

POLICY CONTENTS PAGE

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INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council is committed to the provision of high quality and cost effective services as detailed in the Council's Corporate Plan. A key factor in the delivery of these services is the availability of competent staff to provide quality services to residents, visitors, customers and colleagues in a timely manner. The Council recognises that high levels of attendance and team working positively contribute to the effective provision of services. Managers have a pivotal role to play in influencing employee behaviour and performance and creating a fulfilling work environment which values individual effort, team effort and good attendance at work.
- 1.2 Conversely low levels of attendance result in service disruption, delays in the completion of work, lower staff morale, additional work pressures on staff covering the absence of colleagues, lower productivity and higher employment costs associated with temporary replacement cover. Sickness absence may also have a considerable adverse impact on both an individual employee's physical and psychological well-being.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 The Council expects the regular and punctual attendance of all employees at work. The Council recognises that staff occasionally will be absent from work due to sickness absence.
- 2.2 As an employer the Council has a duty of care of all its employees and commits itself to promoting good employee health throughout the organisation.
- 2.3 The Council understands that employees are increasingly balancing a range of activities, interests and relationships outside work whilst striving to meet the increasing demands of the workplace. The Council will try where reasonably practicable to accommodate an employee's requests to achieve a good work-life balance.
- 2.4 The Council's Executive Management Team and Committee will be provided with sickness absence levels on a quarterly basis and develop initiatives to reduce sickness absence in accordance with the Chief Local Government Auditor's Annual Letter to Council.

3. OBJECTIVE

- 3.1 The objective of this Policy is to adopt a balanced approach towards protecting and enhancing the interests and well-being of all the Council's employees as well as those of all other Council stakeholders eg residents of the borough/district, visitors, customers and work colleagues in the delivery of quality services.

4. SCOPE

- 4.1 This Policy has been developed in conjunction with management and trade unions and applies to all employees regardless of role or position.

5. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 5.1 This Policy aims to positively manage employee attendance at work and contribute to the achievement of the Council's Corporate Objectives by:-
- a) Creating a well-managed, safe and healthy working environment for all employees.
 - b) Establishing a framework within which employees' absence from work is managed fairly, compassionately and consistently with due regard to current employment legislation, case law, best practice and professional advice.
 - c) Providing a system of on-going support and engagement with employees absent from work due to sickness.
 - d) Addressing the causes of sickness absence.
 - e) Putting in place rehabilitative measures where these are feasible and appropriate. The Council will comply with its obligations to make reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995. The Council will, wherever possible, consider all reasonable adjustments which could be made in respect of an employee's work in order to facilitate their return to work. Such adjustments may include a reduction in hours, lighter duties for a specific period of time, phased return and the possibility of a transfer of duties. Such adjustments may be adopted on a temporary or permanent basis depending on the circumstances of each case.
 - f) Regularly monitoring the financial cost of sickness absence and investing in appropriate employee health initiatives to promote good health.
 - g) Minimising potential disruption/ delays in service delivery arising from employee sickness absence by encouraging team working and effective contingency planning in all work teams.
 - h) Fostering partnership working between employees, recognised trade unions and management in the implementation of this policy.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Primary responsibility for attendance management lies with the line manager and employees. However, it is acknowledged that Human Resources and the Councils Occupational Health also have a role to play in attendance management. The effective and efficient implementation of any attendance management procedure also depends on the co-operation of individuals, and it is therefore important that employees understand fully their own rights and obligations under the policy.

The roles of all parties in managing attendance are summarised below.

6. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 Every employee must:-

- a) Take responsibility for achieving an acceptable level of attendance.
- b) Take responsibility for recovery and a timely return to work.
- c) Be aware of the requirements of the policy, its application as well as welfare services that are available eg counselling, referral to occupational health.
- d) Comply with the Council's notification procedures on a timely basis, to include the provision of self-certification of illness and GP fit notes.
- e) Co-operate fully with absence review procedures to include requests for meetings.
- f) Provide sufficient information to the Council as and when required to facilitate a timely return to work.
- g) Comply with any reasonable treatment or medical advice to ensure a speedy recovery.
- h) Disclose information on any disability that may impact upon the level of attendance.
- i) Comply with requests to attend any occupational health or medical appointment made by the Council either by means of the employee's own transportation or public transport, whichever is appropriate. (The Council will arrange transportation for employees to attend such medical appointments if a genuine difficulty arises).
- j) Make management aware of any concerns regarding health, safety and welfare issues.

Not attend (for example college course or physical holiday) or participate in any activity (for example sports) which would bring into question the reason for continued absence or which might be detrimental to a speedy return to work. Clarification on such participation must be sought from the GP/Occupational Health and a report sent to HR confirming if the employee should participate in

such activities. Permission must also be sought by the employee if they can go on holidays during a period of sick leave and if this should be taken as annual leave or continuation of sick leave.

- k) Not undertake any other employment of full time or part time nature while claiming sick pay including self employment or any form of work (paid or unpaid).
- l) Receive required approval from the GP or occupational health consultant prior to going on holiday while on certified sick leave in a timely manner. Each case will be treated on its own merits.
- m) Be aware that the sick pay scheme is for ill health, and not for other purposes such as caring responsibilities.

7. MANAGER/SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 The line manager/supervisor will have a responsibility to exercise leadership and as such is expected to monitor and manage employee attendance. He/she should therefore ensure that all employees understand what is expected in terms of an acceptable level of attendance, and that their contribution to the service provided by the Council is valued.

7.2 Managers/supervisors should therefore undertake the following:-

- a) Ensure the policy is accessible and communicated to all employees to include the notification procedures for absence and the required standards of attendance.
- b) Ensure new employees, as part of the induction process, are made aware of, and understand the rules and procedures under this policy.
- c) Regularly monitor levels of sick absence in line with the absence review mechanisms and maintain accurate records for each individual employee to include providing timely and accurate returns to the Human Resources Department.
- d) Maintain confidentiality, treating all employees with dignity and in a fair and consistent manner; encourage employees to seek help with any problems which they might have which result in non-attendance at work including signposting to services eg Counselling.
- e) Conduct relevant meetings and/or necessary actions in line with the policy eg return to work interviews and absence review meetings, completing the necessary paperwork in full for all absences due to illness.
- f) Establish, monitor and implement improvements for managing attendance in conjunction with individual employees and reviewing them as necessary.
- g) Maintain regular contact with employees who are absent from work, whether due to short-term or long-term sick absence, industrial injury or disability. In circumstances where there is an issue of a sensitive or personal nature, an

employee or line manager may contact Human Resources for advice and/or assistance.

- h) Ensure a firm approach is adopted towards unauthorised absence in line with the Disciplinary policy.
- i) Comply with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy in the operation and implementation of this policy.
- j) Seek guidance from, and liaise with the Human Resources Department on the appropriate management of sickness absence.
- k) Be aware that failure to carry out relevant meetings and/or necessary actions in line with the policy in a timely manner may result in a meeting being conducted with the Director and/or disciplinary action being instigated.

8. HUMAN RESOURCES RESPONSIBILITIES

8.1 While the primary responsibility for attendance management lies with line managers, Human Resources will provide an important source of advice and have a central role to play in facilitating and supporting management in their efforts to effectively manage employee attendance. Human Resources will therefore provide the following:-

- a) Ensure confidentiality is maintained throughout all stages of the process and that all documentation, reports etc are securely stored and handled in line with Data Protection legislation.
- b) As part of the recruitment and selection process, arrange pre-employment medical assessments as appropriate and provide feedback from Occupational Health, if required.
- c) Assist line managers/supervisors in ensuring that all new employees, as part of the induction process, are made aware of, and understand the rules and procedures of the policy and relevant welfare services that may be of assistance.
- d) Provide training to line managers/supervisors to ensure they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills (procedural and interpersonal) to manage attendance effectively.
- e) Provide professional advice, support and information to managers and staff on all aspects of the policy, to include attending absence review meetings.
- f) Provide information on welfare and counselling services as required to employees to assist them in dealing with problems which adversely affect their attendance at work.
- g) Co-ordinate the provision of Occupational Health services to include making referrals to the Council's Occupational Health Consultant in order to establish the actual medical condition of an individual employee as part of the process of

managing attendance, and usually following a recommendation from a line manager.

- h) Complete and submit Occupational Health Referral for employees and arrange meetings with employees following receipt of reports from the Council's Occupational Health Consultant and undertaking other actions contained in the reports.
- i) Provide quarterly reports to the Senior Management Team, managers on sick absence levels within the Council.
- j) Compile and complete the Local Government Audit Office annual absence return.
- k) Review and update the Managing Attendance Policy and procedures as and when necessary, consulting and involving all relevant stakeholders.
- l) When appropriate, act as an initial point of contact for employees who prefer not to discuss their medical condition with the line manager/supervisor, because of the sensitive or personal nature of the information.

9. OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (OHS) RESPONSIBILITIES

- 9.1 An OHS enables the Council to encourage an efficient and effective workforce by promoting and maintaining well-being in the workplace, and to enable the Council to fulfil its obligations under current legislation.
- 9.2 Should employees have concerns about their health, whilst still at work and wish to seek permission to refer themselves to occupational health for further advice on how to effectively manage their health condition, they should contact HR, in the first instance to discuss and Human Resources will make the relevant appointment, if applicable.
- 9.3 The OHS will, if required:-
 - a) Carry out pre-employment health assessments.
 - b) Carry out ergonomic assessments as well as audiometry testing, lung function examinations and Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) assessments as part of the Council's ongoing health surveillance programme.
 - c) Carry out health assessments on employees absent from work due to either repeated short-term or long-term sick leave. For employees on long-term sick leave, the Council will require attendance at an Occupational Health appointment (irrespective of whether a GP has verified the employee as being fit) before the employee is able to return to work. The purpose of doing so is to ensure health and well-being by obtaining information on required adjustments to duties and/or a phased return, and to fulfil Council insurance requirements.
 - d) Produce a formal report following each assessment. This report will be copied to the employee. If requested by the employee they may see a copy of the report

prior to it being sent to HR. A meeting will be held with the employee to review the report with the line manager/supervisor and a HR Officer.

- e) Maintain confidentiality throughout the whole process and ensure that all documentation is stored and handled securely and confidentially.
- f) Provide advice to staff and help them to understand the illness and minimise its impact on their ability to work.
- g) Make assessments in terms of an employee application to NILGOSC (Northern Ireland Local Government Superannuation Committee) for ill-health retirement.
- h) Advise if and when the use of confidential counselling services or other therapy services eg physiotherapy are appropriate.

In addition to absence review an employee may also be referred to Occupational Health as part of the disciplinary process, e.g. in connection with capability; to ascertain whether or not there is an underlying medical condition.

In the event of an employee refusing to attend an OHS examination the Council will base decisions in connection with employment on the information available at that time.

Occupational Sick Pay may be suspended on the following grounds:-

- Repeated abuse of the sickness scheme (will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure)
- Absence due or attributable to deliberate conduct prejudicial to recovery
- Employee's own misconduct
- Injury while working in the employee's own time on their own account for private gain or for another employer
- If the Council's Occupational Health Consultant advises that the employee is medically fit for work.
- The Council shall advise the employee of the grounds for suspension and the employee shall have a right to appeal the decision in accordance with the appeals procedure set out in the disciplinary procedures.

