

HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

MANAGERS GUIDELINES ON ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

January 2016

*The Management of Absence Policy and Procedure was approved by Cabinet in 2010.
Please discard any earlier versions you may have.*

1. Introduction

These Guidelines refer to the Absence Management Policy which is available on the Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR/OD) Website or by clicking [here](#).

The Policy's aims are:

- To assist with the Management of Absence
- To ensure that the Council meets its responsibilities with regard to the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees
- To provide supportive measures where appropriate [Care First is available to all employees on a 24/7 basis]

2. Payment

When an employee's period of sickness absence is due to a sports injury, motor vehicle accident etc., loss of earnings resulting from sickness absence will be recovered. Managers are expected to establish whether or not an employee is in receipt of sickness payments from a 3rd Party and, if this is the case, the Council will recover any such sickness payments. This arrangement will be reviewed dependant on the length of sickness absence should this extend beyond the period of 3rd party sickness cover.

In addition, payments will not be made for non-essential procedures (e.g. cosmetic surgery) or for injuries incurred whilst working for another employer (in line with the Secondary Employment Protocol).

3. Reporting Procedures

It is important that all line managers understand their responsibilities with regard to absence management, ensuring that their team are fully aware of the policy, that they are contractually obliged to comply with it and that non-compliance will be dealt with via the Disciplinary Policy.

a) On the first day of absence

The employee **must**, without exception, telephone her/his line manager before the commencement of the normal working day/shift or as soon as possible (staff who are working in a front-line service must make contact **no later** than 2 hours before the start of the shift). The line manager must be told the reason for sickness absence, how long the employee is likely to be away from work and, in the case of an injury, how this occurred and if it was work related. In situations where the line manager is not the person to whom the employee notifies their sickness absence, the line manager **must** return the employee's telephone call that day.

Only in an emergency situation will contact from a person other than the employee be accepted, eg, in cases of hospitalisation. Advice and guidance on when this is acceptable can be sought from the Employee Relations Advisor.

If an employee fails to follow the reporting procedure, the line manager must, in the first instance, attempt to contact the employee to ascertain the cause of their absence and to remind them of their responsibility to keep in contact. If it is not possible to contact the employee, the manager should contact the Employee Relations Advisor for advice on the matter and a non-compliance letter will be automatically issued.

All information discussed must be recorded on the Sickness Absence Management form, available via the HR/OD Web Pages or by clicking [here](#). This form should be updated at each of the stages set out below.

During the initial notification of absence the employee is able to request that consideration is given to using annual leave as an alternative to a period of sickness absence.

Line managers must ensure that there is regular contact with their absent employee. For short term absence this should be in person on a daily basis [unless there is a clear reason which needs to be documented as to why this would not be effective]. With the employee expected to ring in on the first, fourth and seventh day, it is the line managers responsibility to maintain contact with the employee on all subsequent days during the self certification period. The employee is contractually obliged to make themselves available for contact.

b) From the fourth day of absence (fourth calendar day, not working day)

If the employee's period of sickness absence continues for four consecutive days, she/he **must**, without fail, contact her/his line manager by telephone to provide an update on the absence. It is important that the line manager has early intervention in the absence process in order to support the employee and ensure that they are receiving the appropriate support. Should the employee fail to make contact, the line manager must attempt to contact the employee and should gain advice from an Employee Relations Advisor if they are unable to do so and a second compliance letter will be automatically issued.

c) If the absence continues beyond seven calendar days

In this situation the employee **must** provide a **fit note** from their G.P., Hospital Consultant etc and **must** forward this to her/his line manager within 2 working days. Failure to provide a fit note covering the appropriate period of absence will result in a third [and final] non-compliance letter being issued. It may also lead to a disciplinary investigation and any monies paid will be recovered and future payments withheld (dependant on the outcome of that investigation).

Once the absence is known to exceed 14 calendar days the line manager must notify HR to allow a letter to be issued, giving 7 days notice, informing the

employee of a scheduled Welfare Meeting. The letter will confirm that whatever the fit note indicates, ie whether the employee will be fit to return at the end of the period covered by the fit note or that the absence may continue, the meeting will proceed - either to be used as a return to work meeting or a welfare meeting.

4. Absences beyond 21 calendar days - welfare meeting

Once the sickness absence has reached 21 days a welfare meeting will be convened to develop a Return to Work Action Plan. This meeting will be chaired by HR, and in attendance will be: the line manager, the employee, their representative [if desired] and occupational health [if appropriate]. This meeting and action plan will take into account the medical evidence available at the time and may explore support mechanisms; rehabilitation plans, potential redeployment opportunities, etc.

In order to qualify for receipt of sick pay the employee, in accordance with their contract of employment, must participate in the meetings to assist with the management of their absence.

If Occupational Health advice needs to be sought consent from the employee will be requested. The relevant forms for completion will be emailed to the line manager prior to the appointment by HR/OD and these forms include a meeting pro forma and the initial consent form for signature by the employee.

In signing the consent form, the employee consents to IMASS discussing their absence with them and providing a report to management regarding their health. There are occasions where IMASS will need to obtain medical information from an employee's G.P. or consultant - in these circumstances, IMASS will discuss this in more detail with the employee prior to this being requested.

Should the employee withhold consent, a decision regarding the employee's absence will be made without the availability of additional medical evidence. Failure to participate in a telephone consultation or attend a meeting with Occupational Health without an acceptable reason or late notification of cancellation (less than 24 hours before the appointment) may result in the disciplinary procedures being invoked

5. Return to Work

Whenever an employee returns to work following sickness absence, even if the absence has only been for one day, the manager **must** carry out a return to work interview. The purpose of the interview is:

- to confirm the understanding of the reason/s for absence,
- to determine whether any adjustments to the workplace are required
- to establish whether counselling advice or support from the Occupational Health Service or the Health and Safety Team would be of benefit

- to clarify whether the employee is taking any prescribed medication for the condition and if this could affect their role
- to establish if the condition is likely to recur
- to advise the employee if the absence meets a trigger within the policy.

The Return to Work section of the Sickness Absence form should be completed at this interview. The completed Sickness Absence Management form should then be forwarded to HR/OD.

6. Absence Review Meeting

When an employee has met one of the triggers as detailed in the policy an absence review meeting will be convened.

The employee is to be contacted verbally and in writing. Confirmation that the employee may be accompanied at this meeting by a trade union representative or work colleague will be explicit.

The manager will inform the employee of her/his concerns and explain that a sustained improvement is required. The employee will also be advised that further periods of absence may result in formal action being taken which could affect future employment. Where appropriate, a referral may also be made by the manager via HR/OD to Occupational Health to explore any underlying cause of the absences and to identify any reasonable adjustments that need to be considered.

7. Formal stage of the Absence Management Policy and Procedure.

Line managers will always be accompanied by an employee relations advisor who will provide advice and guidance prior to the formal meeting taking place.