

WORK LIFE BALANCE

FLEXIBLE WORKING AND PART TIME DUTY SYSTEMS

As a consequence of the recent modernisation agenda the service needs to ensure that there are no artificial barriers that would prevent us from making best use of all our employees. The world of work is changing and more and more people have to juggle responsibilities at home and in the workplace. It is with this thought in mind that Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service has taken the view that we should ensure that all employees have the option to alter their working patterns to meet these demands.

Aims and objectives of this policy

Work Life balance is covered by a considerable number of existing policies and practices. The approach taken by the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service will be to amend existing policies and introduce new arrangements where applicable. The philosophy will be to improve the arrangements for all employees and ensure that access to these is not restricted unjustifiably. The approach will be to:

- Provide a range of choices for all staff that will suit the varying demands.
- Improve the flexible working patterns available.
- Maintain morale, motivation, commitment and engagement.
- Reduce absenteeism.
- Improve recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce.
- Become 'an employer of choice'.
- Meet our legal requirements.

Legal framework

Many of the provisions listed below have been driven by the EU directives which were significantly extended in April 2003. In the main a large number have already been available to all employees, however in some cases the existing Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service provisions do go beyond the statutory minimum and this is indicated in the information shown below. The intention is that notes for guidance will be developed to support this policy statement which will detail the types of scenarios and possible outcomes. Where existing policy is in place this has been referenced and additional information can be sought from these points.

Annual Leave

All employees are entitled to 20 days paid annual leave this on a pro rata basis for Part Time workers, the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service provision goes beyond this requirement. (See SO 50 section 2)

Working Time

The working week is limited to 48 hours per week averaged over 17 week, for employees who have not opted out. These regulations have been adopted and appropriate mechanisms put in place to meet the legal requirements. All employees are advised on appointment of their rights and responsibilities.

Parental Leave

Employees are entitled to take 13 weeks unpaid parental leave at any time up to the child's fifth birthday. This has been extended beyond the statutory minimum to aged 8 years, employees can ask for this when children are over this age and the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service is willing to look at each case on its own merit. (See NJC Conditions of Service Green Book part 3 Section 5 & Grey Book Section 4d 49 -54)

Maternity Leave

Women giving birth are entitled to 26 weeks maternity leave and employees with one completed years service are entitled to additional 26 weeks unpaid leave. Maternity leave and pay arrangements have always been more favourable than the statutory requirement. (See NJC Conditions of Service Green Section 11 & Grey Section 4D)

Paternity Leave

Fathers or the nominated carer are entitled to 2 weeks paid paternity leave which can be taken as a single block of one or two weeks within 56 days of the birth of the child. The service arrangements have allowed for nominated carer and improved payment. (See SO 50 section 2.2.15)

Adoption Leave

Employees have been given this leave and recently amended to comply with the regulations.(See SO 50 section 2.2.13)

Right to request flexible working

Employees with children under 6 (under 18 if disabled) can request a change to hours of work, the time or place of work. (Application form 2C20). The Authority has extended this to be available to all employees regardless of the childcare responsibilities.

Part time work

Part time workers are entitled to the same hourly rate of pay and entitlements to annual leave, maternity and parental leave on a pro rata basis. Part time workers also have the same access to contractual sick pay and no less favourable treatment in access to training. This practice is already in operation.

Career Break Scheme

All personnel are able to take advantage of this scheme. This scheme provides an opportunity for an unpaid extended period of absence from work, for reasons of child care or other family responsibilities, or for education/academic reasons, after which the individual may be re-employed at or near the same grade/role as before the break. (See section 2.2.16)

Voluntary reduced hours

An employee can request a voluntary reduction in their standard working hours and the decision whether or not to agree to a 'V' time arrangement will be based on the practicality of reducing the employee's hours, to the degree requested, and for the length of time involved. The following are examples of the range of options that have already been adopted for non uniformed posts within the service, a reduction to part time hours, four day week, and a nine day fortnight.

Job Share

This scheme has been in place for all non uniformed staff and Control staff. This will be extended to all employees and be given due consideration when requested.

Homeworking

The Service is committed to the growth of homeworking where this is both in the interests of the service and welcomed by employees concerned. This has been in place for some time and additional information can be requested from Human Resources.

Special Leave

The general principles of special leave have been in place at the discretion of the Authority and are continually under review to take account of the changes in legislation as indicated above. This also includes the right to take unpaid leave to deal with family emergencies or urgent domestic matters. (See SO 50 section 2.2. – 2.2.3)

Flexible Duty Systems

The existing system currently in operation for non uniformed personnel allows employees to work hours to suit their personal needs within the remit of the scheme. This approach is currently under review for other employees working day duty systems. (See SO 50 section 1.7)

Pensions

The current provisions for membership of the Firefighter Pension Scheme for Part Time workers is being amended. Membership for employees on the Retained duty system is still under review and this will be adopted once agreements have been reached. The Local Government Pension Scheme already has a provision for part time workers to be members of the scheme.

This list is not exhaustive and the development of the work life balance strategy will continue to ensure that we achieve the key operating procedures.