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| **Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service****Managers Briefing** |
| **Return to work following maternity/adoption or shared parental leave**This guidance has been produced to aid managers in supporting employees returning to the workplace following a period of maternity, adoption or shared parental leave.It is important that managers seek advice and guidance from the People Management team at the earliest opportunity to ensure that all options can be fully considered, and appropriate support and advice given. **Related Procedures** There are a number of CCC and CFRS procedures that are related to this guidance and managers should ensure that they are familiar with the contents of the following: * HR Procedure – [Maternity Adoption, Paternity, parental and Shared Parental Leave](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/view.aspx?ID=104919)
* [New and Expectant Mothers policy and risk assessment](https://cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/5901/6049/44845101756.docx)
* [Maternity Uniform Policy](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/view.aspx?id=64203)
* [HR Procedure – Work Life Balance](https://cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/5901/6049/43896115824.docx)
* Support Information on [Employee Wellbeing pages](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/employeeinformation/wellbeing/)

**Prior to Return to Work**Returning to work following a period of leave to welcome a new household member can be a daunting prospect. Individuals may have been absent for a lengthy period of time and had a range of experiences whilst away from the workplace. It is therefore important for managers to be kind and open to the fact that individuals could have various feelings and thoughts about returning to work and be willing to discuss those and take them into account when making arrangements for their return. KIT (keeping-in-touch) days can help employees on adoption/maternity/parental leave to maintain contact with the workplace and colleagues and lessen the culture shock on returning. **Meeting with the employee**Before an employee returns to work, managers should arrange to meet with them, having kept in contact whilst they have been away, this should be arranged when appropriate for individuals but in good time before the employee is due to return. The meeting could be in the workplace or a neutral venue, depending on what works best for individuals and their circumstances. Discussions should centre on the person, their feelings on returning to work (including questions or concerns), and how best to create a return-to-work plan. This conversation may take place over more than one meeting to support the person to process returning to work and what support they might need. There are various considerations that managers will need to consider, this may include the following but is not an exhaustive list: * **Occupational Health referral** - employees’ medical circumstances can change at any time whilst they are away. An Occupational Health referral could provide guidance on how any changes may impact the employee in the workplace and any recommendations to support them.
* **Individual Risk Assessment** if required
* **Return to work plan** - It is important for there to be open communication between managers and employees when individuals are returning to work after a lengthy absence, as it is natural for employees to need an adjustment period as their routine changes. To support an employee’s return to work it is helpful to create a plan. This might include working arrangements (e.g. job shadowing, phased return, modified duties), training updates, development opportunities, supportive actions, key contacts (e.g. a workplace ‘buddy’ or mentor). Actions for both parties may be documented in a letter or an action plan which can be reviewed on a regular basis whilst employees are settling back into the workplace.

**Request for change in workplace/hours**Changes in personal circumstances can mean that employees may wish to review their working pattern/location or availability. Managers should discuss this with employees and signpost/provide them with a copy of the relevant procedure:* [Worklife balance procedure](https://cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/5901/6049/43896115824.docx) (includes flexible working request procedure and career break scheme)
* [Transfer policy](https://cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/5901/6049/44778143310.docx)
* [Management of on-call availability procedure](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/eLibrary/view.asp?ID=90549)

**Challenges**Whatever the type of leave employees have been on, there are a number of challenges which they may still be facing when returning to work, as well as whole new challenges once they have returned to work and are adjusting to finding their work-life balance, which is different for everyone. Challenges can come in many forms and another reason for managers to develop trust and open communication with their employees is so they can understand their personal circumstances and provide appropriate support. Some challenges may include:* Wellbeing
* Hormonal and physical changes are taking place – changes in health and diagnosis of related conditions such as the mental health conditions examples below, can be a shock especially for people who have previously been in good health
* Broken sleep patterns
* Emotions around leaving a child with other childcare providers/arrangements
* Changes in relationships with partners and other children/dependents
* Perinatal mental health issues (PMI) – can be experienced by new parents and include, but are not limited to, postnatal depression (PND), post-traumatic stress disorder; depression and anxiety
* Change in confidence levels – inside and outside of work
* Reflection on changing personal priorities
* Obtaining job satisfaction
* Burnout – trying to ‘do it all’

**Support Available****Breastfeeding**1. When meeting with employees to discuss their return to work, managers should confirm if new parents will wish to continue to breastfeed on their return. Managers are encouraged to seek advice from the People Management team on this topic.
2. An individual risk assessment should be completed with the employee and if this assessment reveals a significant risk to them continuing to breastfeed, then modified duties/suitable alternative work should be arranged and agreed with the employee whilst they continue to breastfeed. The risk assessment will continue to be reviewed throughout and the length of the modified/alternative duties period will depend on medical advice, the availability of alternative meaningful work, training and development needs and any ongoing risks to health and safety. There is an expectation that employees will engage with their manager and other relevant teams in respect of this matter.
3. Operational members of staff will not attend operational incidents whilst breastfeeding due to the potential risk of exposure to hazardous substances which could pose a risk to their baby. Managers may seek further advice from Occupational Health by submitting a management referral.
4. Facilities will be provided for employees to rest, express and store expressed milk in a private and secure location. A fridge for storage of expressed milk will be available. Employees will not be permitted to bring their child onto the premises for nursing, although unpaid breaks may be provided to facilitate breast feeding elsewhere (e.g. at home if they live nearby to the station). In exceptional circumstances, and after full consultation and agreement from HR and advice Occupational Health, paid breaks may be considered.

**Key Contact Points**Resources and further support and be sought from the following: * Occupational Health – through management referrals for advice or (self) referral for counselling
* HR team for advice on supporting return to work steps and use of associated policies
* ‘Buddy’ – managers may discuss with employees whether they would find a workplace buddy helpful as someone to support them during the course of the work period. This must be by mutual agreement with all parties. It is an individual choice what personal information they disclose to their colleagues.
* Women in Fire Service
* Line manager
* Regular wellbeing check ins – increased 1:1 meetings between line managers and employees may form part of the return to work plan to give employees increased opportunities to celebrate progress, raise concerns, review the plan and ask for help

**Further advice**If you have any specific queries in relation to this advice you can contact the People Management Team using the [People Management Portal](https://servicecumbria.service-now.com/peoplemanagementportal) in the first instance.  |
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