staff may need to flex their hours over the coming weeks and work outside of core hours and it’s important that they are supported in doing so, e.g. some may need to split their day if they’re sharing childcare responsibilities, and opt to work additional hours in the evening.
- What activity/pieces of work can be put on hold or postponed in the interim, prioritising what is vital work versus ‘a nice to have’.
- Is it possible for other team members to potentially support with workloads in the short-term, recognising that some may have already be doing this and that consideration is given to their wellbeing also.
- Are video meetings required, or would an email or telephone call suffice? Is it really necessary for that member of staff to attend?
- If video meetings are necessary then give allowances to those who may also have children at home by allowing them to be in attendance, without the need for them to have their video on, if this is their preference.
- Be considerate of the time when scheduling meetings e.g. for the majority of children there is no longer any wraparound care, so this may pose a challenge for some staff who may need to drop off/collect their children from school/nursery.
- If all parties are in agreement then consideration could be given to holding meetings/telephone calls in the early evening if this is preferable and a workable solution.

These are challenging times for all staff, and a reduction in output should not necessarily be viewed as a direct reflection of an individual’s capability. All staff should be made to feel supported when having these conversations, and know that their line manager will work with them to try and identify a fair and reasonable way forward.

Additional Support

In addition to the above considerations, if staff feel they would be unable to work to their full capacity at present e.g. perhaps they have very young children at home, such as reception age, they are reminded that we have several options available to support them during this period.
These include but are not limited to:

- Coronavirus Special Leave – with effect from 5th January 2021, staff are again eligible to apply for up to 14 days coronavirus special leave during 2021,
- Special Leave
- Annual Leave
- Parental Leave/Unpaid Leave
- A temporary change to working pattern
- Furlough Leave

Furlough Leave

Staff can request to be placed on furlough leave, whether fully or flexibly (i.e. you may work a proportion of your working hours, and the remaining proportion would be classed as furlough leave) if they are unable to work due to childcare reasons, providing they meet the criteria of the scheme.

If you feel this may apply to you, for example you are unable to work from home due to the nature of your role and you have childcare needs, or you are a single parent and cannot commit to working your full working pattern at present, then please speak with your line manager about this option and whether you would be considered eligible.

Line managers are advised to speak with their HR Partner to discuss next steps if they wish to furlough a member of staff.