



Absence Management Policy and Procedure

Honiton Town Council

1 Introduction

The Council is committed to providing effective, high-quality service to all its customers 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, the Council expects all employees to take reasonable care of their own health, seek medical help whenever appropriate, and to attend work when fit to do so.

The Council recognises that genuine medical grounds will occasionally result in employee absence. It is the Council's policy to treat all such sickness absence in a fair, sensitive, and consistent manner across all areas of the workforce.

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

It is very likely that short or long term absence from work will impact on other staff.

1.1 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;
- Managers and employees adhere to this policy and procedure; and
- Levels of sickness absence are the subject of routine monitoring.

1.2 Responsibilities

It is important that employees read and understand this document. If employees are not sure about any part of it, they should ask their line manager, who will provide the necessary clarification.

The onus for attending work on a regular basis and for reporting absence in accordance with the Council's 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 on a day-to-day basis lies with the Town Clerk. It is therefore essential that they ensure that all employees are aware of this Policy and Procedure.

1.3 Miscellaneous

It is important that employees comply with this procedure so that:

- The Council can monitor sickness absence across the workforce and identify any intervention/support needed;
- The Council can provide assistance to individual employees where necessary; and
- Any sick pay to which the employee would otherwise be entitled is not withheld or refused.

If an employee wilfully abuses the sickness absence/payments provisions or absented themselves without permission, then this will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's disciplinary process.

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. The employee is entitled to access their records on request.

2 Absence Reporting

Employees who are unable to work due to illness/injury must telephone their line manager. This should be done before their expected start time or, if this is not possible, as soon as possible. Text messages or emails are not sufficient. If the employee is unable to speak to the appropriate person, then they should leave a message for their line manager to phone them back.

When reporting absent, the employee should provide some indication of:

- The nature of the absence;
- The date the injury/illness began (including weekends and holidays);
- The expected duration of the absence; and
- Whether there are any immediate work commitments that need completing/reassigning during the absence.

If the employee is unable to report themselves absent, they must arrange for someone else to do this on their behalf.

The employee must maintain contact with their line manager during any period of sickness absence lasting longer than one day, so that the line manager is aware of any progress and the expected date of return to work.

Failure to follow the sickness reporting process may lead to the absence from work being considered as unauthorised, resulting in loss of pay and possible disciplinary action.

3 Certification

3.1 Absence Period of up to Seven Days

Where the absence is for a period of up to seven days (including weekends) and not covered by a statement of fitness to work ("fit note"), the employee will be asked to complete a self-certification form on their return to work.

3.2 Absence Period Exceeding Seven Days

If the absence exceeds seven days and the employee has not already done so, they must provide medical evidence in the form of a fit note for the remainder of the absence. If the absence continues, the employee will need to ensure that the employer is always provided with a current fit note.

All fit notes must be certified by a healthcare professional who has assessed the employee's fitness for work. Healthcare professionals who are eligible to issue fit notes are doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists and physiotherapists. The fit note should state whether or not the employee needs to see a doctor or other healthcare professional again before returning to work.

If the fit note states that the employee "may be fit for work", the employee should inform their line manager immediately. They will refer to the fit note and discuss with the employee whether there are any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate the return to work, taking into account the doctor's or healthcare professional's advice. This may take place at a Return-to-Work Interview or an Absence Review Meeting. If appropriate measures cannot be taken, the employee will remain on sick leave and their line manager will set a date to review the situation.

4 Return to Work Meetings

When the employee returns to work after any period of absence, their line manager will arrange to meet with them. This meeting will occur on the first day back or as soon as possible.

The Return-to-Work form is shown at Appendix 1.

The purpose of the return-to-work meeting is:

- To provide an opportunity for their line manager to check that the employee is fit enough to return to work;
- To give the employee an opportunity to voice any concerns that they may have and/or to identify any domestic, welfare, or work-related problems in an appropriate forum;
- To ensure that the employee is aware of work-related matters that have occurred during their absence; and
- To complete a Sickness Declaration Form to record details of the absence for payroll/administrative purposes in addition to the return to work form.

Return to Work interviews should still be carried out following any absences that occur during any formal monitoring periods as set out below.

5 Short-Term Frequent Intermittent Absence

5.1 Absence Triggers

The Council will instigate a more formal review of attendance records and reasons for absence with an employee if there has been either (a) four episodes of absence or (b) a total of 10 working days' short-term sickness absence within any period of 12 months.

The number of days of sickness absence which constitutes the absence trigger point will be reduced pro rata for employees who work less than 5 days per week as follows:

Normal Days Worked Per Week	Absence Trigger – Total No. of Working Days
5	10
4	8
3	6
2	4
1	2

5.2 Action When Absence Triggers are Reached

The guidance in the following sections sets out the procedure for addressing short term absence when absence triggers are reached. A flow chart to support the guidance can be found at Appendix 2.

If an employee's level of attendance improves satisfactorily during a period of monitoring, then at the end of the monitoring period they will be informed that no further action will be taken.

There is, however, an expectation that a satisfactory level of attendance will then be sustained. If the employee's absence meets a trigger in situations where absence monitoring has recently ended or where an employee has repeatedly been subject to absence monitoring, consideration can be given to picking up the procedure at the next or most recent stage rather than starting the process from the beginning.

5.3 Stage 1 – Short-Term Absence Review Meeting

The relevant manager will arrange an absence review meeting with any employee whose absence record matches or exceeds the above criteria set out in 5.1 above. The employee will be invited in writing to attend the review meeting and notified of their right to be accompanied by a Trade Union Representative or colleague. The employee should be reminded that the aim of the meeting is to find ways to improve their attendance.

During the meeting, the manager should bring the employee's attention to their poor attendance record and the problems that their absences are causing for the Council and other employees. The manager and the employee should also consider any steps that can be put in place to help the employee to improve their attendance as well as signposting them to any additional support that can be accessed such as an Employee Assist Programme.

During the meeting, if the employee discloses an underlying health condition, then the advice in section 9 should be followed.

At the meeting, the employee will normally be advised that:

- They are being issued with a Stage 1 Short-Term Absence Warning, to inform them that if they are unable to sustain an improved level of absence then this procedure will continue to be followed.
- A 6-month monitoring period will be put in place.
- During that time their absence is not expected to exceed half the annual triggers set out in 5.1 above.
- The manager will meet them at the end of the 6-month period to review their absence levels.
- If they exceed the half-year triggers before the end of the 6-month monitoring period, the review meeting should take place at this point.
- If the half-year triggers are exceeded during the monitoring period, then a decision may be taken to move to Stage 2, as set out below.

This will be confirmed in writing and the employee will be notified of their right to appeal.

5.4 Stage 2 – Further Short-Term Absence Review Meeting

If the employee reaches the absence trigger set for their stage 1 monitoring period, the relevant manager will arrange a further absence review meeting. The employee should be reminded that the aim of the meeting is to find ways to improve their attendance. The employee will be invited in writing to attend the further review meeting and notified of their right to be accompanied by a Trade Union Representative or colleague.

During the meeting, the manager should remind the employee of the problems caused by their absences. The manager and the employee should also review any steps that may have been put in place to help the employee to improve their attendance and consider any further support that may be needed. The employee should also be reminded of any additional support that they can access such as the Employee Assist Programme.

During the meeting, if the employee discloses an underlying health condition which hasn't previously been raised then the advice in section 9 should be followed.

The employee will normally be advised that:

- They are being issued with a Stage 2 Short-Term Absence Warning, to inform them that if they are unable to sustain an improved level of absence then this procedure will continue to be followed and their employment may be terminated.
- A further 6-month monitoring period will be put in place.
- During that time their absence is not expected to exceed half the annual triggers set out in 5.1 above.
- The manager will meet them at the end of the 6-month period to review their absence levels.
- If they exceed the half-year triggers above before the end of the 6-month monitoring period, the review meeting should take place at this point.
- If the half-year triggers are exceeded during the monitoring period, then a decision may be taken to move to Stage 3, as set out below.

This will be confirmed in writing and the employee will be notified of their right to appeal.

5.5 Stage 3 – Final Short-Term Absence Review Meeting

Where an employee's attendance has still not improved to the required level, the relevant manager will arrange a final absence review meeting. The employee should be made aware that the aim of the meeting is to review and discuss their attendance and for the manager to decide whether a Short-Term Attendance Hearing should be held to consider dismissal.

Although there is no statutory right of accompanied at this meeting, the relevant manager may extend this offer to the employee as a supportive measure.

During the meeting, the manager should review the employee's absence record and remind the employee of the problems caused by their absences. The manager and the employee should also review any steps that may have been put in place to help the employee to improve their attendance and consider any further support that may be needed. The employee should also be reminded of any additional support that they can access such as the Employee Assist Programme.

During the meeting, if the employee discloses an underlying health condition which hasn't previously been raised then the advice in section 9 should be followed.

The manager should then inform the employee whether the decision has been made to proceed to an Attendance Hearing or not. Alternative options made include a further period of monitoring or a review of the trigger levels.

5.6 Attendance Hearing for Short-Term Absence

Where the decision is made to proceed to an Attendance Hearing, the employee will be invited in writing to attend the hearing and notified of their right to be accompanied by a Trade Union Representative or colleague.

The Hearing Panel will normally be comprised of three members of the HR Committee, who will make the decision. The Town Clerk/line manager will attend to outline the history of absence; details of absence monitoring carried out; support given; and other relevant information, including, where applicable, any medical advice received.

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

Once the Panel has considered the manager's and employee's cases, and all other relevant information, it will adjourn to make a decision.

The decision to terminate the employee's employment may take place where the organisation can no longer tolerate the high level of absence.

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

- 1) The Panel's decision:
 - a) If a stage 3 warning has been issued, the timescale for this (normally 6 months), the level of improvement required and any other measures/support put in place;

- b) If the decision is to dismiss the employee, inform them of their relevant notice period and provide them with any relevant pension information; and
- 2) The employee's right of Appeal.

6 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. There is very likely to be an impact on other staff.

6.1 Long-Term Absence Review Meetings

The Council will maintain contact with the employee and advise them that they should keep the Council informed of developments relating to their medical condition.

The Council will hold regular Absence Review Meetings with the employee during their absence, as appropriate. The purpose of the meetings is to keep the employee up to date, review the on-going absence, and offer support to the employee where appropriate.

Where an employee remains absent and a return to work is not foreseeable within a reasonable timescale, the Town Clerk will arrange a Final Absence Review meeting which may lead to an Attendance Hearing to consider dismissal.

6.2 Final Long-Term Absence Review Meeting

Prior to an absence hearing being arranged for an employee on long-term sickness absence, the Town Clerk will normally meet with the individual for a final absence review meeting.

The purpose of the meeting is to provide a final opportunity to review and discuss the employee's current situation and for the Town Clerk to decide whether an Attendance Hearing should be held. Alternative outcomes from the final absence review meeting could include seeking further medical advice or setting a date for a further absence review (e.g. where a medical appointment is due).

In order to decide whether to proceed to an Attendance Hearing, the Town Clerk will make sure that they have fully explored all the relevant information relating to the employee's absence. This would also be provided to the Attendance Hearing Panel if a decision is made to proceed to an Attendance Hearing.

This will depend upon the individual case, but may include:

- Relevant absence history and the date on which the current absence started;
- The reason for the employee's current absence;
- Details of absence review meetings and other communications during this absence;
- Any treatment/investigations being undertaken and the timescales for these to be completed;
- Whether there has been any recent improvement in the employee's condition and whether this is expected to continue;
- Whether there is any prospect of them returning to work within a reasonable timescale;
- Any reasonable adjustments or other support which would enable the employee to return to work within a reasonable timeframe;
- Any vacant roles within the organisation which the employee would be capable of performing and, where applicable, whether they would wish for this to be considered.

It is usually advisable to seek up to date medical reports from an Occupational Health provider or the employee's medical professional prior to an Attendance Hearing.

6.3 Long-Term Absence Hearing

Where the decision is made to proceed to a Long-Term Absence Hearing, the employee will be invited in writing to attend the hearing and notified of their right to be accompanied by a Trade Union Representative or colleague.

The Hearing Panel will normally be comprised of three members of the HR Committee, who will make the decision. The Town Clerk will attend to outline the history of absence and relevant information described in Section 6.2 above.

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

Once the Panel has considered the manager's and employee's cases, and all other relevant information, it will adjourn to make a decision.

The decision to terminate the employees employment may take place where:

- An employee is declared permanently unfit for work;
- An employee is declared medically unfit for their work and alternative employment has not be found;
- The service can no longer support the employee's continued absence for operational/financial reasons.

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

- If the decision is not to take action at this point and to 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; and
- The employee's right of appeal.

7 Appeals

Employees have the right to appeal against any decision to issue a formal warning or dismissal under this procedure. If an employee wishes to appeal, they should write to the Town Clerk setting out the grounds of their appeal. This must be done within 10 days of the date of the letter informing them of the outcome of the relevant stage of this procedure.

Appeals will be heard by a separate person/panel. For warnings short of dismissal, the appeal will normally be heard by another manager or the Town Clerk. For warnings issued at a Short-Term Attendance Hearing or Long-Term Absence Hearing, the Appeal will normally be heard by members of the Appeals Committee who have not previously been involved.

Once the person/panel hearing the appeal has considered both the employee's appeal and the original Hearing Chair's case, and considered all other relevant information, the meeting will be adjourned to make a decision.

The decision will be confirmed to the employee in writing within 5 working days. The decision will be final and there is no further right of appeal.

8 Occupational Health

In order to ensure that the Council has access to guidance and advice in respect of the best course of action to follow in relation to cases of absence, employees may be referred to the Council's Occupational Health Advisor.

Examples of when an employee may be referred to occupational health include to:

- establish when the employee might be able to return to work;
- ask for guidance on an employee's health condition;
- discuss any adjustments that could be considered in order to support the employee.

Where the Occupational Health Advisor makes a recommendation that might affect the employee's continued employment, the relevant manager will discuss the advice and options going forward at an Absence Review Meeting with the employee. Employees may wish to have the support of a trade union representative or a work colleague present during such a meeting, and this should be positively encouraged.

In certain cases, the Occupational Health Advisor might find that an employee is unfit to perform a particular job but fit enough to undertake other types of work. In such cases, full consideration will be given to the possibility of redeployment into alternative positions. Consideration will also be given to redeployment in cases where work in a particular place poses problems with attendance.

Where a return to work following a period of prolonged absence might be facilitated by temporary redeployment or phased re-introduction (e.g. reduction in hours) an employee can discuss these options with their manager and, if such measures are appropriate, the Council will ensure that the support mechanisms necessary for this to occur are provided. Such arrangements will be for a defined period and will be subject to joint review.

9 Underlying Medical Conditions

Where an employee and/or their manager identifies that the employee's attendance may be affected by an underlying medical condition, the Town Clerk will give consideration whether to request that an Occupational Health referral is arranged.

This process would involve discussing with the employee the proposal to undertake a referral to the Council's Occupational Health Service. The purpose of this referral would be to obtain independent medical advice on:

- The nature of any underlying/recurrent condition;
- How to support the employee to improve their attendance, e.g. suggestions for reasonable adjustments to the employee's work, which the Council could consider.

Any agreed adjustments should be taken into account when applying the following procedure, which may need to be adapted accordingly.

Where appropriate, an employee may be referred to Occupational Health on more than one occasion e.g. when there has been a change to an employee's underlying health condition or prior to an attendance hearing.

10 Personal, Domestic, or Work-Related Problems

Where an employee reveals that their absence has been a consequence of personal, domestic, or work-related problems, the relevant manager should endeavour to discuss with them any relevant details that they wish to disclose.

Although an employee may have genuine concerns about revealing sensitive or personal information, they should be reminded that such matters will be

treated confidentially and that the Council cannot assist them if it is not made aware of the problem. If an employee wishes to discuss matters with someone other than the relevant manager, the Chair of the HR Committee can be contacted for a confidential interview.

Once the problem has been clearly identified, appropriate assistance can be offered to the employee. In some circumstances, special leave, temporary adjustments in working arrangements, or referral to specialist agencies may be granted.

11 Alcohol/Drug Dependency

Where an employee discloses that their absences are a consequence of alcohol or drug related problems, after a Risk Assessment they will be encouraged to seek help and treatment voluntarily through the Council's Occupational Health Service or through resources of their own choosing. Employees may be granted, if necessary, leave to undergo treatment and any such leave will be regarded as sick leave within the terms of the Council's sick pay scheme, with the 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 Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

12 Welfare

If, as a consequence of medically related issues, the relevant manager has any concerns about an employee's ability to undertake the full range of duties and responsibilities associated with their post, they should encourage them to seek advice from their GP. If necessary, consideration could be given to suspending them with pay, or finding alternative duties whilst medical advice is sought from the Occupational Health Provider.

13 Monitoring of Absence Records

Monitoring is an important part of sickness absence management. In order for this to take place, it is important that all absence from the workplace is reported and recorded. All signed Sickness Declaration Forms and Return to Work Forms should be returned as soon as possible after the employee's Return to Work Interview has been conducted.

The Town Clerk will ensure that absence records are maintained for all employees. These records will provide the base data for the compilation, as required, of statistics showing the level of sickness absence across the Council.

The absence monitoring system will also enable the Town Clerk to identify individual cases where frequent or lengthy absences have occurred, or where patterns of absence have been identified. However, the manager should not rely on this as a substitute for pro-actively identifying and addressing problems or potential problems.

Managers should ensure that records of contact during and after absence are completed thoroughly and correctly stored on the employee's personnel record. These could include Sickness Absence Declaration forms, return to work meeting records, fit notes, notes of absence review meetings, correspondence and medical reports. These should be treated with sensitivity and confidentiality at all times. Employees 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 / fit note provided (*delete as appropriate) – Attached

Provide brief details of the content of the discussion:

Signed Date.....
 (Employee)

Signed Date.....
 (Town/Parish Clerk)

APPENDIX 2 – MANAGING SHORT-TERM ABSENCE – FLOW CHART

