



WEST DEAN PARISH COUNCIL

ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

West Dean Parish Council is committed to providing effective, high-quality services to all its parishioners and to optimising the contribution of all employees. As part of this aim it is essential that all employees are committed to maximising attendance.

The council is concerned for the wellbeing of its employees and seeks to protect their health and safety by creating a safe working environment. In return, WDPC expects all employees to take reasonable care of their own health, seek medical advice whenever appropriate and to attend work when fit to do so.

The council recognises that genuine medical grounds will occasionally result in an employee being absent from work. It is WDPCs policy to treat all such sickness absence in a fair, sensitive, and consistent manner across all areas of the workforce.

The council must however balance the sensitive management of genuine individual sickness against the needs to be publicly accountable for its resource allocation and as such it can not sustain high levels of sickness absence. Action will therefore be taken to address recurrent short-term sickness or extended periods of absence as appropriate.

Aims

In order for the council to meet its responsibilities it will ensure that:

- It provides a supportive environment for those employees affected by ill-health:
- All employees adhere to the guidelines produced in support of this absence policy
- Levels of sickness absence are subject to routine monitoring

Responsibilities

The onus for attending work on a regular basis, and for reporting absence in accordance with councils agreed procedures, rests with the employee. It is also an employee's responsibility to appropriately detail any periods of absence on their record of hours worked.

The responsibility for recording, monitoring, and managing absence of the Clerk lies with the Staffing Committee. The Clerk is responsible for recording, monitoring and managing absence of all other employees. In the procedure which follows the Clerk is responsible for reporting to the Staffing Committee not only their own absences but also any reporting required by the Committee of other employee's absence data.

Review

This policy and the support procedural guidance will be reviewed periodically and the responsibility for this review lies with the Staffing Committee.

GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYEE REPORTING

if you are unable to attend work due to illness/injury you must in the first instance contact the Clerk or Chair of Staffing Committee as soon as possible. This should be no later than 9.30am on the first day of absence or nearest working day.

You should provide some indication of:

- The nature of your absence
- The date your illness or injury began (including weekend and holidays)
- The expected duration of your absence
- Whether you have any immediate work commitments that will need completing or reassigning during your absence.

No later than the fourth day of absence you must contact the Clerk or Chair of Staffing Committee to provide updated information in respect of your ongoing illness or injury.

Certification

Where your absence is not covered by a doctor's certificate and is for a period of up to seven days inclusive of weekends you will be asked to complete a self-certification form on your return to work.

If your absence exceeds seven days, and you have not already done so, you should provide a doctor's certificate for the remainder of your absence. This certificate or 'fit note' will include whether you need to see your doctor again before returning to work.

You need to ensure that a current certificate is in force.

If the 'fit note' states that you may be fit for work you should inform the Clerk or Chair of Staffing immediately. They will discuss with you whether there are any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate your return to work, considering the doctor's advice. This may take place at a return-to-work interview or an absence review meeting. If appropriate measures cannot be taken, you will remain on sick leave and the Clerk or Chair of Staffing will set a date to review the situation.

Return to work meetings

When you return to work after a period of absence the Clerk or the Chair of Staffing will arrange to meet with you, this will occur on your first day back, or as soon as possible thereafter. The purpose of this meeting is:

- To provide an opportunity to check that you are fit to return to work, and to supply, where necessary, a Fit Note if you were signed off by a doctor for more than seven days. A Fit Note may contain advice on adjustments that should be made (for example, a phased return).
- To give you the opportunity to voice any concerns that you may have and/or identify any domestic, welfare or work-related problems in an appropriate forum.
- To ensure that you are aware of work-related matters that have occurred during your absence
- To complete a sickness declaration form

Miscellaneous

It is important to comply with these procedures in order that:

- The Council can be aware of potential problems and help where necessary.
- Any sick pay to which you may be entitled is not withheld or refused.

Records retained in respect of sickness absence will be treated with sensitivity and confidentiality at all times in accordance with the provisions of prevailing Data Protection Legislation. You will be entitled to access your personal records on request.

Guidelines for the Clerk: General Issues

You are responsible for the management of sickness absence of any other employee within WDPC. You should therefore ensure that other employees are aware of, and comply, with WDPC's procedure for reporting absence from the workplace.

Where employees have failed to follow established procedures in respect of notification of absence or the provision of medical certificates etc. they should be reminded of their obligations and, if appropriate, notified that further non-compliance may result in the initiation of disciplinary action. Where there is concern that an employee has wilfully abused the sickness absence provisions or absented themselves from work without satisfactory reason or explanation the matter should be referred into the Disciplinary Procedure for investigation and appropriate action.

If an employee is sick while they are on holiday, this time should be regarded as sick leave provided that they can provide a doctor's certificate. Post dated certificates i.e. covering a period prior to the doctor's appointment will not be accepted.

Should an employee who has refused annual/flexi leave subsequently report sick for the period requested, you should carefully investigate the circumstances. You may wish to consider requiring the employee to submit a doctor's certificate for the period in question.

It is not expected that you will normally contact employees at home during periods of self-certification of absence, although there may be occasions when this is necessary as a result of issues arising at work. The timing of contact with an employee at home during this period must be a matter of judgement with consideration being given to the nature of the absence, the importance of the job, the problem of providing cover, the employee's previous absence record, and the effects on service provision and other employees.

Return to work meetings

Effective absence management depends upon the availability of relevant information, and you should therefore arrange to hold return to work meetings with employees following each period of absence. Return to work meetings present an informal opportunity to establish the cause of absence, indicates to the employee an interest in their welfare, and allows you to establish if further help or support is required. They can also provide an opportunity for you to alert an employee of concerns that you may have in respect of situations where unsatisfactory absence records are developing.

You will need to complete a return-to-work form after every period of absence including half days (see Appendix 1 for the form).

Meeting should be arranged as soon as practicable and preferably within 2 days.

In some cases, the discussion will only be brief. In other, more complex cases, perhaps where there is a history of high levels of absence, the meeting will need to be more involved. An employee can refuse, if they wish, to provide any information during the return-to-work discussion. Where this is

the case, you should attempt to identify with the employee the reasons for this refusal. If the employee does refuse to co-operate in the return-to-work discussion, you should record your attempts to conduct the discussion and the employee's refusal.

Long-term absence

All cases of long-term absence will be treated sympathetically, and every assistance will be given to the employee to return to work. You should maintain contact with the employee and advise them that they should keep the Council informed of developments relating to the medical condition.

In order to ensure the Council has access to guidance and advice in respect of absences for a continuous period of 4 weeks or more, depending on the nature of the absence, may be referred to an Occupational Health Physician (OHP). Where the OHP makes a recommendation which may affect the employee's continued employment, you should arrange a meeting with them to discuss alternative options. Employee's may wish to have the support of a trade union representative of work colleague during such meeting, which should be positively encouraged.

Where return to work following a period of prolonged absence the possibility of a phased return or temporary redeployment, or alternative work location offered this should be discussed with the employee. Such arrangements will be for a defined period and subject to joint review.

In certain cases, the OHP may find that an employee is unfit to perform a particular job but fit enough to undertake other types or work. In such cases, full consideration will be given to the possibility of redeployment into alternative positions, where that is possible.

Frequent Intermittent Absence

Although, there will be informal return to work interviews after all periods of absence after four episodes of absence or a total of 10 days short-term sickness absence within any 12 months period, you will be required to undertake a formal review of attendance records and reasons for absence with an employee. You should therefore arrange a meet with any employee whose absence record matches or exceeds the above criteria.

During the interview, you should draw the employee's attention to their poor attendance record, and the problems that their absences cause for the Council and other employees. Where no underlying medical condition is disclosed, the employee must be advised that their attendance record will be monitored, over a period of no less than 3 months, and that significant improvement is required. In addition, employees must be warned that if no such improvement is forthcoming, serious consideration will be given to reviewing their employment situation. This must be confirmed in writing.

Return to work interviews must continue to be carried out following any absences which occur during this monitoring period. These interviews will afford you the opportunity to remind the employee of the Council's concerns.

If, after the period of monitoring has elapsed, no significant improvement in attendance has been made, a further interview must be arranged. At this stage, the employee must once again be reminded of the problems caused by the absence and asked if they wish to disclose any underlying medical condition or problem of which you were unaware. If such a condition is disclosed, a medical referral should be arranged.

Where no underlying medical condition exists, the employee should be told their attendance record will be subject to a further period of monitoring, of no less than 3 months, and that their

employment may be terminated if the required improvement is not effected. Employees have the right to be accompanied to this meeting with a trade union representative or work colleague.

Employees whose level of attendance improves satisfactorily during periods of informal and/or formal monitoring must be reminded that they will be expected to maintain these levels of attendance. Failure to do so will result in further monitoring and/or the initiation of formal action.

Personal, Domestic or Work-Related Problems

Where an employee reveals that their absence has been the consequence of personal, domestic, or work-related problems, you should endeavour to discuss with them any relevant details they wish to disclose. Although an employee may have genuine concerns about revealing sensitive or personal information, they should be reminded of the fact that such matters will be treated confidentially, and that the Council can not assist them if they are not made aware of the problem. Should an employee wish to discuss matters with someone other than yourself, the Chair of Staffing Committee can be contacted for a confidential interview.

Once the problem has been clearly identified, appropriate assistance can be afforded to the employee. It is not possible, in a guidance document, to cover all circumstances, but special leave, temporary adjustments in working arrangements or referral to specialist agencies are available options.

Alcohol/Drug Dependency

Where an employee discloses that their absences are a consequence of alcohol or drug related problems they will be encouraged to seek help and treatment voluntarily through Occupational Health Service or through resources of their own choosing. Employees will be granted, if necessary, leave to undergo treatment and any such leave will be regarded as sick leave with Councils permission, with monitoring of progress by the Occupational Health Service.

Should an employee refuse or discontinue any programme of assistance designed for them, then any unacceptable behaviour or inadequate standard of work will be dealt with on its merits through the Disciplinary Procedure.

Welfare

If, as a consequence of medically related absence, you have concerns about an employee's ability to undertake the full range of duties and responsibilities associated with their post, consideration should be given to suspending them with pay or finding alternative duties whilst medical advice is sought from an Occupational Health Unit.

Termination of Employment

Prior to termination being considered the Staffing Committee or the Clerk will meet with the individual to explore whether there are any reasonable adjustments that could be made to enable the employee to remain employed. Termination of employment may take place where:

- An employee is declared permanently unfit for work
- An employee is declared medically unfit for work and alternative employment cannot be found
- A decision has been taken that the service can no longer tolerate a high level of absence

- A decision has been taken, within the disciplinary process, that an employee has wilfully abused the sickness absence/payments provisions and /or absented themselves without permission

To reach a decision whether dismissal is appropriate an attendance hearing will be arranged. The employee will be invited in writing to attend the hearing and notified of their right to be accompanied by a trade union representative of colleague.

The Hearing Panel will be the Staffing Committee or if this is not appropriate may consist of other members of the Council or external advisors, who will make the decision. A member of the Staffing Committee or the Clerk will attend to outline the history of absence and any relevant steps taken and advice received.

All paperwork relating to the hearing will be circulated 5 days in advance of the hearing, to all parties attending.

At the hearing once they have considered both the managers and employees' case and considered all relevant information the Panel will adjourn to decide.

The decision of the Panel must be confirmed to the employee in writing within 5 working days. The letter should clearly set out:

- The Panel's decision
 - If a warning has been issued, the timescale for this and the level of improvement required, or
 - If the decision is not to act at this point and review again in a certain time period, the applicable timescale for this, or
 - If the decision is to dismiss the employee, inform them of their relevant notice period and provide them with any relevant pension information.
- The employee's right to appeal.

Monitoring

Monitoring is an important part of sickness absence. In order for reports to be issued to the Council, it is important that all absences from the workplace is recorded. All signed absence forms should therefore be returned as soon as possible after the employee's return to work interview has been conducted.

The Clerk or Chair of Staffing will ensure that an absence history is maintained for all employees, these records will provide the base data for compilation, at regular intervals, of statistics showing the level of sickness absence in WDPC.

The sickness monitoring system will also enable the Council to identify cases where frequent or lengthy absences have occurred, or where patterns of absence have been identified. However, you should view such notifications as a secondary means of identifying problems or potential problems.

You should ensure that at all times you maintain comprehensive records for each employee in relation to contact during and immediately following periods of sickness absence. These details should be maintained on the employee's personal file and should be treated with sensitivity and confidentiality at all times. Employee's will be entitled to access these records on request.

APPENDIX 1

RETURN TO WORK DISCUSSION

Name				
Date of interview				
Time of interview				
Period of sickness absence	From		To	
Number of working days absent				

***Self-Certificate/ Doctors Certificate provided (delete as appropriate) – Attached**

Provide brief details of the content of the discussion:

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

(Employee)

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

(Employer)