



# DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL CAREER BREAK POLICY

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(HR/346)

## 1. POLICY TITLE

Down District Council Career Break Policy.

## 2. POLICY STATEMENT

Down District Council recognises that at various stages in employees' working lives, domestic and family commitments and responsibilities potentially reduce or hinder their ability to fulfil work responsibilities. Where such conflicts cannot be resolved, this could result in the organisation losing employees. To prevent such loss of skilled experienced workers and to help reduce anxiety and stress among our workforce, this organisation not only acknowledges those potential conflicts but also offers practical help through its career break scheme.

## 3. POLICY AIMS

Down District Council is committed to promoting equality and valuing diversity in everything we do including service delivery and employment.

The objectives of the Career Break Scheme are-

- To retain skills and expertise within the Council
- To facilitate employees who wish to take a Career Break

The Council will actively support applications for Career Break where it is reasonable and practicable to do so and where operational needs will not be adversely affected however, employees do not have an automatic right to avail of a Career Break.

## 4. POLICY SCOPE

- 4.1. Any permanent employee who has satisfactorily completed their probationary period may apply for special leave without pay for a Career Break. It does not affect other arrangements for granting unpaid leave.
- 4.2. A Career Break may for example, be allowed to employees who are taking a prime responsibility for the care of children, or who have to care for elderly and/or disabled relatives. A Career Break will not be allowed for the primary purpose of taking up alternative salaried or wage earning employment unless to enter self-employment. Request for Career Breaks for other reasons for example, personal development or voluntary work will be considered on the merits of the application.
- 4.3. This facility will not be used as an alternative to disciplinary or capability procedures.
- 4.4. Any employee who does not comply with the terms of the Career Break Scheme will not be considered for re-employment under the terms of the scheme

## 5. RELATED POLICIES

- Parental Leave
- Special Leave
- Time off For Dependents
- Flexible Working



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## 6. DEFINITIONS

A Career Break is special leave without pay for a specified period.

### 6.1 Duration and Number of Career Breaks

- The total period of special leave without pay available to an individual employee for Career Break purposes will not exceed a maximum of 2 years during employment with Down District Council.
- Special leave without pay for a Career Break will only be granted for a period of not less than 6 months and up to a maximum of 2 years.
- A Career Break may be extended once for a period of not less than 6 months provided that the total period does not exceed 2 years in all.
- On return to work following a Career Break one additional Career Break may be granted subject to the total maximum of 2 years provided that the period of service between the Career Breaks is not less than the initial Career Break (including any extensions).

### 6.2 Conduct during Career Break

- During a Career Break, the employee will be subject to all normal regulations including the Councils Code of Conduct. Disciplinary action may be taken where appropriate.
- In normal circumstances, employees will not be permitted to perform work for any other employer while they are absent under the career break scheme. If the need to work does arise, then the employee must first discuss this matter with the organisation to see whether suitable work can be found within the organisation. If it cannot, then the organisation will need to consider whether employment elsewhere may be taken up.
- Employees may be required to receive training and refresher courses to a maximum of 10 days, whilst on a Career Break.
- During a Career Break, the employee must advise the Council of any changes in details relevant to their employment e.g. change of address.
- Employees will be free to apply for any vacancies within the Council during their Career Break. However, they would have to accept the post at the time of offer to take up duties when required.

### 6.3 Continuity of Service

Employees who are absent under the career break scheme will not be under contract during their absence, therefore all contractual entitlements and benefits will cease to accrue or apply during the break.

- An employee will not be entitled to incremental progression or incremental credit (e.g., service related annual leave increments, salary scale progression etc.) during or on return from the Career Break.
- On returning after a career break, periods of service before and after a career break will be treated as continuous for contractual purposes.



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- Any period of special leave without pay for a Career Break will not count for superannuation purposes, which can have an effect on the employee's final pension and lump sum entitlements. Once payments cease, employees will not be entitled to enhanced service for death or ill health. They are therefore advised to make their own arrangements for life cover, for the period of the career break. Employees should therefore consult the Payroll Section who will advise of the position in relation to the Superannuation Scheme.
- On return to work, an employee has 30 days to decide if s/he wishes to pay contributions for the period of absence. If (s)he decides to do so, the Council will pay its contributions as a lump sum. The employee will be allowed to repay Down District Council over a period no greater than the duration of the career break.
- Where an employee fails to complete three months' service after a career break of one year and six months' after a break of one to two years; (s)he will be required to repay the Council's contributions to the superannuation scheme.
- If an employee does not return to work following a Career Break that was preceded by a period of maternity leave, she will be required to repay the Ordinary Maternity Pay (OMP) she received.

#### **6.4 Return to Work**

- While no guarantee to a particular post can be given, every effort will be made to place those employees returning from a Career Break to their previous or a suitable post
- If a vacancy does not exist in the grade formerly held by the employee, they can be offered a lower graded post (with the appropriate terms and conditions of service). Every effort will be made to relocate the employee to a suitable post at their original grade as soon as possible. Where an employee is relocated, excess travelling expenses will not be paid.
- If a suitable position does not exist or is not likely to exist in the foreseeable future, the employee may be offered redundancy terms based on the employees' service prior to the break
- If prior to the commencement of a Career Break an employee was working in a part-time/job sharing arrangement, every effort will be made to allow the employee to return on that basis. However, there is no guarantee that this will always be possible and in these circumstances, employees may be offered a full time post.
- There is no automatic right to early return from or extension to an approved Career Break.
- Employees who are unable to resume duty on the due date because of illness will be required to produce supporting medical documentation.
- At the Council's discretion, an employee may be required to undergo a health assessment prior to their return to work from Career Break.
- In the case of an employee returning from Career Break to a "regulated" position, Down District Council will require the employee's consent to apply for an Access NI disclosure.



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## 7 POLICY OWNER

Director of Corporate Services

## 8 POLICY AUTHORISATION

Reviewd by Local Joint Consultative Committee 29 July 2011 & reissued 8 September 2011.  
Approved at Strategic Policy and Resources Committee 3 October 2011  
Ratified by Council on 24 October 2011

## 9 POLICY EFFECTIVE DATE

1 November 2011

## 10 PROCEDURES

Down District Council Career Break Procedure

## 11 . EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This Policy has been assessed on 22 July 2011 under Down District Council's Equality Impact Assessment process and has been screened out as having no impact on any of the groups designated in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

## 12 POLICY REVIEW

The Human Resources Manager will monitor and review this policy and present any necessary changes; following consultation via the Local Joint Consultative Committee.