

Work and Pensions Committee

Oral evidence: Support for Carers, HC 581

Wednesday 10 January 2018

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Members present: Frank Field (Chair); Heidi Allen; Andrew Bowie; Jack Brereton; Alex Burghart; Emma Dent Coad; Ruth George; Chris Green; Steve McCabe; Chris Stephens.

Questions 1- 60

Witnesses

I: Emily Holzhausen OBE, Director, Carers UK, Sarah Jackson OBE, Chief Executive, Working Families, and Moira Wilkinson, Network Manager, Carers Trust.

II: Nicola Best, Building Better Opportunities Project Mentor, Northamptonshire Carers, Fiona Malpas, Project Manager, Carers Support Centre (Bristol and South Gloucestershire), and Joanne Speed, Former CEO, Dove Service (Staffordshire).

III: Laurence Beckett, People Business Partner, Savings and Retirement, UK, Aviva, and Arthur Allen MBE, Founder, Listawood.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Carers UK](#)
- [Working Families](#)
- [Carers Trust](#)
- [Northamptonshire Carers](#)
- [Carers Support Centre \(Bristol and South Gloucestershire\)](#)
- [Aviva](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Emily Holzhausen OBE, Director, Carers UK, Sarah Jackson OBE, Chief Executive, Working Families, and Moira Wilkinson, Network Manager, Carers Trust.

Q1 Chair: Sarah, might you begin, please, by saying who you are, for the sake of the record? I will then ask people along the table to identify themselves equally for the record.

Sarah Jackson: I am Sarah Jackson. I am the Chief Executive of Working Families, a UK work-life balance charity. We are here particularly because we support a network of parents of disabled children who have particular difficulties combining work and home. We also work with employers—our employer members—many of whom are showing leading good practice in support for carers in the workplace.

Emily Holzhausen: I am Emily Holzhausen. I am Director of Policy and Public Affairs at Carers UK. We are an organisation that represents and is made up of family members and close friends who care for their relatives. We are here today because we also provide a lot of advice and information; they tell us their experiences. We work very closely with Working Families. We also have an Employers for Carers network of about 130 good practice employers. We have quite a lot of different range of experience.

Moira Wilkinson: I am Moira Wilkinson. I am Network Manager at Carers Trust. Our organisation is made up of a network of local carer support organisations, providing detailed and one-to-one support for carers across the UK. We also have some employment projects on which we are working with carers to help them back into employment.

Chair: We want to emphasise that in this session we are seeking your advice on combining caring and working.

Q2 Ruth George: Could you start us off by saying in turn what you feel are the main challenges faced by people who are trying to juggle their caring responsibilities with paid work?

Sarah Jackson: From our point of view, the first is that when you become a carer that is often the point at which you drop out of the workforce because it all seems too difficult. What we think would really help, and parents have told us would help, would be a period of paid adjustment leave, which is different from the day-to-day carer leave to manage the condition that you are caring for. This would be a period of weeks to adjust to new family circumstances and then come back and talk to your employer about how you stay on.



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We know that one of the real barriers to both remaining in work and getting a new job is the lack of suitable flexible working opportunities. We are saying we need a jobs revolution in the UK. All jobs should be designed, thought through and then advertised flexibly, as the Prime Minister has recently called for. That will open up the jobs market to those who have the skills and the motivation but cannot find the opportunity.

The final thing is the cost of childcare. The cost of caring for a disabled child is, in many cases, at least double the cost of caring for a child who is not disabled. There is the tax-free childcare scheme, which Government thought about and very generously has increased the allowance for a parent who has a disabled child from £10,000 to £20,000, but if you cannot afford £10,000 you cannot afford £20,000 either. It would be much more effective to double the tax-free contribution from 20% to 40%.

Emily Holzhausen: We have done a lot of research with families and employers over the years and people have several real issues with juggling work and care. The first is that people do not identify themselves as carers and find it very difficult to find a pathway through information and advice. They do not always get the right support that enables them to juggle work and care. I am sure you know that it is extremely difficult trying to knit up the health service, the benefit system and social care services, which have been under extreme pressure.

People are also concerned that they will not have a supportive employer, and we have mixed experiences of that. We have an excellent practice of supportive employers and we can see where employers do not understand the issue of caring. It is like the childcare movement was almost 20 years ago where people are worried about raising those issues in the workplace for fear of some challenge from the employer. There is a real difficulty for people. About one in nine employees has a caring responsibility, and it will be exactly the same here within the Houses of Parliament with colleagues who have caring responsibilities. There is an issue in finding the right care, knowing where to look, having a supportive employer and what the rights and entitlements are within the workplace.

We are very lucky to work with some very supportive employers who are trying to look at the ageing population that we have and trying to keep people in employment, but the rights space is quite underdeveloped. A parent with a disabled child has improved rights within the workplace. As soon as that child is 19 and moves up through the age spectrum, they have the right to request flexible working and to take emergency time off, but beyond that we are asking for a right to paid care leave of between five and 10 days. We have done work internationally and looked across the world, and we are lagging behind other countries on that front. Other countries—especially Japan, with a much advanced ageing population—have looked to keep women, in particular, in the workplace,



but of course that applies equally to men who have caring responsibilities.

Moirá Wilkinson: I absolutely endorse everything that these two have said. The very clear experience of the carers we have been working with closely in London, for example, in the last year on our Working for Carers programme is lack of good social care and availability, and cost is one of the huge barriers. People are really fearful of being able to get that sort of care when they need it. Flexibility is the key issue. People need flexible working. Lots of carers are looking for self-employment, mainly because they feel that is the only way that they will be able to work flexibly enough. That is great and we are able to support and encourage them, but if flexibility was written into all job contracts it would not be something special for carers. It would be something that is normal and we are moving towards that with people working from home, with the technology and so on, but I think that issue needs to be raised.

The other issue that has come to light in the one-to-one work we have been doing with carers is the lack of confidence, because a lot of people have been out of the workplace for maybe 10, 20 years. Some have been out for less time than that but feel that they have lost skills and confidence. The workplace has changed; I have seen it changing enormously over those years. It is difficult to have the confidence to move back into that. In the one-to-one support, just for short periods most of the time, we have been able to give an understanding of their needs and helped people to recognise the skills that they have built up. They have built up skills while they have been at home caring but they are not able to recognise those. Being able to give people that little boost and bit of support has helped a lot of the carers to move back into employment.

Q3 **Ruth George:** Sarah, you touched on the cost of childcare but you did not particularly talk about financial pressures. What are the financial pressures that carers face moving in and out of employment?

Emily Holzhausen: Can I answer that question? There are huge penalties, of course, in giving up work to care. We found that about 2 million people have given up work to care. The pensions contributions of, in particular, women who have been caring are several percentage points lower, which has been pointed out by John Cridland in his future pensions review. Families find it incredibly difficult to afford social care. We found in our survey that of those who gave up work to care, for about half the reason was because affordable social care was not available, and that continues to be a concern where we have an ageing population.

The loss of income is approximately £15,000 a year, which we measured several years ago. That is just one in-year cost for a family, but it depends on the family. People face significant financial challenges. If they come on to the benefit system, Carer's Allowance is the main benefit that they can claim, if they are entitled to it, and that is one of the lowest benefits of its kind. It is £64.10, which is lower than Jobseeker's



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Allowance, and for that they have to be providing at least 35 hours care a week.

There are significant pressures on people. We need people to stay in work for as long as possible. They want to stay in work for as long as possible, and they also see it as a change and a difference from caring. Some even call it a break from caring, and it is vital for a family's financial resilience long term to be able to have the choice about juggling work and care.

Q4 Chair: You talked about 10 to 15 days' paid care. Where does the figure come from?

Emily Holzhausen: Five to 10 days. We have looked around at different policies and what is currently within the labour market with employers. We felt that that was a reasonable start. Japan looks at 93 days, which is very much higher. It is not too dissimilar to what public sector employees have in the United States, and it is a step on and a slight step up, so we thought that that would be more of a manageable level. It would be where it is not necessarily an emergency but is important. It might be helping smooth discharge from hospital or arranging for new care arrangements, somebody going into residential care, or helping a disabled family member move house. There is a whole range of different circumstances where that would be useful. What employers say and the evidence from carers is that at the moment, if there is an absence of a very clear policy with an employer, people either take their annual leave, which makes them very tired, or they take sick days, neither of which is really desirable in the workplace.

Q5 Alex Burghart: I am sorry to ask you detailed questions about the system in Japan, but obviously 93 days puts it in an entirely different universe to what we have here. It sounds very interesting. Are there any aspects of the Japanese system that you would recommend to us? Do you know how the Japanese system is funded?

Emily Holzhausen: I don't know how the Japanese system is funded. I will have to come back with a note to the Committee about that. There is a range of different ways that systems are funded across the world. Some are employer-funded, some are part state-funded in what people receive and how that paid care leave is paid. If you don't mind, I will come back. Japan is reviewing its work-life balance policies at the moment to increase the range and the breadth, simply because of the ageing population structure and the need to have more women in work and the familial responsibilities they have for care.

Q6 Heidi Allen: I am trying to imagine the scenarios. There can be workers who suddenly find themselves becoming carers and drop out of work as a consequence, or those who have been caring for some time and perhaps their elderly relative passes away and they are ready to come back. Can you talk me through how much employers get those two categories of people, and what they are doing or what they can do to help that? It strikes me that particularly with disability and an ageing population, this



is going to get bigger and, whatever you think about Brexit, access to workforce might become difficult. We will come on to the DWP angle and what they can do to support later, but do employers get that this is possibly a ticking timebomb for them workforce-wise? I am thinking of all the skills of resilience and adaptability in those carers who have not been in work for a while. They might need to learn new skills, but they have been doing really difficult jobs. Do employers get keeping people in work and also bringing them back in again?

Moira Wilkinson: There are employers who get it but they are probably not the majority. There are lots of employers who are becoming quite interested in finding out how they can support carers within the workplace. It is often the larger companies that are starting to set up carers' networks and so on.

Q7 **Heidi Allen:** Is this to keep existing employees?

Moira Wilkinson: I am thinking about for keeping existing employees, yes, and I think that is really important. You are right; losing carers from your workforce is bad for everyone, bad for the carers and for the company. I think we need to work really hard to get people to understand how they can support the carers to stay in work. Many carers say, "I just couldn't cope. My husband had a stroke and then this happened. Everything crashes in on you and the solution is to leave your job". That is not really the best solution, as you realise at a later stage. I think it is something we need to focus on and do a lot more work on. Employers for Carers has been doing this work and it is starting to have an impact but, frankly, I think we would all agree there are many employers out there who just don't get it.

Q8 **Heidi Allen:** Are they small employers more typically?

Moira Wilkinson: It varies. If an employer has had experience of a carer in the workplace and has been able to understand what would help that person, they get it. People do not think about caring until it comes and hits you in the face. That is the truth for all of us. It is not something that people go around thinking, "I might be a carer". You probably will be a carer one day but it is not something we think about, is it? We don't think about it until it happens.

Q9 **Heidi Allen:** We have talked a lot about flexibility. Are there any other ideas as to what more employers can do to keep people in work and also bring the carers in?

Moira Wilkinson: I think being open within a company that it is okay to be a carer and it is okay to talk about that, because carers very much keep it a secret. They feel that they will be seen as less good, they will not be considered for promotion and they will not be given the better jobs because they are seen as less reliable, perhaps. It is openness and an ability to talk about the fact that it is okay to be a carer, it is okay to talk about your caring role and it is okay to make adjustments for that. It



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does not mean you do less; it just means you may work differently. Flexibility and openness are really important.

Emily Holzhausen: There are a few different mechanisms and Sarah has a very important thing that she needs to add. Leadership: we have found that quite often a senior champion within a company is someone with caring responsibilities—men and women. That makes a huge amount of difference. There are mechanisms like a specific carers' policy, because people do not understand that special leave might also apply and so on. Line manager training is absolutely critical. We come back time and again to understanding how to apply these different flexibilities.

There are different mechanisms like a carers' network, and British Gas has had a carers' network for several years. It is one of the longest running, it has been awarded by Working Families and over 1,000 employees are part of it. It is a very supportive network. There are things like carers' passports as a way of describing your situation and talking about informal flexibility within the workplace. That is something that has been run out through companies like BT. I have been driving along and heard an advert for BT, which has, in the past, positively advertised flexibility and mentioned caring responsibilities for older people, and that is really valuable.

Sarah Jackson: The first challenge for business is to understand the scale of the business risk. If you think that one in nine of your people is likely to have caring responsibilities, that is quite a number of people who may be about to leave. Another thing you should be thinking about is that there is a vast pool of talented people who are looking to get in. I thought it would be useful to talk about two specific examples of employers who are addressing the challenge of making it clear that they are carer-friendly organisations. Coincidentally, they are both in Scotland.

One is a small organisation, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which is based over a scattered number of locations, and the other is West Dunbartonshire Council, which is obviously a big employer. Highlands and Islands has an HR team champion for carers and every new recruit has a personal interview at which the HR champion explains what the organisation's carer policies are and encourages the person, if they already have care responsibilities, to join the informal carers' register in the organisation. The really important thing it is doing is establishing from the get-go that this is an organisation that will positively support you if you become a carer or if you already are.

West Dunbartonshire Council is the first Scottish local authority that has adopted the "happy to talk flexible working" approach to recruitment, which is to analyse every job before you advertise it and make it explicit within the advert and the role description what flexibility is available. That means that they are now asking all prospective employees if they wish to work flexibly and, if so, how, so that the fit can be worked out. On top of that, they have introduced a scheme where—subject to the



criteria of the post, obviously—for almost all jobs they will guarantee you an interview if you are returning from a period of carer's leave and you have been out of the workforce for a time. It is beginning to try to tackle that loss of confidence that Moira was talking about earlier.

There you have two very different organisations that are beginning to understand the importance of retaining and attracting carers and are also understanding that the point of recruitment is when you can start establishing the culture. What we see among our best practice organisations is super policies—lovely policies—many of which Emily has referred to, but there is often a big gap between policy and lived experience. A lot of that is down to the communication of it within the organisation. You have to keep selling all your work-life balance policies as though they were one of your products, because otherwise people forget. When something happens in your life, you do not go and look at the staff handbook, which is wodge thick. You just try to deal with the situation, and for carers that often means throwing up your hands and saying, "I'm off".

Q10 Heidi Allen: The recruitment angle is very important. When I reflect on my team, you have a laptop, you work from home and you have kiddies who might get ill. Having children, in some ways—you should have a flexible workforce policy for all kinds of people. We have not touched much on getting in people who have been out of work for a long time. I am hearing a lot about retaining. Is there anything you can add about bringing them in?

Emily Holzhausen: We did some work with British Gas about 18 years ago—a funded pilot—and then later some European-funded work. Much of what we found was echoed in current work being done by Carers Trust. On returning to work, the distance from the labour market is almost accelerated because of the isolation of caring, which might take up so much of your time. There is a huge loss of confidence. Even people who were well qualified and had very good skills had that loss of confidence that needed building to get back into the labour market.

One of the two biggest challenges of getting people back, as well as the loss of confidence, is some of the tricky benefits regulations. All the benefits have changed very significantly over that time, such as the earnings limit on Carer's Allowance. The other, if people are still caring, is the double bind that they are in, and again an analogy can be made with childcare. Until you have reliable care and you know that the person you are caring for is safe at home and is having a positive life, you can't work. You can't work until you have the care. We have looked at, "You could go to your local authority and ask for a carer's assessment" and asked how long that has taken. It takes between three and six months, and there are not necessarily the guaranteed outcomes of the social care that you might need to get back into work, even though that beautifully crafted piece of legislation also says that work is very important. There is a mismatch between what people want to do and what people can do.



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I can tell you about the earnings limit on Carer's Allowance. From April 2018 it will have gone up from £116 to £120 a week after certain deductions, and we very much welcome that increase. The problem is that it does not link with the national living wage.

Chair: We want to come on to that a bit later.

Q11 **Chris Stephens:** My colleague asked about whether there is a difference between large businesses and small businesses. Are there any particular problems with some sectors of the economy when it comes to employing carers, for example where shift changes are prevalent, either to work additional hours or where there is a shift cancellation?

Emily Holzhausen: It is really interesting, because one person's flexibility is another person's rigidity. There was a carer who worked in a shift pattern with exactly that issue. He was caring for his wife with MS and for him it was a fixed shift pattern. The care assistants would come in, hopefully on time but not always on time—of course, that affected his ability to work—but with the fixed shift pattern he could organise the care with his wife and for his wife. That was an impossibility for him without a shift pattern, and he had small children as well, so that kind of fixed shift is really important. For others a more flexible shift pattern is ideal, but they need to be able to negotiate that. That is important for the employers that we work with—people like London Underground. They work that through within those environments.

Q12 **Andrew Bowie:** It has been suggested in written evidence, and we have heard today, that there is a lack of consistency across the board in how employers deal with carers. The MS Society said that it was very much down to luck, which is obviously unfortunate. Do you think the DWP could be doing more to support carers in employment? If so, what should they be doing?

Sarah Jackson: A very simple thing to do is train up the work coaches. What we know is that carers' experience of work coaches and trying to get back into work varies hugely. There is no consistency, so one work coach will be incredibly understanding of your care responsibilities and the restrictions and constraints that those create; and another will not be, and you will be quickly into the sanctions system. Proper training to enable work coaches to understand what caring means, and to give them the confidence to use their discretion to support people case by case, would really help.

Emily Holzhausen: I absolutely agree with that. More flexibility around the types of support mechanisms would help carers back into work. There used to be a fund that would support carers' training. One of the challenges was that it was not hugely known about across the DWP. It does not exist in that form any more, but that could be looked at. Carer awareness training fits very well with that. We have developed a new learning tool that looks at helping carers regain their confidence and look at the skills that they have attained while they have been caring on their



pathway back to work. It is based on a model that we did years ago with City and Guilds but was no longer funded. We hope to be able to work with DWP to look at how that might be used with carers to accredit their skills to get back into work.

One final thing I would say is that there is quite a strong link between health and work and caring. Perhaps that is something that the DWP could look at in the future. They have looked at work and disability in significant depth, but not at health and work and caring. That would be an area of development.

Moira Wilkinson: Where the DWP are working well with their local carers' organisations they can do some very focused work with carers. It raises awareness of the needs of carers by the staff in the DWP but it also helps to link the carers in with local support. That can very quickly help to boost their confidence and give them the little bit of extra support they need.

Q13 **Andrew Bowie:** Are there examples of that happening now?

Moira Wilkinson: The Working for Carers programme in London is one of the Lottery-funded programmes. We are working closely with the DWP in most of the areas now and helping carers get back into work quite quickly, in some cases, because they are ready to think about it. They are coming to us because they are ready to think about it. They do not quite have the confidence to go out there and find the work. Understanding their needs and their situation is what really helps them; it gives them the confidence.

Q14 **Andrew Bowie:** You are talking more about a cultural shift?

Moira Wilkinson: It is probably a cultural shift within the DWP. It is a mind shift, I suppose, in the carers. They start with no confidence and a feeling that they will not be able to work and they do not have anything to offer, but actually they are able to build their confidence through having someone who understands the situation and through meeting with other carers and seeing how it works.

Q15 **Andrew Bowie:** Do you think a cultural shift within the DWP would then translate into a cultural shift across the board?

Moira Wilkinson: I think it would help. They can help with employers as well to raise the things that we have been talking about, such as flexibility and so on, because they have the contacts. That would be a really good way to go forward.

Q16 **Chair:** The Committee is concerned about how we can put a more human face on sanctions. We agree with sanctions, but it is how they are applied sometimes. Sarah—well, all of you—might you give us examples of where they have been applied well, in the sense that people have not able to turn up for interviews or progress in jobs because of their caring responsibilities and DWP has been very understanding about that, and



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where that has not occurred, so that we can think about making recommendations to the DWP to try to get up to the best standards?

Sarah Jackson: I think the best thing is that we go away and get you some examples.

Q17 **Chair:** Would you do that?

Sarah Jackson: Yes, definitely.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Nicola Best, Building Better Opportunities Project Mentor, Northamptonshire Carers, Fiona Malpas, Project Manager, Carers Support Centre (Bristol and South Gloucestershire), and Joanne Speed, Former CEO, Dove Service (Staffordshire).

Q18 **Chair:** Like the other panel, might you go down the table and introduce yourselves, please?

Nicola Best: My name is Nicola Best. I work for a charity in Northamptonshire called Northamptonshire Carers, which has been going for 26 years. I am currently in the role of supporting working carers and also working under Building Better Opportunities, which has been referred to, for helping carers get back into work. Northamptonshire was one of the nine pilots in the Carers in Employment scheme, which was linked to the Department of Health, Department for Work and Pensions and the Government Inequalities Office.

Joanne Speed: I am Joanne Speed. I am the former Chief Executive of the Dove Service, which was one of the nine pilots in the Carers in Employment scheme. I am currently the Finance Director of a charity called Saltbox based in Stoke, Staffordshire, which also works with carers. I would like to add that I have personal experience of caring for elderly relatives and working at the same time, while having children. I am one of the sandwich generation.

Fiona Malpas: I am Fiona Malpas. I am the Project Manager for Carers in Paid Employment and the BBO project, getting people back into work as well as maintaining them in work, in Bristol and South Gloucestershire. I was also one of the nine pilot sites for the project.

Q19 **Jack Brereton:** I would like to welcome you all, particularly Joanne from Stoke-on-Trent. As the MP for Stoke South, I know that you do some fantastic work, particularly with Saltbox, in the area. I want to ask particularly about the pilot that Nicola has mentioned and some of the things that have happened there—some of the improvements and the challenges that you faced with those pilots.

Nicola Best: The disappointment here is that the final report has not been published. It is a real shame that Sally, the professor who led the



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institute's evaluation studies, is not here on the panel. We understand the reasons for that. Fiona will speak on another of the pilots, but we were all doing very different things. There is some really exciting stuff coming out about different ways of working, but it very much shows—this picks up on the previous discussion— that there is not one fix that fixes all, and you do need to be flexible and look at different things.

In Northamptonshire we have been supporting carers for years, so we decided our bid was to focus on working with employers. They are mostly small and medium-sized enterprises in Northamptonshire. There are a lot of logistics companies. We decided that we wanted to take the information into them to get them to think about, "You do have carers in your organisation. What are you doing for them? How can you retain them?" We used a lot of the information that Emily and Moira have been talking about to get them to look at their policies, and we approached it in that way. The pilot has ended, we do not have any funding for it and local authorities can't give us any money to do it. Despite that, we are managing somehow to keep it going one day a week to carry on supporting employers. We have a core group of seven employers who act as peer support. We have developed our website, where carer-friendly employers can use our logo to say that they are carer-friendly employers. That helps them recruit other carers. It is picking up on a lot of the stuff that you were talking about in the previous session.

Joanne Speed: The first thing I want to say is what a tremendous success the pilots were, and thank you to Government for funding those pilots. They were very innovative and very informative, and I think the learning programme that has come out of that for the organisations, and for the statutory partners as well, will be shown in the final report.

During the pilot the Dove Service worked with over 400 individual carers, 25 large employers of 250 staff or more and 60 SMEs, and we ran four events on business parks. The key to that was partly that through the Chambers of Commerce, of which we were a member, we were able to access a lot of different resources and networks to get to employers. One of the key challenges was how to get employers, managing directors and senior staff to listen to you and to wake up to the fact that this is a growing and significant problem that will impact our workforce. Through those networks, although it was a challenge, we were incredibly successful because we had the right people on board. I would emphasise the role of DWP in helping to open those doors and the partnership that we had together.

The other side was the carers, and I would like to concentrate predominantly on carers who were currently in the workplace in those organisations. They did not want to be identified. They felt at risk of discrimination from colleagues and managers. They thought that people would feel as though carers might have a lesser workload, for example, or that others would be covering for them. There was a real fear of being identified, and it was very much an education process on both sides—for



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employers and for the employee—about the fact that it was okay to come out and share your story, and to be honest about your situation. It would affect your long-term prospects, because potentially you would not be able to stay in employment if you did not have an understanding manager and employer all the way up the line.

The final thing to say is that one of the challenges was the disjointed availability of services, and I think most of the pilots experienced that. There is very much a postcode lottery when it comes to local statutory services, lack of provision and lack of affordability of some of that provision. If you have sufficient income, whether you had Carer's Allowance or not, it was a case of whether you could access the support and whether it was there in the first place. I would like to come back to that at some point.

Fiona Malpas: Like Nicola, we engaged quite a few local businesses and local carers. The success in Bristol and South Gloucestershire was the fact that we managed to engage with over 300 carers for information, advice and guidance and give 150 carers more than just information, advice and guidance—one-to-one support. Employers-wise, for us, DWP were a good success. We managed to engage with them locally and do some things with them in looking at local policies. A local Aviva site took part in its We Care pilot, which I am sure we will come on to later on. Rolls-Royce was another one that was deemed to be a really good employer and started doing a lot of work with us.

In total, we engaged with over 20 different employers. We found that there was not really a requirement from the SME market, and they did not really want to engage with us. It was more the larger employers. That did come with some struggles, because although they would engage you with locally, they wanted something that was more of a national fit and we were only able to offer something on the local level. We did some stuff with the local hospital trust and we have some carer strategies that are going in there, but it has taken a lot longer to get anything moving with those. It has been two years, and they are still in the implementation stages.

One of the biggest challenges for us was that when we went to speak to businesses, we did not have a named Government sponsor for the project. It was all, "We are doing this project and these are the three bodies that are funding it" but there was nobody with a name behind it to really push it forward, which was a real shame. It is something that we asked for within the project, but that did not seem to come to fruition. Lack of legislation meant that it was not a priority for a lot of businesses. They had other demanding needs, and Brexit and whatever else was going on, so it was always pushed back to something they would look at another day. Lack of understanding and flexibility of working practices was also key for a lot of businesses, but that is something we are trying to help with.



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For those we engaged with at a senior level, we found that it sat at the senior level and they all bought into it, but operationally it never hit the ground running. That may be something to be looked at. I suppose it is more about the people you meet. You may build a great relationship with somebody, but unfortunately people move on and once you have lost that link it is difficult to re-engage with people. It was taking up to six months just to get our foot through the door to have a conversation with these people in the first place.

Q20 Jack Brereton: What things do you think need to be done to ensure that the good practice and the lessons learned can continue into the future?

Nicola Best: There were nine pilots across the country. For me, it is again about the postcode lottery. It is linking up with carers' organisations and getting the message out there. I believe it needs to be top down, and it needs to be supported by the Government. We were very disappointed that the workplace charter is being monitored by environmental health officers. When we first met our Department of Health lead they did not know anything about it, and carers were not put into the workplace charter. Opportunities have been missed, and we need cross-Government discussions. It needs to be top down and referred to. It is about information and education. It is very labour intensive, as Fiona has described, so you need people at the coalface doing it and we do not have funding to do that. Local authorities are being hit and fundraising is very difficult now. I believe it is about making that somebody's responsibility.

Joanne Speed: To reiterate some of what colleagues have said, a range of things can be done. I think the carer passport system is quite integral to helping employers and carers to navigate systems. I do not see why it is not being rolled out right across the country, rather than just with statutory organisations, and I do not see why it cannot operate like the Blue Badge scheme as something that anybody has access to providing they meet certain eligibility criteria. It should be easy to obtain, and I would suggest a full rollout of that for all relevant entitled carers. I think the carer leave entitlement is a very important option, but I appreciate the cost implications of that, particularly for small employers. That does need to be considered, researched and examined in more detail.

Access to assistive technologies is another thing. The whole technology market, as we all know, is opening up so many options. Tolling out some of these schemes on a free basis for carers could make life-changing differences. We had a small budget of £200 per carer, for a pilot of just 20 people, to roll out some assistive technologies, and some of that was adaption aids. A lot of it was just apps and things like that on smartphones, but there was a monthly subscription fee to pay, and facilitating the cost of that made a big difference to some of those carers. There are some very simple things like that, and I think there is the potential for legislative change.

Chair: We are going to come on to that.



Joanne Speed: That is absolutely fine. The other thing I wanted to refer to concerns the postcode lottery, particularly for older carers; that was one of our specialisms where we were working. We have this national system for parents returning to work, whereby the nursery provision that we all expect—absolutely standardised free care for two, three and four year-olds for a certain number of hours per week—is just embedded in the system. Why are we not employing such a system for people who want to be and are able to be in the workplace, to give them access to a similar kind of care provision? I realise the cost implications of this; however, it is embedded for parents returning to work but not for carers. We need a systemic change and shift in our culture and thinking to move that, particularly with our ageing population and the big problem that this is becoming.

Fiona Malpas: I think the evaluation could get lost unless it is shared with the right people, so it is really key that it goes to businesses throughout the UK. Nicola has talked about getting funding and being able to push this forward. It is difficult to have somebody on the ground who is working with businesses to support them and the carers in the businesses, but without that link or the funding to do that, it might, unfortunately, just get lost.

Q21 **Steve McCabe:** Joanne, when you were making your observation about access to nursery provision—I can understand the moral argument you are making—you said, “I realise there would be cost implications”. Have you given any thought to how a system like might be funded if it were to be introduced?

Joanne Speed: I have not given a lot of thought to it, to be honest. It is really just observations about how we operate in society and the cultural shifts that are potentially needed. It is more that there is a huge gap there. In some local authority areas, some day-care provision still exists and is statutorily funded through social care. In other local authorities a lot of the day-care provision has been closed down. When my mother-in-law was caring for my father-in-law with early onset dementia at the age of 50, she was able to access great local day-care provision for a day a week to give her a carer’s break, and it was all free. We have nothing like that any more these days. Many places have been closed down, and it is very much down to funding of local carer organisations and charities—again, to a greater or lesser extent—where something like that is available. I think it is an immense challenge and something that has to be looked at from a Treasury perspective.

Chair: We will maybe look at that our report. Thank you very much. I want to move on.

Q22 **Jack Brereton:** In terms of the variability that you have mentioned across the country, what do you think are the challenges in terms of rolling that out and rolling out these good practices to ensure that carers are supported properly? As you said, much is reliant upon charitable organisations who offer very different services in each of their areas.



What are the challenges of rolling these sorts of services out?

Nicola Best: I think the core services are there, potentially, whether they are being offered by Carers Trust or another voluntary sector organisation. There are carers' organisations in most of the country, it is fair to say, and a lot of us are doing very similar things. Because there is a statutory responsibility to do things like carers' assessments—looking at personal budgets, direct payments and that sort of thing—I think that infrastructure is there, potentially, but it does need some funding. Certainly, there is the funding issue.

Joanne Speed: I would reiterate that.

Q23 **Emma Dent Coad:** My question is about potential changes to the law or national policy, with your expertise and very clear frustrations in your work. From what we have been hearing earlier, thinking about, for example, people who provide care for people who need it, whether they are children or adults, are providing a service that is saving us money, saving the taxpayer money, that is clearly not accepted, is it? It is normally seen as women's work, to be honest, isn't it, which is a problem? I have done it, too, so we know what we are talking about.

We were hearing earlier about normalising flexibility—that that could be part of future national policy—whether it is for illness, childcare or caring for adults and social care. I have not heard about job sharing yet this morning. We are talking about a cultural shift, and saying that perhaps these things should be imposed. It should not just be a good thing that is good to have, which helps women—because it is mostly women, unfortunately—to look after whoever it is; there should be a statutory responsibility. Given those points that I have been picking up, what changes to legislation or national policy would be most helpful?

Fiona Malpas: For me it is more about having a carers' policy for most organisations that has flexibility and leave attached to it. We work with the local trusts near us in their recruitment policies to offer flexibility, such as bank work. Bank work is only flexible for the organisation; it is not flexible for the person who is working it. They miss out on all different kinds of rights as an employee, and also on money. You cannot pay a mortgage on bank work, but that is what they class as flexibility.

I do think there is a huge culture change that needs to happen as well with the way that organisations look at their policies and the way they put things forward. I have found that in the stuff we have done with Aviva. We have never had good before, so what does good look like? In my eyes Aviva's policy is what good looks like. It is having something we can take out to businesses and say, "This is what good looks like, and this is what we are hoping you will get to". I think at the moment it is difficult to know what it should look like, because there has not been anything to compare it against currently.

Joanne Speed: In terms of job share, what most of us would recognise is that carers do not necessarily prefer job share. That might be relevant



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to a particular role. What they are looking for is part-time working and flexibility, bearing in mind what the previous panel was saying. One person's flexibility is another's rigidity, and you have to be very careful. One size does not fit all with this. I think part-time working—the whole employer policy side—is very, very important.

It is great having hallmarks, best practice and what have you, but small employers often do not have the resource or the drive to put this into practice because they have other priorities. We need to think through how we can work, particularly with the SMEs. Larger companies are very good at this, because they want to be seen to be leading edge and get the kudos from that, but smaller companies are not. That is what we really need to focus on and think about with Chambers of Commerce, DWP and information and education programmes for employers.

Nicola Best: I do not necessarily think all the big companies are doing it. I would not agree on that. I would also say that certainly in our county it is about 60:40 female to male, but the males have different needs so you need a different approach.

I was part of the parliamentary roundtable that reported to Alistair Burt and Ros Altmann a couple of years ago, and we talked about a lot of this. We were expecting a Care Act to come out and we were expecting new legislation. Unfortunately, it did not happen. I would bring you back to what is in this carers' strategy. As a carer, your wellbeing can have a huge impact, so it is about enabling those with caring responsibilities to fulfil their employment potential. It is written down, it is in the strategy, so let's put some teeth on it, I would say.

With regard to making these things happen, are a lot of companies want to do it. Certainly, the smaller companies that I have worked with want to do it, but they do not necessarily know how. We must not chastise them and say that they are not doing it; we need to give them the tools. We have developed the tools. There is a lot of expertise from Carers UK and Employers for Carers, and now there are the nine pilots. Let's get that report out there, and let's get the tips out to people to help them do it and offer them a bit of help to do it.

Q24 **Chair:** Does every Government Department have a carers' policy?

Nicola Best: I do not think it does. I do not know, I will admit, but I do not think it does.

Chair: And local authorities?

Nicola Best: I can only speak for our own, and they had to revise their policy. What they did was to look at it as part of the pilot work and simplify it. It is technically there, but it is quite well hidden in all the—

Q25 **Chair:** We will push with the Government what they are doing through their big Departments. Would you give us the best examples of local authorities, so we can encourage other local authorities to follow? The



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second-biggest employer in my area is the NHS trust. Do we have some good examples of trusts having carers' policies?

Joanne Speed: Yes. We worked with North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare Trust. They asked us to go in and review all of their HR policies and how they touched on carers. That was quite a time-consuming exercise, but there are some good examples out there. They wanted to be part of the pilots. All of the statutory organisations within our footprint wanted to be part of the pilots.

Q26 **Chair:** Do we have an example that you know of from just one Government Department, or in all of them?

Nicola Best: The Government Ombudsman's Office—do we include that? They have passports. They have been one of the first, and they have shared information.

Q27 **Chair:** Could we have more information on that? That would be brilliant.

Nicola Best: The Health Foundation Trust in Northamptonshire have been absolutely amazing. They have developed care ambassadors, and we have gone in and done surgeries. They are running groups to support their own staff online and physically meeting together. They have been absolutely amazing, and they have written it all into their services for their patients and staff who are carers. They are trying to prioritise those people. If, say, a member of staff has an appointment to see the physio, they will try to prioritise that appointment because it gets the staff member back into working and supports them in their caring role. They have been absolutely amazing.

Chair: I feel that if the Government put its own house in order, it would be a good example to the private sector.

Q28 **Ruth George:** In previous Committee sessions we have looked at the Taylor review of modern working practices. Obviously, working practices and the changes in them impact particularly upon people with caring responsibilities. Do you feel that some of those recommendations, particularly around employees having at least set hours of work with the possibility of additional pay if they are asked to work extra hours, would be of particular assistance to carers who might incur extra costs if they have to work extra hours?

Joanne Speed: I think it would be beneficial. Again, it is about looking at the small print with some of these things and making sure there are no other conditions and so on, bearing in mind the need for flexibility where that needs to be put in place and ensuring that the carer is not penalised. Where someone is able and willing and has the care facilities and care support there, we should be doing as much as we can to help people. Ultimately, work—good work—helps people's wellbeing, health-wise, physically, mentally, emotionally. It is the right thing to do.

Q29 **Heidi Allen:** Before we rush ahead and design our perfect piece of Care Act legislation, it occurs to me—we have all touched on it a little bit—to



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ask: is it a bit like caring for children, or some other agenda in life other than just work? Should any legislation we draw up be about employment generally, and the flexibilities that an employer might have a duty to provide that would naturally encompass carers, or do you think we need something that is just about carers?

Nicola Best: There is a lot of overlap. I went along to a forum that Carers UK ran, and there was a company there that talked about space. It was about supporting parents, carers and everybody, because we all need this time out—we all need some flexibility if issues go on in our lives. I do not think it necessarily needs to be about carers, but carers need to be being talked about and made aware of.

Q30 **Chair:** Does either of you disagree with that?

Joanne Speed: No. I look at equality legislation, and I think that we have specific categories that we have drawn out and said we need to protect. I think there can be general employment legislation, but likewise there are specific categories that we need to protect.

Q31 **Heidi Allen:** Carers would be one of them?

Joanne Speed: Yes, carers would be one.

Fiona Malpas: I think carers, more than anybody else, are the ones who take all their holiday in order to care for somebody, and then they do not get a break. That is where we need the extra support for them, in particular, because they are the ones who are doing the extra role.

Nicola Best: Can I just say, though, you do not choose to be a carer? You can choose to be a parent. Things can happen; somebody can have an accident now, and you go home and you are a carer.

Chair: Yes, that is the importance of that adjustment period, isn't it?

Q32 **Emma Dent Coad:** As we head towards, hopefully, really good, robust changes in legislation and national policy, do you think the next stage is to highlight the benefits to everybody—including us, the taxpayer, and so on—of good practice in particular organisations and businesses? Do you think that is a good way forward?

Joanne Speed: Yes.

Q33 **Chair:** Do you have examples of organisations who think they are financially better off because they have behaved well? I see our next panel is nodding. If you have examples of that in answer to Emma's question, could you give it to us? It would be really helpful in our report.

Joanne Speed: We would be able to give a couple of examples. Finning UK and Jaguar Land Rover are two that would recognise that.

Q34 **Chair:** That would be very helpful. Fiona, on Emma's question, do you have any examples of employers who believe they are financially better off by providing the sort of programmes that we have been talking about



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this morning?

Fiona Malpas: Not specifically, but we probably could find some. We have been working with Aviva.

Chair: Could you do that? It would strengthen our report.

Fiona Malpas: Yes, that is fine.

Q35 **Chris Stephens:** The consensus and all the evidence we have had so far are about a requirement for a cultural shift. Obviously, people who do not identify as carers, or even when they do, do not feel confident to raise issues. On the other side of the coin, employers think they are almost giving a favour if they talk about flexible working. What can the Department for Work and Pensions do to promote a cultural shift towards helping carers in the workplace?

Fiona Malpas: For us, the stuff we have done with DWP is more about giving them training about who carers are and understanding their needs. I know locally within our DWP agencies there are people out there who do business, and they go out and look for business. It is more about finding businesses and vacancies that are flexible to people so we are lining people up with the right kind of work. There is nothing worse than somebody going into the jobcentre and being told that there is a full-time job that they need to take, when they could never do it because they are already caring for somebody. They already have a job, but they are just not getting paid for it. I think it is about a better understanding of what it is like to be a carer, but I think that until you end up in that situation yourself, you do not tend to understand it.

Joanne Speed: The training that DWP offers encompassing carers is very, very helpful both for employers and for carers. I think that if they can identify, at a local level, local companies who are carer friendly and build a toolkit around those organisations, it will start to influence other organisations through their networks to improve practice and to move things forward so it comes from the grassroots up.

Nicola Best: We have worked a considerable amount with the DWP in our area, but it is slow work and there are a lot of DWP offices. We are doing a marketplace event in one of the jobcentres next week and we have done joint training with the DWP. We have asked them if they can mail out information to carers who are on certain benefits or people who are on certain benefits. They find that difficult, so that barrier could be removed. We have also spoken to disablement advisers—I think that is the phrase that they use—because if there is somebody who perhaps has some health issues, there might well be a carer lurking in the background as well. It is about getting those discussions going.

Fiona Malpas: Also, just because you are a carer does not mean that you automatically want to become a care worker, and they automatically seem to send somebody on that route. It is about being aware of carers'



other roles and transferrable skills that they can utilise in different professions.

- Q36 **Chris Stephens:** It is also a sector of the economy that is precarious in terms of its work, according to some of the evidence that we have heard. Do you think that we are looking at training for the jobcentres, in terms of trying to steer people away from sectors of the economy that are known for being precarious work, and where there are late-notice shift changes or cancellations and things like that?

Nicola Best: What I would like to see is a checklist where when they are working with individuals they go through certain issues and they ask those questions, such as "Are you a carer?" and then they refer them to somebody if they want it.

- Q37 **Chair:** Is that the job coaches? Are they the key people?

Nicola Best: It does not have to be. It can be, but I think anyone who comes into contact with them at the jobcentre, via any route where there is one-to-one time, can ask those questions.

Joanne Speed: That is why a carer's passport would be ideal.

- Q38 **Steve McCabe:** I was thinking about Emma's question earlier about job sharing. You have all been involved in pilots. Would there be any merit in having a pilot to incentivise employers to package certain jobs as job share for carers? Presumably, this would get around the problem of some people needing time off, because it could be managed. Would there be any merit in a specific approach that says, "We are going to incentivise these employers. We want you to identify jobs that could be for carers and they should be job-share jobs," so that we resolve this issue of people needing time off?

Joanne Speed: I think pilots are always a good idea because, again, the learning information and the research that comes out of them can be so extensive. Something like that might be worth exploring. Alongside that, I wonder whether tax incentives for employers—a reduced employers' National Insurance threshold for them specifically for that—will draw them in, and whether a financial incentive will help to make a success of these things.

Nicola Best: I have worked on a job-share basis, and I felt more restricted doing that than I did working part-time. I made the choice to go part-time because I was caring for my mother in a very heavy caring role. I and the lady who I worked with very closely at work were both in heavy caring roles in caring situations at the same time, so it would not have saved anything with us. I think you just need to think it through. It can be quite restrictive.

Chair: Thank you very, very much. We look forward to that additional information.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Laurence Beckett, People Business Partner, Savings and Retirement, UK, Aviva, and Arthur Allen MBE, Founder, Listawood.

Q39 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Laurence, might you begin the introductions?

Laurence Beckett: My name is Laurence Beckett. I am the HR director for the savings and retirement business for Aviva UK. We employ about 16,000 people in the UK across 22 different locations.

Arthur Allen: I am Arthur Allen. Thirty years ago I founded a very tiny business called Listawood. This business has now grown to about 120 people here in the UK in King's Lynn where we manufacture and decorate promotional products. We have a factory in India with about the same number of employees. We have a long-standing reputation for flexible working and family-friendly practices.

Q40 **Chris Green:** Mr Allen, from an employer's perspective, what are the barriers to employing carers, do you think?

Arthur Allen: We find this quite a difficult question. Let me talk first of all about the perceived difficulties. I think there are perceived difficulties. All employers would like everybody to be able to do everything whenever they needed it. That is, of course, a pipe dream. There is a fear that if somebody has caring responsibilities they will not be available when they are needed. There are also anxieties that they may be distracted by very serious caring responsibilities elsewhere and that they may become unreliable. I said that these difficulties are perceived difficulties, and I mean that, because the difficulties are much less real, if the situation is properly managed, than many people think they are.

Laurence Beckett: I think what we would consider is the opportunity for retaining our carers. That has really been the focus of our work. It has been much more about how we make it clear to carers in our workforce that they are welcome and that we want them to feel that they can fulfil their caring responsibilities while also remaining in employment with us. We have tried to turn it around and look at it as an opportunity to promote the caring policies that we introduced last year.

Q41 **Chris Green:** Perhaps Mr Allen first: in terms of flexible working, at the moment it is a right to request. Do you think it should just be a right?

Arthur Allen: We would not have any problem with it being a right. It is already well established within our organisation. Right from day one when people join the organisation, they mostly know that they are joining an organisation that has these sorts of policies and practices. It is reinforced at induction and it is reinforced in the canteen chatter and it is reinforced when they themselves need that flexibility.



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Chris Green: The values go right through the company?

Arthur Allen: It does indeed, yes.

Q42 **Chris Green:** Mr Beckett, should it be a right?

Laurence Beckett: As part of our standard job advertising, all of our job adverts include the opportunity to request flexible working. We make that very clear on all of our job adverts. That does not necessarily mean every job can be done part-time, but working from home and looking at if you have a requirement to work flexibly—we want to attract the best candidates. If you have a requirement to work flexibly, we want you to apply and talk to us about what that requirement is and we will try our best to meet it.

Q43 **Chris Green:** What kinds of jobs would your organisation be a bit more cautious about or find far more difficult, perhaps, given that flexibility?

Laurence Beckett: For example, for our frontline customer operations, it can be difficult for them to work from home. That is a challenge, but we are open 8.00 am to 8.00 pm for our customers so we have a range of shift patterns that we can offer. If doing a 12.00 pm to 8.00 pm shift works better for you so you can do some caring duties in the morning, we can accommodate that, or if working early and finishing early works better for you.

Q44 **Chris Green:** As a large organisation with people doing similar kinds of roles, it gives you that flexibility because you have a very significant workforce. If you did not have the same approach as Mr Allen's company, what challenges do you think there would be for a smaller company without this kind of scale?

Laurence Beckett: I have worked for Aviva for 28 years, so my experience is largely big company experience. I would not presume to know the challenges of a smaller business.

Arthur Allen: If I could say something here, I do not buy this argument about small companies or big companies. I have met a lot of people who work for big companies who try to tell me flexibility is very easy if you are a smaller company, and I have met lots of people in smaller companies who tell me that flexibility is very easy if you are a big company and you have all these resources.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the way in which we support carers and the flexible policies that we have differ in detail from what Aviva does. We are 120 people in our organisation in King's Lynn, so the detail will be different. What I think will be absolutely identical is an underlying organisational culture. If that organisational culture is based on mutual trust and respect, all of the details can be sorted out pretty easily. That is the bit that is absolutely critical.

Q45 **Chris Green:** There is evidence saying that about 20% of jobs paying under £20,000 per year are advertised with part-time or flexible working



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as an option and only 10% of jobs paying over £20,000 a year have that same flexibility. That is an indication it is fairly limited. It is not an option widely available and it is far more restricted as you go up the pay scale.

Laurence Beckett: We changed our approach to our recruitment adverts last year. We used to have flexible working wording as an option. The default was full-time employment and 99% of our job adverts went out as full-time opportunities because that was the default, and managers had to proactively request this as okay for flexible working. As part of our looking into this whole area we said, "Why don't we just flip it and say flexible working is standard?" That is the way the world is going. We did it for a three-month pilot and we had one manager complain in that three months that it was going to be difficult for them, so we just implemented it.

Q46 **Chris Green:** Difficult for the team that manager had?

Laurence Beckett: Yes, and there is work to do with line managers around understanding exactly what we mean when we say flexible working.

Q47 **Chair:** Laurence, what was the factor that made your company flip in that dramatic way, what event?

Laurence Beckett: I think it was just trying to modernise our employment practices. As part of the fuller working life strategy, we did an over-50s survey in our organisation and asked people what it was like to work for Aviva if you were over 50. The biggest single thing that came out was the need for flexible working. That was the top issue that got mentioned the most times. We were thinking, "How do we respond to this and what are the things that we can do to make it better for that particular population?"

Q48 **Chris Green:** There is always that concern where there are things like cost and benefits to a company. In this sense, both of you, the evidence you are both giving is about how the flexibility of that supporting environment for carers has benefited your organisations. Do you think this is widely known? If you take the right approach and have the attitudes, is it widely known enough that this will improve your business?

Laurence Beckett: Following the pilot we did in Bristol, where we did a big launch around revamping our carers approach—we had a carers policy before but it was not well known and it was not well utilised—there is now an 80% awareness in Bristol of the approach that we have adopted.

Chris Green: We are going a little bit more later on into the Bristol example.

Laurence Beckett: Awareness in general is definitely an issue.

Q49 **Chris Green:** To take it on to the next question, perhaps not going into too much detail about Bristol, can you describe your approach to



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employing carers and the impact this has on the business, perhaps especially with employees, and go into a bit more detail on that?

Laurence Beckett: Probably the place to start is with the fact that we relaunched our carers policy in October. We have introduced five days' paid leave for planned appointments and five days' paid leave for unplanned care issues. We also did some independent research and 83% of carers said they wanted an equal footing with parental leave, the right to 18 weeks' unpaid leave for care responsibilities, so we have introduced that as part of our policy as well.

Our belief is that when we employ someone, if they have a caring need outside of work it is likely going to be the most important thing in their life for that period of time. We have trained and developed those individuals and we do not want to lose them from our workforce, so we believe there is a substantial benefit in working with our employees to try to find ways to retain them while they have that caring responsibility.

Arthur Allen: I would endorse that entirely. It has benefits in terms of employee retention. It has huge benefits in terms of the commitment that employees give back to you. If you support your employees, the employees will be taking care of your customers. There is absolutely no doubt about that.

You touched on the issue of what is the financial benefit to companies. We would see that benefit as being absolutely huge and vital. In 2008 when the credit crunch happened, we lost 25% of our business more or less overnight. We were producing mouse mats at that time, and the mouse-mat market was hugely affected. We have had to replace about 60% of our business with alternative products. We have had very difficult years in the last eight or nine years. We would not have got through this without the support of our staff. We have asked them to do very difficult things at times and they have risen to the challenge without any difficulty or hesitation at all. They would not have done that if we had not supported them when they needed it. We are very clear on the benefits to be gained from this.

Q50 **Chris Green:** You are both expressing company views that are consistent with "our best asset is our people". You have taken the approaches you did. Some people would argue that the higher employment is, the more power shifts from the employer to the employee. We are not always going to be in the position we are at the moment with relatively high employment. These practices that you engage with, should there be more Government legislation to direct companies?

Laurence Beckett: Andy Briggs, the CEO of our UK insurance business, in his role as the Government's business champion for older workers, has recommended that five to 10 days' carers' leave should be statutory.

Arthur Allen: In practice we are doing that with many of our employees who suddenly find that they need time off. Your earlier witnesses talked



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about the dreadful chaos that carers are suddenly plunged into on occasions when a grandmother falls over or whatever. Many employees' first thought is, "I have to give up work". Our first step is to say to them, "No, calm down, take some time, go and concentrate on dealing with the caring situation. We will be here for you when you need it". That is absolutely vital. We are supporting that in many cases with paid compassionate leave or paid emergency leave. We would not have a problem with that. I am aware that not all employers would necessarily take that point of view, but that would be our point of view.

- Q51 **Emma Dent Coad:** While we are working towards a stronger national policy legislation to incentivise good practice, do you think, as we were hearing earlier, that tax breaks should be offered to good employers or do you think that the reputational advantage that we have been hearing about, that clearly your businesses have attracted, the fact that it attracts staff loyalty as you have just talked about, is a good enough incentive rather than a tax break?

Arthur Allen: It has been for us. I appreciate not everybody takes the same view.

Laurence Beckett: I concur completely. We are looking out for the best interests of Aviva customers and we know that treating our employees well is the best way to do that. We do not believe companies need to wait for legislation or should wait for legislation, but there are wider issues for Government to consider. From an employment perspective we think we are doing the right thing for our employees and our customers.

- Q52 **Heidi Allen:** I am smiling so much because I run a small business, which my husband now runs, and he would love to talk to you, Arthur, because this stuff works. Can I just check your opinions? You both talked about culture a lot. We heard that in the previous evidence session as well. A tool like a tax break is almost wasted. You are either culturally ingrained to treat your employees in this way, and you want to do it; or you are not, and that stick would not achieve anything. Am I right in thinking that?

Arthur Allen: We would not say no to a tax break, but we did not need it.

- Q53 **Heidi Allen:** Would it be the perfect answer, I suppose? Would it just magically make things improve in businesses?

Arthur Allen: I think you are probably asking the wrong people.

- Q54 **Alex Burghart:** You both obviously have a lot of experience of various policies and pilots that you have seen over the years. Which ones would you like to see rolled out more widely and why?

Laurence Beckett: In the pilot we did in Bristol, there were three things that made the real difference for our employees. The first was raising awareness and changing the policy. That made a significant difference.



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Fiona talked about the support that was provided by Bristol Carer's Centre. Our employees who were plunged into that care need and who could access one-to-one support to help them through the system found that immensely beneficial. We joined the Employers for Carers website, and the ability to access the right information online at the point of need has been fantastic. We tried some other things that did not work so well, but they were the three things that really stood out.

Q55 Alex Burghart: Like what, just out of interest quickly, things that you thought had potential and did not?

Laurence Beckett: They provided access to some webinars. It turned out that in our experience they were either too high level or too lengthy, not specific enough. Our employees who were carers, who are already pushed for time to do work and caring, did not find that useful, so we pulled the plug on that aspect of the pilot.

Arthur Allen: What we are doing within our company seems to work fairly well for us; it seems to work fairly well for our employees. I am sure we could do some things better. I think the thing that we would really like to be better for those employees who suddenly find themselves plunged into this nightmarish world is that it should be as easy as possible for them to find their way through the care system and to understand what help is available and how they access it and get that help. That is really important because we have reports from our staff that that it is at times very, very difficult.

Q56 Chair: What would be the shape of that, Arthur—that point of contact that would help? You are giving flexibility but there are employees who are now carers as well as employees, who are concerned about what other support there may be. Where should they look for that one-stop-shop?

Arthur Allen: Places that people can look—I think it is a service that has much greater demand on it than they can cope with—is the helpline that Carers UK run, for example. I think that is a good example of something that is very helpful. Speaking about Carers UK, you asked a number of questions about examples of good practice in Government Departments, in local authorities and in businesses. Carers UK have chapter and verse on that and they can certainly help with that.

Laurence Beckett: The other thing that we do is provide our employees with an employee assistance programme, which is a phone line that they can call for any needs that they have, counselling, bereavement counselling, whatever. One of the services they provide is if you are put into a carer situation, they will help you. It is a phone service rather than face to face, and in our Bristol pilot we did find that the face to face, someone coming and sitting with you to help you do it, was much more appreciated, but the phone service is better than nothing, for sure.

Q57 Steve McCabe: I want to return to the issue of flexible working. Do you



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think it should be available as a right from day one for carers as is the case for employees with a disability?

Arthur Allen: Our experience is that we do not have an issue about the timescale, whether it is on day one or whatever, or whether people are coming to us at job interview and talking about their caring responsibility. We are not concerned about a timescale. We do not have any timescales like that.

What is happening with us is when we are dealing with a carer or a carer comes to us and there is clearly a problem we want to sit down and negotiate a win-win solution. We do not say yes to every request to have Friday afternoons off or to have Monday mornings off or anything like that. We do not say, "Yes". The flexibility has to be a two-way street. It has to work for the employer, it has to work for the employee, and you have to work hard to find that solution. Again, if you have an organisation where there is openness and there is trust, that is not too difficult to achieve, but it is not an automatic right that an employee can come and say, "I want this element of flexibility" and they automatically get it. We have to look after our customers, too.

I asked my HR manager, who is sitting just behind me, this morning if she could think of a single instance over the last couple of years where we lost an employee because we could not find a suitable way forward with that employee. The answer was no, we could not think of a single instance where we could not get a working solution.

Q58 **Chair:** Laurence, given that you have now, in a sense, packaged all your jobs with the flexibility rather than the time factor, how has that changed, in answer to Steve's question, the people coming forward from day one saying, "I have caring responsibilities", feeling they can talk to you about it?

Laurence Beckett: I do not have precise examples around that, I am afraid. I can look into that and see if I can come back with something.

Q59 **Steve McCabe:** It seems to me that in the current situation it is all right if you have an employer who already has a fairly open-minded approach, but the current situation is that you have to wait 26 weeks before you have an entitlement. I hear very clearly what you were saying about the actual nature of the flexible working needing to be subject to some kind of rational negotiation process, and that strikes me as sensible. What I am really asking is should there be a presumption that the person has an entitlement to flexible working? It may then be down to a question of how that is negotiated. I do not understand the distinction. I guess the point I am making is if I have a disability and I start work and I have an automatic entitlement, and I have a caring responsibility and I start work, why don't I have the same entitlement? I am not quite clear what that distinction is. In your experience, could you explain that?

Arthur Allen: We did a staff survey recently and we had 100% of the staff said that if they required time off at short notice or no notice, they



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knew that would happen. 98% of the staff said that any request for flexible working would be considered fairly, and that is undoubtedly the case. But if you come and say, "I have a requirement to have Friday afternoons off", that is not necessarily going to be acceded to, unless we can manage it. If we can manage it, fine.

Laurence Beckett: I refer back to the previous answer. I think you are possibly asking the wrong people because we are intuitively already in that space where we would not consider the timeframe to be an issue.

Q60 **Chair:** If you are in that space we would like many others to be, how many employers come and ask you how your systems work on this policy to carers? Are they banging at the door regularly saying, "Can we come and talk?"

Laurence Beckett: No. We have presented Employers for Carers sessions and tried to publicise what we do, but our primary focus is succeeding in our own business.

Arthur Allen: I have an identical answer. We have presented at Employers for Carers and they have done great things, I think, in raising this issue among employers.

Chair: On that note we will end. Thank you very much. It has been a great session; all three of them have been.