

Working Families Strategy 2024 – 2029

Foreword from Jane van Zyl, CEO

The last few years have raised unprecedented challenges for working parents and carers across the UK. The cost of living crisis has placed significant strain on families, particularly those on lower incomes.



Now more than ever, it's crucial to provide stable, dependable employment opportunities, especially for those with caring responsibilities. And with 42% of families in the UK with one or more dependent children¹ and 1 in 5 people with caring responsibilities², it is clear this is an issue that affects many people.

In the post-pandemic corporate landscape, discussions about "returning to the office" have gathered pace. And in these economically unsure times, businesses may mistakenly believe increased visibility and control result in increased productivity. But they couldn't be more wrong. We have proven time and time again through our work with employer members that flexible working isn't only beneficial to individuals, but that it's also good for business. The case studies from our Best Practice Award winners and data from our Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark report prove that flexible working increases productivity, retention and recruitment and that there is, in fact, no trade-off between flexible work and good work.

As 2029 marks 50 years of Working Families, we are more eager than ever to continue on our trajectory of better flexible working for all, not regress back to rigid and unyielding ways of working that fail to offer inclusivity and adaptability to the diverse needs of our workforce. And as the UK economy strives to recover, flexibility is the key to ensuring that all people of working age across society can bolster the economy and future proof against financial shocks. Regressing back to traditional and constrained working patterns would be a false economy.

The path to building a stronger future lies in developing diverse, productive and happy workplaces that empower individuals with caring responsibilities to contribute fully to the economy while maintaining harmonious family lives. And at Working Families, we're ready to help make this happen.

¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2022>

² https://www.carersuk.org/media/ew5e4swg/cuk_state_of_caring_2022_report.pdf

Foreword from Helen Humphreys – Chair

As we unveil this five-year strategy for Working Families, I am filled with optimism and enthusiasm for the changes that lie ahead. Reflecting on the progress we have made in recent years, it is evident that our collective efforts have already made a significant impact on working families' rights to flexible working in the UK. However, as the workforce evolves, so do the challenges and opportunities.



Flexible working has emerged as an important part of modern employment practices, offering individuals greater autonomy over managing their time, while delivering tangible benefits to businesses in terms of productivity, employee satisfaction and talent retention. And as demographics change and technology reshapes how we work, its importance will only grow.

Our role as a champion for change in promoting and facilitating flexible working has never been more crucial. By advocating for policies that support flexible working arrangements and providing practical support and guidance to both employers and employees, we aim to ensure that flexible working becomes not just an option, but the normal practice embraced by businesses of all sizes and sectors.

As we look ahead to the next five years, we are committed to building upon our past successes and driving even greater change. Through collaboration and innovation, we'll continue in our mission to remove the barriers that people with caring responsibilities face in the workplace.

Working Families





Our vision

We want to achieve a society in which everyone can fully meet their work and caring responsibilities, and where all parents and carers have an equal opportunity to find and progress in secure, paid work.

Our mission

Our mission is to remove the barriers that people with caring responsibilities face in the workplace. We drive positive change by empowering and advocating for working parents and carers, supporting employers to build flexible and family-friendly cultures, and influencing government policy.

Our Values

-  We are **collaborative**. We work alongside like-minded partners to maximise achievement of our shared goals.
-  We are **practical**. We see the whole picture and use this authoritative perspective to deliver tangible support to families and employers.
-  We are **inclusive**. We strive to ensure that our work reaches a full range of families and employers.
-  We are **driven**. We leverage our collective knowledge, commitment, and skills to do an expert job for our beneficiaries, supporters, and colleagues.

About Working Families

Policy and advocacy

We drive policy change to support those with caring responsibilities who are in employment.

Legal Advice

We directly empower thousands of parents and carers to access the outcomes that they need in their working lives through our free legal advice service

Employer Services

We support employers to create genuinely flexible and productive workplaces through our employer membership programme



Why we're needed

- ✚ **Three in four mothers** and **9 out of 10 fathers** in the UK are in employment.
- ✚ Just under **half of families** with only one child had both parents working full-time, dropping to 4 in 10 of families with three or more children.
- ✚ When asked about flexible working options, only **3 in 10 mothers** reported an agreed special working arrangement in their job, and just **2 in 10 of fathers**.
- ✚ Nationally, only **5% of eligible fathers** and partners take Shared Parental Leave.
- ✚ **4 in 10 working parents** on lower incomes have gone into debt to pay for childcare.
- ✚ Over **half of parents** on lower income have had to reduce their working hours to manage childcare needs.
- ✚ Working mothers on lower incomes take **4 months' less maternity leave** than the UK average of 9 months.
- ✚ Parents who are on a lower income are **twice as likely** to have an informal flexible working request rejected than the average parent.
- ✚ **73% of people** think parents' leave and/or pay entitlements should be improved from the current statutory entitlement.



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The Working Families LAS Deep Dive report from 2023/2024 revealed that;



More than **1 million** working parents and carers accessed our legal advice pages.



98% of the parents and carers we advised on our helpline felt better informed



We provided personalised legal advice to over **1,500** parents and carers.



Around **60%** of our clients last year were from households earning below the minimum Income Standard (MIS)



1 in 2 outcomes survey respondents who had contacted us for benefits advice increased their household income.



Our advisers supported our helpline users to access over **£150,000** in unclaimed benefits.

“I no longer have to try and find overnight childcare due to being pressured into overnight work.”

“I feel less stressed as I was able to resolve my issue based on the advice given. All communication was very helpful.”

“I feel confident in challenging my employer regarding changing my contract.”

“I feel more confident to deal with a stressful situation at a particularly vulnerable time in our lives.”

“I contacted Working Families. Your advice is always 100% accurate, even with complicated circumstances. I have since been able to increase my family’s income by £500/month, making our financial situation much more manageable.”

Our strategy

The cost-of-living crisis coupled with a lack of access to affordable childcare has resulted in extraordinary challenges for the UK's working parents and carers. The Resolution Foundation forecast in September 2023 that the amount of people in absolute poverty in the UK will increase by 300,000, from 11.7 million in 2023/24 to 12.0 million in 2024/25.

Our agenda has never been more needed.

In developing this strategy, we reaffirmed our organisational values. These are at the heart of how we will deliver and measure our activities and outcomes.

Our objectives

2024-2029

Over the next five years, we will work to ensure that more people with caring responsibilities have the opportunity to attain and thrive within secure and flexible jobs, with a focus on those with least access to justice. Our objectives provide a roadmap for achieving this and will not change until we have achieved our mission and our vision.

1. **Parents and carers are informed and empowered** to make use of their employment rights and entitlements to enter and stay in work.
2. **Employers offer and promote** flexible and family friendly working practices and opportunities
3. **Policymakers legislate and act** to create a policy framework that provides a baseline of rights and entitlements for working parents and carers.

Achieving our objectives

Objective 1

To ensure parents and carers are informed and empowered to make use of their employment rights and entitlements to enter and stay in work we will;

1. Reach more parents through our legal advice service, with a focus on those with least access to justice, including innovating new delivery methods.
2. Expand our brand awareness/digital presence.
3. Increase user involvement and co-creation of our Legal Advice Service, through collaboration with partners.

As a result, we want

- 📖 Parents and carers to be informed of their employment rights and entitlements at the start of parenting and caring.
- 📖 Parents and carers to be informed of their employment rights and entitlements when they need it.
- 📖 Parents and carers to feel empowered to use their rights and entitlements to stay in work.

To measure the success of our objectives, we will look at the following Key Performance Indicators

1. From the LAS feedback form, we'd like to discover if Legal Advice Service clients better understand their rights.




2. Discover whether Legal Advice Service clients used their rights by asking how clients acted on advice through the LAS follow-up survey of representative groups.
3. Gather data on wider population via surveys in partnership with academics or other rights advice providers; and via the Working Families Index to discover to what extent parents and carers are aware of their rights and do they use them.
4. Monitor ONS data, including annual report on public opinions and social trends.

Objective 2

To encourage employers to offer and promote flexible and family friendly working practices and opportunities we will;

1. Influence the policy, practices and culture of the largest possible number of employers through our employer services, providing membership, and a range of products and services.
2. Influence SME's policy and practice by developing a range of products and services specifically tailored to smaller employers.
3. Expand our brand awareness/digital presence.

As a result, we want

-  All employers to advertise jobs as flexible across sectors and roles.
-  People working flexibly in the wider employee population.
-  Employers offering enhanced leave for increased periods.

To measure the success of our objectives, we will look at the following Key Performance Indicators



1. Monitor jobs advertised with flexible working options through the Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark report, specifically whether new employer members show improvement in this area.
2. Monitor the supply of quality flexible jobs through reporting from Timewise, ONS survey and employer body reporting (CIPD, CMI etc.).
3. Number/proportion of employers offering an improved range of opportunities and enhanced support for parents and carers through the Benchmark report, specifically whether employer members demonstrate individual improvement in their flexible and family friendly policies.

Objective 3

To encourage policymakers to legislate and act to create a policy framework that provides a baseline of rights and entitlements for working parents and carers we will;

1. Influence any future Employment Bill and other legislative and policy opportunities.
2. Create new alliances and influencing through the APPG on Flexible and Family Friendly Working.
3. Expand our brand awareness and digital presence.

As a result, we want

-  A reduced proportion of parents who report that they aren't working flexibly but would like to.
-  An increase in the average length of parental leave taken by poorer households and fathers.

- A lower proportion of parents saying they didn't have enough leave due to financial concerns.

To measure the success of our objectives, we will look at the following Key Performance Indicators

1. Policy/legal changes introduced that reflect our policy goals across;
 - a. Pregnancy and parental leave
 - b. Childcare
 - c. In-work benefits and family finance
 - d. Flexible and secure jobs
 - e. Equalities and access to justice
2. Policy development tracked against a list of specific goals and legislation needed for the following policy areas;
 - a. Pregnancy and parental leave
 - b. Childcare
 - c. In-work benefits and family finance
 - d. Flexible and secure jobs
 - e. Equalities and access to justice

Delivering Our Strategy

Our vision, mission, and strategy are ambitious—we are committed to delivering system change for working parents and carers right across the UK. We need to ensure that our organisation is in the strongest possible position to realise our aspirations.

Our Legal Advice Service continues to be a lifeline for many parents and carers who want to remain in employment but require access to better flexible working, with over 1.3 million people accessing our legal advice pages in 23/24.

Our employer members also confirmed that the support we offer has never been more relevant to their workplaces, as they face increasing challenges around the cost of living crisis, recruitment and the gender pay gap.

These factors mean that we are starting our strategy period from a position of strength, but with a challenging and uncertain economic outlook ahead of us. This volatile economic context means we expect the need for our services to continue to grow even after accounting for the record numbers of working parents and carers who sought our support in 2023.

To ensure we can best serve working parents during the period of this strategy, we will:

- 📌 Put the needs of parents and carers at the heart of all we do.
- 📌 Promote research to bring evidence for change in workplaces.
- 📌 Build our profile, engagement and influence to grow our support and impact.
- 📌 Invest in growing sustainable unrestricted income.
- 📌 Make Working Families a great charity to work for and with.



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