

WMFS

West Midlands
Fire Service

Employee guide to

Family Leave

Introduction
This guide reads alongside the Family Leave Policy with the aim of ensuring you are confident you understand the process you're following.

This guide focuses on longer term periods of family leave and what you can expect from your manager and the Service during this time.

Letting us know
First things first, if you're planning on taking any form of family leave, you'll need to let us know! This should be in writing to your manager, or to your managers manager if this is not possible. We would always advocate you speaking to your manager first too to let them know your plans.



Doing this can bring forward a range of emotions - from excitement and anticipation to anxiety.

To help, we've put together some key points of what you'll need to consider when having this conversation or writing this email:

- The type of family leave you'll be taking.
- You or your partner's due date.
- An indication of when you intend to begin your leave (this can be changed or decided at a later date, but a rough idea will help your manager begin to plan). If you don't know though – that's fine!
- Do you plan to take any holiday before your leave?
- Are you ready to share your news with anyone else?

Your manager will then meet with you to discuss your news, roughly plan leave dates with you, and answer any questions you may have. They will also complete a risk assessment with you if you are operational, or a workplace assessment if you are non-operational. This involves discussing what you can or can't do, and looking at what support you may need. This should be reviewed every trimester as a minimum. If your manager doesn't initiate this, you are within your rights to prompt them.

If at any point during your pregnancy you need any equipment – such as lumbar support or a footstool – you or your manager can order this directly by emailing [redacted]

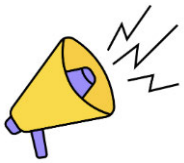
If you're pregnant, you'll also need to send a copy of your MATB1 form provided by your midwife as soon as you have this (usually after 21 weeks) to Human Resources [redacted]

Pregnancy when Operational

If you are operational and pregnant, you will be taken off your operational duties immediately to avoid any risk to you and your baby. You can still follow your watch but will be restricted to non-operational duties planned by your manager. Your manager will talk to you about the work you will now complete, which will be guided by the risk assessment. If you are interested in alternative arrangements during your pregnancy – such as a move to HQ or alternative working hours – you can speak to your manager to see what availability there is for this.

Your needs may change over the course of your pregnancy, so keep your manager updated. As part of this conversation, it's a good idea to discuss who you would like your manager to contact if you experienced complications with your pregnancy whilst at work, or if you went in to labour unexpectedly at work. You might also think about if you would like another employee to travel to hospital with you if your partner were unable to.

Announcing the News



We understand that this can be both an exciting but also personal thing to announce. That's why we think you should have some input in to how this is shared within your team, any external contacts, and the wider Service.

Together with your manager you can look at who needs to know, what they need to know, and when they need to know it.

Dates to Remember



To be eligible for family leave pay you'll need to complete a Family Leave request form or a Shared Parental Leave (SPL) form and email this to [redacted] before the dates below. If you don't complete this the HR team will not know about your leave and your payments will not be arranged. Once they've processed your form you will receive a confirmation letter. Informing your manager alone will not trigger payments.

Maternity Leave	Before the 25th week of your pregnancy.
Adoption Leave	Within 7 days of being notified that you have been matched with a child for adoption.
Paternity Leave	28 days prior to your leave start date.
Shared Parental Leave	8 weeks before the intended start of your leave.

Before your leave begins, you can change the dates by giving us 8 weeks' notice. And during your leave if you decide you want to change your return date, you'll also need to give us 8 weeks' notice.

Uniform for Operational and Fire Control pregnant employees
As your body changes during pregnancy you may need to think about maternity workwear.

Following the suspension of Ballyclare from the National Framework for workwear, Interim solutions to maternity work wear are currently in place.

You are entitled to the following allowances:

- Black shirt - 4
- White shirt (for Officers, where appropriate) - 1
- Black T-shirt 4
- Maternity trousers, black 2 (Fire Control may opt to take a skirt).

Where the interim solutions offered are not suitable, procurement will work with you to ensure something more suitable can be provided (within the corporate guidelines), subject to a maximum allowance of £40.00 per item (this allowance will be reviewed periodically).

Loaner stock can also be ordered from stores for PPE to enable you to participate in any training that is risk assessed.

If you have exceeded your allocation and if you require additional quantities, or for more information on the process of this, you can contact [redacted]

If size amendments are required for structural firefighting PPE refer to the Personal Protective Equipment Framework

Planning a Handover
If your role requires you to give a handover, in an ideal world you would have a handover period with someone taking over your duties - but this isn't always possible. If you can't do this, this doesn't stop you pulling together a handover to give to your manager in the interim.

West Midlands Fire Service

Tips for a successful handover

1. Include your day-to-day tasks and responsibilities
2. Give access to any important documents and instructions on where to find them
3. List information on any ongoing projects or work – including status updates, deadlines, and any issues encountered
4. Divide your work clearly in to things that you will finish before you leave, and things that someone else will need to pick up
5. Detail, detail, detail!
6. Include those little bits of useful information you've picked up that it's possible only you know!

Handing over your Direct Reports

Remember in your handover that if you are a line manager, your team will be getting a new manager, and they may need reassurance about this. The more positive you are about this the more likely they are to follow your lead.



It's also a good idea to have a meeting with your replacement (if possible) to go through each team members objectives for the year and any training opportunities that have been promised so that they can continue meaningful reviews with them.

Planning your holidays

We encourage you to take any accrued holiday before and after your leave to avoid having a 'stockpile' of annual leave that may be difficult to use when you come back. Please be assured though that you will continue to accrue leave during your leave, including bank holidays.

If you choose not to return to work after your family leave, any accrued but untaken leave will be paid to you in your final pay.

Time off Sick whilst Pregnant

If you need to take time off sick during your pregnancy you should follow the normal reporting procedures in the Attendance Management Policy. Any absences due to pregnancy will not be counted to towards any absence triggers, but that doesn't mean that your manager won't want to meet with you to check on your wellbeing and see if there is anything we can do to help.

If you are absent in the 4 weeks leading up to your EWC (expected week of childbirth) however – for reasons wholly or partially due to pregnancy - your maternity leave may be automatically triggered which may be earlier than you had planned. You can speak

to your manager about this if you are concerned. This would usually be in situations where you are issued with a sick note, rather than an odd day, but will be on a case by case basis.

Continual Professional Development (CPD) Payments
CPD payments are treated as basic pay for the purposes of all family leave payment calculations. If your leave involves any period of unpaid leave, CPD payments will stop for this period, and restart when you return to work. After your return to work, your CPD payments will become subject to the normal re-assessment process the following July or following a period of 6 months whichever is the sooner.

If you are entitled to CPD for the first time while on maternity leave, you should make your manager aware of this and payment will be factored into your maternity pay. details are available.

Your Last day
When your last day finally arrives, we're sure you'll be feeling a huge mix of emotions. You'll probably have countless questions running around your head - have I finished everything I needed to? Did I manage to say goodbye to everyone? Whatever it is, we can assure you it's going to be ok! Now you can switch off and take a deep breath! You made it!



During your leave
Your manager will offer to keep in touch with you during your leave, and you can agree how this will work best for you. It's useful to agree how you are most comfortable being contacted, how frequently, and what sort of things you'd like to know. Your manager must keep you informed about promotion or job opportunities and any redundancy or restructures that may affect your role – but consider would you also like to know about new starters and leavers in the team or social events?

You are under no obligation to work during your family leave period, but you do have the option to work 10 Keeping in Touch (KIT) days – or 20 if you are taking shared parental leave. You can contact your manager to book these days or to ask about any upcoming meetings or training that you may want to attend on a KIT day. See section 12 of the Family Leave Policy has more information.

Pregnancy during Family Leave
If you become pregnant or have a further adoption placement during a period of Family Leave, you will simply need to end one before another can start and your entitlement to time off remains. However, this will likely affect your entitlement to pay for this second period. Check the policy for more details.



Returning to Work
Returning to work after a long period away can be daunting – even more so with family leave where this may involve leaving your little one more than you have been used to.



Your manager will offer to meet with you or speak to you around 4 weeks before you are due to return to discuss your return, any updates you need to know, and what you can expect when you come back – including first day arrangements if they are known, and what you will be working on. You could even use one of your KIT days to meet or come in to work for this.

If you have any concerns about returning, or any gaps you feel you have in your knowledge that you'd like support with then please let your manager know. This is a good time to also consider that if you have had a baby your body shape may have changed, so let your manager know if you need new uniform.

If you are operational and returning from maternity or adoption leave, you will not be able to return immediately to your operational duties. Your manager will prepare a return-to-work plan with the aim of re-developing your skills to return you to your duties. This plan on average will cover the first 8-12 weeks of your return. You will also need to complete a fitness test with occupational health which your manager will arrange.

If you don't believe you'll be ready to return to work on your agreed return date you'll need to let your manager know as soon as possible giving at least 8 weeks' notice. You can't extend your leave beyond 52 weeks, but your manager could explore unpaid leave with you or use of your annual leave.

If you don't think you can return to work at all, remember that if you do not return for a period of 3 months you will need to repay any enhanced pay you have received over the statutory allowance.

Breastfeeding and Returning to Work
If you are breastfeeding and planning to continue when you return to work we will fully support you and provide facilities for you to express at work. Just let your manager know and they can organise a private room and a fridge. Let them know if you also require this for any KIT days you work.

Flexible Working
If you want to change your hours or working pattern on your return to work, you will need to make a flexible working request at least 28 days before your return. For more information, take a look at the Flexible Working Policy.

Who can I ask for help?

If you need any help with the process, your manager – with the support of HR – will be able to help.



If you have any questions about your pay before or during your leave the payroll team will be able to help. They can be contacted at [redacted]

If you have any questions about Childcare Vouchers (CCV) you can contact Service Support Administration [redacted] Please note that the CCV scheme closed to new entrants in 2018 so unless you already have an open account you will not be able to apply for this and may want to explore Tax Free Childcare instead.