

BILBROOK PARISH COUNCIL

Leave of Absence Policy

1. Policy Statement

This Attendance and Leave Policy outlines the procedures and entitlements for all types of leave of absence for employees of Bilbrook Parish Council, including annual leave, sick leave, family leave, and other forms of paid and unpaid leave. It is designed to ensure all staff receive their correct leave entitlement in accordance with their contract of employment and current UK employment law.

2. Annual Leave

Your holiday entitlement is detailed in your contract of employment. For a full-time employee, the basic entitlement is 28 days, which includes public and bank holidays. If you work part-time, your leave is calculated on a pro-rata basis.

- **The Leave Year:** This runs from April 1st to March 31st.
- **Bank Holidays for Part-Time Employees:** If a bank holiday falls on a day you do not normally work, the equivalent amount of leave is made available to you. If a bank holiday falls on a day you normally work, that day will be taken from your total annual leave balance.
- **Working on a Bank Holiday:** With the agreement of the Clerk (or the Council in the case of the Clerk), an employee may choose to work on a public or bank holiday. In this instance, the bank holiday entitlement will be added to your total annual leave balance to be taken at a later date.
- **Requesting Leave:** You must give a notice period that is at least twice as long as the leave you wish to take (e.g., two weeks' notice for one week of leave). The Council will balance your needs against those of other staff and the team's workload. If a request must be rejected, you will receive written notice at least as long as the period of leave requested. You may not normally take more than two consecutive working weeks of leave at a time. You should not make any firm holiday arrangements until you have received authorisation. Any costs incurred due to cancelling or changing prior arrangements will be your responsibility.
- **Holiday Management:** Holiday requests are managed through the online system, Bright HR. While the council is transitioning, you may still use the paper "Application for Leave" form (see Appendix 1), which should be submitted to the Clerk (or the Chair in the case of the Clerk).
- **Carrying Over and Payment:** You cannot generally carry over unused leave from one year to the next, nor will you be paid for leave you have not taken. You can carry over up to 20 days of your leave if you were unable to take it due to long-term sickness, maternity leave, or other statutory family-related leave. If you leave the council, you will receive a payment for any outstanding accrued leave. This payment will be calculated on a pro-rata basis for the part of the leave year you have worked. If you have taken more leave than you have accrued, the equivalent amount will be deducted from your final salary.

3. Sickness Absence

On the first day of sickness absence, you must notify the Clerk (or the Chairman in the Clerk's absence) as soon as is reasonably possible and before your scheduled start time. You should make contact by telephone, leaving a voicemail if they are unavailable. If a phone call is not possible due to circumstances, a message via a mutually agreed-upon alternative method, such as WhatsApp, is acceptable.

- **Short-Term Sickness (7 days or less):** For absences up to 7 consecutive days (including weekends), employees must complete a self-certification form upon their return to work. A copy of this form is included in Appendix 2.

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- **Return to Work:** Upon your return to work, you must complete and submit a self-certification form to your line manager. For absences of seven calendar days or less, your manager will confirm receipt of the form and may have a brief, informal check-in with you at a mutually convenient time to ensure you are fit to return to your duties and to see if any support is needed.
- **Long-Term Sickness (more than 7 days):** For absences over 7 consecutive days, a Statement of Fitness for Work ('Fit Note') from a GP or other medical professional is required. This must be given to the line manager as soon as it is received. The council reserves the right to request a second medical opinion from a doctor of its choice, at its own expense.
- **Sick Pay Entitlement:** Employees are entitled to Sick Pay (SSP) in line with government regulations. The council may, at its discretion, offer enhanced sick pay, but this is not a contractual right and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- **Sickness During Annual Leave:** If you become ill during a period of paid annual leave and wish for it to be recorded as sick leave instead, you must follow the sickness absence procedures. You must contact the Clerk (or the Chair in the case of the Clerk) on the first day of your illness and keep the council updated. Annual leave continues to accrue during periods of leave, such as sickness, maternity, paternity, or adoption leave.

4. Family and Parental Leave

- **Maternity Leave:** All pregnant employees are entitled to a total of 52 weeks of maternity leave, regardless of their length of service. You are also entitled to paid time off for all ante-natal care appointments.
 - **Notification Requirements:** You must notify the council in writing of your pregnancy and your planned leave start date no later than the 15th week before the expected due date. You must also provide a copy of your MATB1 form.
 - **Maternity Pay:** Eligible employees will receive Maternity Pay (SMP) for up to 39 weeks. This is paid at a higher rate for the first six weeks, followed by a standard rate for the remaining 33 weeks.
 - **Changing Your Return Date:** If you wish to return to work before the end of your 52 weeks of leave, you must provide at least 8 weeks' notice.
 - **Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days:** You may, by mutual agreement, work for up to 10 days during your maternity leave period (not during the two weeks of compulsory leave after birth) without affecting your leave entitlement.
 - **Returning to Work:** After Ordinary Maternity Leave (the first 26 weeks), you have the right to return to the same job. After Additional Maternity Leave (the last 26 weeks), you have the right to return to the same job or, if not reasonably practicable, a suitable and appropriate alternative on no less favourable terms.
- **Paternity Leave:** This policy applies to fathers, partners, or secondary adopters.
 - **Time Off for Appointments:** You have the right to take unpaid time off to accompany your partner to up to two ante-natal or adoption appointments, for a maximum of 6.5 hours per appointment.
 - **Eligibility & Entitlement:** To be eligible, you must have been continuously employed for at least 26 weeks by the 15th week before the baby is due or by the week you are matched with a child for adoption. You are entitled to take a total of **one or two weeks of paternity leave**, which can be taken in a single

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block or in two separate one-week blocks. This leave can be taken at any time within the 52 weeks following the birth or placement.

- **Notification Requirements:** You must give written notice of your intention to take leave by the 15th week before the expected date of childbirth or no more than seven days after being matched with an adopted child. You must then provide a second notice at least 28 days before the date you wish to start your leave.
- **Paternity Pay:** Eligible employees will be paid Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) for the duration of their leave.
- **Returning to Work:** You are entitled to return to the same job you held before your leave.
- **Shared Parental Leave:** Shared Parental Leave (SPL) allows you and your partner to share up to 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of pay to care for a child. This offers greater flexibility in how you manage time off in your child's first year.
 - **Eligibility:** To be eligible, you must have been continuously employed for 26 weeks by the 15th week before the baby is due, and you must remain employed by the council throughout the leave. Your partner must also meet specific work and earnings criteria.
 - **How it Works:** To begin Shared Parental Leave, the mother or primary adopter must end their maternity or adoption leave early by giving a Curtailment Notice. You can then share the remaining weeks of leave and pay. Leave must be taken in minimum blocks of one week.
 - **Booking Leave:** You must submit a **Period of Leave Notice at least 8 weeks** before the leave is due to start. You can book a single continuous block of leave, or you can request to take discontinuous blocks (e.g., take leave, return to work, then take more leave). The council reserves the right to refuse requests for discontinuous leave if it would unduly disrupt operations. You may submit a maximum of three notices to book or change periods of leave.
 - **SPLIT Days:** You may, by mutual agreement, work up to 20 days during your Shared Parental Leave without affecting your pay or leave entitlements. These are known as Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days and are paid at your normal rate.
 - **Shared Parental Pay:** Up to 37 weeks of pay can be shared between eligible parents.
 - **Right to Return:** If your total amount of leave (including any maternity or paternity leave) is 26 weeks or less, you are entitled to return to the same job. If your total leave exceeds 26 weeks, you have the right to return to the same job or, if that is not reasonably practicable, a suitable and appropriate alternative on no less favourable terms.
- **Parental Leave:** The purpose of this unpaid leave is to allow employees to care for a child under 18, which can include accompanying them to hospital, settling them into a new school, or spending more time together as a family. This is an individual right, and both parents are entitled to it.
 - **Eligibility & Entitlement:** To qualify, you must have completed one year of continuous employment with the council. You are entitled to take up to 18 weeks of unpaid leave per child, with a maximum of 4 weeks in any one year. This leave can be taken in blocks of a week (or a day at a time if the child is disabled).

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- **Notification Requirements:** You must give at least **21 days' notice** of the date you wish to start your leave. We may ask for evidence to support your request.
- **Postponement:** The council may postpone your leave for up to six months if it would unduly disrupt operations, but we will provide you with a written explanation within seven days of your request.
- **Right to Return:** If your leave is for four weeks or less, you are entitled to return to your same job. If your leave is longer than four weeks, you are entitled to return to the same job or, if that is not reasonably practicable, to another suitable and appropriate job on no less favourable terms.
- **Adoption Leave:** Employees who are adopting a child are entitled to up to 52 weeks of adoption leave and up to 39 weeks of Statutory Adoption Pay. To be eligible, an employee must have worked continuously for the council for at least 26 weeks leading into the week they are matched with a child by an approved adoption agency. Employees must also provide a Matching Certificate from the agency. During their leave, employees may, by mutual agreement with the Council, work for up to 10 'Keeping in Touch' days without their leave or pay being affected. If an employee wishes to return to work before the end of their full entitlement, they must provide at least eight weeks' notice.

5. Other Leave

- **Emergency Time Off for Dependants:** All employees can take a reasonable amount of unpaid time off to deal with unforeseen emergencies involving a dependant. A dependant for this purpose includes a spouse, partner, civil partner, child, parent, or a person who lives with you as part of the family for whom you are the main carer. It can also cover an individual who reasonably relies on you for care, for example, an elderly neighbour. This is not intended to provide ongoing care. The policy is for unplanned absence to attend to urgent or serious situations where no alternative provision is available.
 - **Reporting Your Absence:** As soon as is reasonably practicable in the circumstances, you must contact the Clerk (or in their absence the Chairman of the Council) by telephone to explain the circumstances and, if possible, give an indication of how much time you'll need. If they are unavailable, you must leave a voicemail. If this isn't possible, you should try to send an email or WhatsApp message. If you are still unable to reach them, you must contact another councillor instead, following the same procedure.
 - **Ongoing Care:** If you need to stay and care for a dependant on an ongoing basis, you can agree with the Clerk (or Chairman of the Council) to take annual leave, unpaid leave, or Parental Leave (if the care is for your child).
- **Carer's Leave:** Employees with a long-term care need can take up to one week of unpaid leave per year to provide or arrange care for a dependant. This is a right from the first day of employment. A dependant for this leave has a long-term care need, which is defined as an illness or injury that requires, or is likely to require, care for more than three months; a disability; or a need for care connected with old age. A request for carer's leave must be made in writing, specifying that the leave is for this purpose and providing the dates of the leave. You must give notice that is double the amount of time you want to take off, or at least three days, whichever is longer. The Council reserves the right to postpone your leave for up to one month if your absence would unduly disrupt business operations.

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- **Compassionate & Bereavement Leave:** We understand that employees may experience a range of distressing situations. This policy provides a compassionate framework for requesting time off for both bereavement and other serious personal events.
 - **Events Covered by this Policy:** This policy applies to various circumstances, including bereavement (the death of a spouse, civil partner, parent, or child; at the Council's discretion, this also includes the loss of a grandparent, sibling, close friend, or colleague) and compassionate situations (a close family member being seriously ill or injured, or dealing with a traumatic personal event like a home fire, flood, or a serious accident).
 - **Time Off and Support:** If you need time off, you should contact the Clerk (or the Chairman) as soon as is reasonably possible. Employees are usually entitled to up to 5 days of paid leave for a bereavement. For other compassionate situations, time off will be considered on a case-by-case basis. We will work with you to agree on an appropriate amount of paid or unpaid leave, taking your personal circumstances into account. When you are ready to return, we will discuss any adjustments that can be made to ease your transition back to work.
- **Jury Service:** Employees summoned for jury service must inform their line manager immediately and provide a copy of the summons. The council will grant time off and will only pay the difference, if any, between the employee's basic pay and the loss of earnings claimed from the court.

6. Life-Threatening Illness

The council is committed to supporting its employees in situations involving a life-threatening illness. This policy outlines the support available to employees who are diagnosed themselves, have a partner or family member diagnosed, or become a carer for someone with a life-threatening illness.

- **Key Principles:** The council will respect an employee's **privacy** and will not share sensitive information with anyone outside of the Parish Clerk, the Chairman of the Council, and the Finance and Personnel Committee without the employee's consent. We will maintain open **communication** and will be as **flexible** as possible with an employee's duties and schedule. The council will also help employees access the right **support**.
- **Support for Employees with a Life-Threatening Illness:** If you are diagnosed, you should inform the Parish Clerk to ensure you receive the necessary support. The council can help in the following ways:
 - **Time Off:** We grant reasonable paid time off for medical appointments, tests, and treatment.
 - **Adjustments:** We will make **reasonable adjustments** to your hours, work patterns, and workload and can explore flexible working options.
 - **Counselling and Health:** We can provide access to a professional counselling service and, if needed, seek advice from an occupational health professional on work adjustments.
 - **Financial Matters:** The Parish Clerk can advise you on your sickness pay entitlement and discuss options for using accrued annual leave to minimise financial hardship.
 - **Returning to Work:** When you are ready to return, we will plan a **phased return** to help you gradually build up your hours and duties. We will also

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consider permanent adjustments to your role or hours if needed, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

- **Unable to Return:** If you are unable to return to work, we strongly advise you to seek financial and pension advice before making any formal decisions.
- **Support for Carers:** If you are caring for a family member with a life-threatening illness, the council will be flexible to help you balance your work and personal life. Support may include flexible working, compassionate leave, or unpaid leave.
- **Further Information:** For more detailed guidance and external support, please refer to the list of organisations provided by the council, including Bright Wellbeing and Counselling, Macmillan Cancer Support, and others.

7. Menopause and Andropause

The council is committed to providing a supportive working environment for all employees. We recognise that hormonal changes associated with menopause and andropause can affect an employee's well-being and performance at work. We will approach these matters with empathy and confidentiality.

If you are experiencing symptoms, we encourage you to speak with your manager or the Clerk. We will discuss your needs and explore what **reasonable adjustments** can be made to your working environment or pattern to help you manage your symptoms while continuing your duties. Managers will be trained to handle these conversations sensitively.

8. General Principles

All requests for leave, other than annual leave, must be submitted in writing. For annual leave, employees must use the "Application for Leave" form (see Appendix 1) or the online system, Bright HR. The council is committed to supporting its employees and will handle all leave requests with sensitivity and confidentiality. Where an employee is unsure about their eligibility for any type of leave, they should contact the Parish Clerk for clarification.

9. Unauthorised Absence

Taking leave without prior permission will be treated as an unauthorised absence and will be handled under the Disciplinary Procedure. This may lead to disciplinary action, which could include a formal warning or, in serious or repeated cases, dismissal.

10. Absence Monitoring

The Council will monitor all employee attendance records. While we understand that occasional absence is unavoidable, if an employee has a pattern of frequent or prolonged absences, the Clerk will schedule a meeting with them to discuss the matter. The purpose of this meeting is to understand the reasons for the absence and identify any support that may be needed to improve attendance. Continued unacceptable attendance levels may be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure.

11. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed by Bilbrook Parish Council annually, or sooner if there are significant changes in legislation or best practice.

Revision History

Date of Review	Description of Revision
Sept 2025	Created from combining the annual leave, emergency dependants leave and sickness absence policies and adding other types of absence. Annual leave entitlement: Changed from 20 days plus 8 bank holidays as 28 days is the legal requirement.

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Appendix 1: Application for Annual Leave Form

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Application for leave

Name	
Dates Requested	
Leave remaining after this leave has been taken	

Approved: Date:

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Appendix 2: Employee Self-Certification Form (Sick Leave)

This form must be completed by an employee upon their return to work following an absence of up to 7 calendar days due to sickness.

Employee Details:

- **Full Name:** _____
- **Job Title:** _____

Absence Details:

- **First day of absence:** _____
- **Last day of absence:** _____
- **Total number of days absent:** _____

Reason for Absence:

Please provide a brief description of the nature of your illness or injury.

Declaration:

I declare that the information provided is a true and accurate account of my absence. I understand that for absences of more than 7 days, a 'Fit Note' from a medical professional is required.

Employee Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

For Office Use Only:

- **Manager Signature:** _____
- **Date Received:** _____
- **Notes:** _____