



Death in Service Policy and Procedure

Introduction

The death of an employee during service at West Oxfordshire District Council ('the Council') is a deeply distressing event for their family, colleagues, and the Council. It is essential that such situations are handled with compassion, dignity, and efficiency, while ensuring all legal, procedural, and contractual obligations are met.

The Death in Service Policy and Procedure ('the Policy') sets out the approach to be followed by the Council in the event of the death of an employee during their employment. It outlines the responsibilities of managers and Human Resources and the support available to the employee's family and colleagues, and the arrangements for managing pay, pension, and other benefits.

The Council is committed to treating each case with sensitivity and respect, ensuring that bereaved families receive appropriate support and that employees are informed and supported through a coordinated and respectful process.

Scope

This Policy applies to all employees of the Council, including those on permanent, temporary, and fixed-term contracts, regardless of grade or working hours, who are in active service at the time of death.

It does not apply to:

- Contractors, agency workers, or consultants
- Former employees which should be reported to the Pensions Team at Oxfordshire County Council
- Elected members (who are covered by separate provisions)

This Policy covers:

- Internal procedures to be followed upon the death of an employee
- Support for the employee's family or next of kin
- Communication with employee's and external stakeholders
- Administration of pay, pension, and death-in-service benefits
- Consideration of memorials or tributes where appropriate

The Policy is intended to ensure a consistent, compassionate, and professional response to death in service situations within a local government context.

Being Notified About the Death of a Colleague

There are several ways in which the Council may be informed of the death of a colleague. This information may come from:

- The employee's family or next of kin, who may contact the Council directly
- Another employee or close colleague who was aware of the situation
- External authorities, such as the police or emergency services, particularly in the event of a sudden or catastrophic incident (e.g. road traffic collision or natural disaster)
- Routine absence follow-up, where an employee fails to attend work without explanation, prompting contact with the individual or their next of kin

It is essential that all employees ensure their emergency contact and next of kin details are kept up to date with Human Resources, to enable prompt and appropriate communication in such circumstances.

The death of a colleague may be:

- Sudden and unexpected, causing significant shock to teams
- The result of a known long-term illness, where some employees may have been aware of the situation in advance

Regardless of the circumstances, managers must act with discretion, empathy, and professionalism. While every case will be different, the Council expects that certain key steps should be taken to ensure a respectful and coordinated response. These are set out in the sections that follow.

Who to Notify Within the Council

When the Council is informed of the death of an employee, the person receiving the information must immediately notify both:

- A member of Human Resources, and
- The line manager of the deceased colleague

Human Resources will coordinate the internal response and ensure that the following individuals and teams are notified as appropriate:

- The relevant Director, who will inform the Chief Executive
- Human Resources will notify:
 - The HR Support Centre including Payroll
- The Health and Safety Business Partner (if the death occurred in connection with work, or there are any health and safety considerations)
- The relevant Trade Union(s), if the employee was a member

The process for managing internal and external communications, is set out in the sections below.

Informing direct colleagues

In the event of the death of a colleague, clear, compassionate, and timely communication is essential. We should also ensure the wishes of the family are considered as a priority unless communication is required for critical business delivery reasons.

Internal Notification

The Director or Head of Service (as appropriate) should take responsibility for informing those closest to the deceased, typically their immediate team, as promptly and sensitively as possible so they hear it first hand and can be offered support. Where appropriate, employees affected by the death should be reminded of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and other support services available to them.

Employee Assistance Programme

All employees have access to free, confidential counselling and wellbeing services through the Council's EAP provider.

- Health Assured
 - Call: 0800 028 0199
 - Visit: <https://wisdom.healthassured.org>
 - MHA312725

In addition, support is available through Medicash via the employee portal:

- 24/7 Health & Stress Support Line
 - Call: 0151 702 0265
 - Online: <https://www.medicash.org/customer-service/>

Managers should encourage affected employees to make use of these services, particularly those who were close to the colleague or are struggling with grief.

Social Media and Public Communications

Human Resources and the Communications Team will work with the Director/ Head of Service to agree an approach to informing the wider Council about the death. Each scenario will be different, and care should be given to the wishes of the family and the impact on colleagues.

The use of social media to share or confirm the death of an employee is strongly discouraged, unless it has been formally agreed in advance with the family or next of kin, and approved by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Human Resources.

All employees are reminded that:

- Communications relating to a colleague's death should be handled with discretion, sensitivity, and professionalism
- No information should be shared publicly, including via social media, internal platforms, or messaging groups, unless the family's explicit wishes have been confirmed
- The privacy of the deceased and their family must be respected at all times

If there is any doubt about what can be shared, or how to respond to public or employee enquiries, employees must consult Human Resources for advice before making any statement.

The Council's Communications Team may support official external communications where appropriate, in coordination with Human Resources and SLT.

Funeral Attendance of a Colleague

The Council recognises the importance of supporting employees during times of loss and bereavement. Where appropriate, employees may wish to attend the funeral or memorial service of a deceased colleague to pay their respects and show support.

Time Off

- Employees will be granted reasonable paid time off to attend the funeral or memorial service of a colleague.
- Employees should seek approval from their line manager in advance and refer to the Council's Compassionate Leave Policy and Procedure for guidance on time off entitlements.
- In cases where additional time off is required, managers may consider granting unpaid leave or annual leave at their discretion, taking into account individual circumstances.

Representation at the Funeral

- Unless the family or next of kin express otherwise, it is customary for close work colleagues and/or a senior representative of the Council (such as a line manager or director) to attend the funeral or memorial service on behalf of the Council.

Supporting Employees

- Managers should be sensitive to the needs of employees who may find attending the funeral difficult and offer appropriate support and flexibility.
- Employees experiencing grief or distress are encouraged to make use of the Council's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and wellbeing services.

Covering the Deceased Employee's Duties

The Council recognises that the period following the death of a colleague can be an especially difficult time for employees.

Nevertheless, it is important for management to act promptly to ensure that the deceased employee's duties are covered. This helps to provide clarity and stability for the team and ensures the Council can continue to operate effectively without unnecessary disruption.

- If the employee was already on sick leave, their duties may already be covered by another employee
- If not, management will temporarily reassign the deceased employee's responsibilities to existing team members or consider engaging temporary support, such as agency staff, until a permanent replacement is appointed.
- Management should aim to balance operational needs with sensitivity to the emotional wellbeing of the team during this time.

Informing Third Parties of the Death of an Employee

The Senior Leadership Team, in consultation with Human Resources, must ensure that the wishes of the deceased employee's family or next of kin are fully considered when deciding how and when to notify third parties of the employee's death.

Third parties may include:

- Fellow employees outside the immediate team
- Customers, clients, or service users
- External partners, suppliers, or other contacts who had regular dealings with the employee

It is the responsibility of the employee's line manager supported by Human Resources to communicate with these third parties sensitively and appropriately, respecting confidentiality and the family's preferences.

Making Final Salary Payments

Human Resources and Payroll will work together to determine any outstanding monies owed to the deceased employee. This includes:

- Basic salary up to the date of death
- Any other accrued remuneration
- Payment for any accrued but untaken holiday entitlement

Payments will be made to the deceased employee's next of kin or, if no next of kin is identified or there is a dispute, to the deceased employee's estate.

Before making any payments, Human Resources must obtain formal proof that the individual requesting payment is the deceased's personal representative (usually the executor of the will) or next of kin. Payments should not be made to the first family member who requests them without this verification. A receipt should be obtained on behalf of the estate.

Payroll will complete a P45 form for the employee, clearly indicating that the employee has died.

The Senior Leadership Team, in consultation with Human Resources, will consider whether any outstanding debts owed by the deceased to the Council (for example, loan repayments) should be deducted from the final salary payment.

Payroll must ensure that any correspondence sent to the family or next of kin, such as payslips or forms, is not addressed to the deceased employee.

Other Payments Due on the Death of an Employee

If the deceased employee was an active member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), their surviving spouse, civil partner, or other dependents may be entitled to receive payments or benefits under the scheme.

- In such cases, a death certificate will be required as part of the claim process.
- Human Resources will liaise with the family or next of kin to request the necessary documents, including the death certificate.
- The Pension Team at the administering authority will also contact the next of kin directly to request the death certificate if it has not already been provided to Council Payroll.

Other Practical Issues Following the Death of an Employee

Following the death of an employee, there are several practical matters that need to be managed with sensitivity and care:

- Human Resources should consult with the deceased's family or next of kin to determine whether they wish to personally pack the employee's belongings or would prefer a close colleague to do so on their behalf.
- The Line Manager or Head of Service will complete a leavers form and, in coordination with IT Services, ensure the employee is deregistered from all Council systems and relevant contact lists (e.g., internal directories, websites, phone lists). Computer files will be securely held and kept confidential until instructions are received regarding their deletion.
- Human Resources will notify all relevant internal departments and external organisations, such as trade unions, of the employee's death. This will help prevent the family or next of kin from receiving employment-related correspondence addressed to the deceased.
- In cases of death occurring at the Council or where circumstances suggest an investigation is appropriate, the Health and Safety Business Partner will liaise with the Council to consider initiating an internal enquiry.
- For deaths related to incidents with potential legal or insurance implications, the Health and Safety Business Partner will coordinate with the Council's insurance providers and legal advisors. Copies of all relevant incident reports and investigations should be promptly forwarded to the Health and Safety Business Partner.
- Human Resources will update the employee's personnel records to ensure that no inappropriate contact is made after their death.

Version Control:	
Document Name:	Death in Service Policy and Procedure
Version:	1.0
Responsible Officer:	Strategic People Lead
Approved by:	Performance and Appointments Committee
Date First Approved:	25 th March 2026
Next Review Date	March 2029
Retention Period:	This Policy will be reviewed every three years, or earlier if new legislation requires it.