



ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

1 PURPOSE

This policy is designed to assist Tidworth Town Council (hereafter known as the Council) in effectively managing sickness-related and other staff absences. The Council recognises the importance of ensuring that employees are supported through any periods of absence and their subsequent return to work. Through an effective Absence Management Policy, the Council will be better positioned to identify any potentially unsafe work practices, any issues affecting employee morale, and any other underlying problems employees may be facing.

2 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 comprehensive procedural guidelines produced in support of this policy.
- Levels of sickness absence are the subject of routine monitoring.

3 RESPONSIBILITIES

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. The responsibility for recording, monitoring and managing absence lies with the Town Clerk. It is therefore essential that the Town Clerk ensures that all employees are aware of the Council's Absence Management Policy.

4 GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYEES

4.1 Reporting

If an employee is unable to work due to illness/injury they must contact the Town Clerk* as soon as possible or arrange for someone else to do this on their behalf. This should be no later than 9.30am on the first day of absence or nearest working day. Some indication of the following should be provided:

- The nature of the absence.
- The date the injury/illness began (including weekends and holidays).
- The expected duration of absence.
- Whether there are any immediate work commitments that will need completing/ reassigning during the absence. If the Town Clerk is unavailable the employee should ensure that contact is made with the office. No later than the fourth day of absence the Town Clerk* should be contacted again in order to provide updated information in respect of the on-going illness/injury.

4.2 Certification

Where the absence is not covered by a doctor's certificate and is for a period of up to seven days (inclusive of weekend) a self-certification form should be completed by the employee on their return to work. If the absence exceeds seven days a doctor's certificate will need to be provided for the remainder of the absence. A current certificate must be in force. The doctor's certificate 'fit note' must say whether the employee needs to see a doctor again before returning to work. If the doctor's certificate states that they "may be fit for work" the employee should inform the Town Clerk* without delay. They will discuss with the employee whether there are any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate their return to work, taking into account 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, the employee will remain on sick leave and the Town Clerk* will set a date to review the situation.

5 RETURN-TO-WORK MEETINGS

Effective absence management depends upon the availability of relevant information, therefore there should be a return-to-work meeting following each period of absence.

Return-to-work meetings present an informal opportunity to establish the cause of the absence, indicates to the employee an interest in their welfare, and allows the Council to establish whether the employee requires any further help or support.

These meetings can also provide the opportunity to alert the employee any concerns there may be in respect of situations where an unsatisfactory absence record is developing.

When the employee returns to work after any period of absence the Town Clerk will arrange to meet with them. This meeting will occur on the first day back, or as soon as possible thereafter. An entry will be made in the Town Clerk's diary to record that this meeting took place.

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- provide an opportunity for the Town Clerk* to check that the employee is fit enough to return to work.
- give an opportunity to voice any concerns that the employee may have and/or to identify any domestic, welfare or work-related problems in an appropriate forum.
- ensure that the employee is aware of work-related matters that have occurred during their absence.
- fill out the sickness declaration form.

An employee can refuse, if they wish, to provide any information at the return-to-work meeting. Where this is the case, attempts should be made to identify with the employee the reasons for this refusal. If the employee does refuse to co-operate in the return to work meeting, this will be recorded.

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. 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.

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 such cases of absence, employees who have been absent for a continuous period of 4 weeks may, depending on the nature of the absence in question, be referred to an Occupational Health Physician. Where the Occupational Health Physician makes a recommendation which may affect the employee's continued employment, the Council will arrange to meet with them to discuss alternative options. Employees may wish to have the support of a representative or a work colleague present during such a meeting, and this should be positively encouraged.

Where a return to work following a period of prolonged absence may be facilitated by temporary a phased re-introduction, i.e., job sharing or reduced hours, it will be discussed with the employee, and if appropriate, ensure that support mechanisms necessary for this to occur are provided. Such arrangements will be for a defined period and will be subject to joint review.

7 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 period of 12 months, a more formal review of attendance records and reasons will be conducted and an interview will be arranged.

During this interview, the employee's poor attendance record should be drawn to their attention, and the problems that their absences are causing for the Council and other employees explained to them.

Where no underlying medical condition is disclosed, the employee must be advised that their attendance record will be monitored (over a period not less than 3 months) and that a significant improvement will be 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.

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

Where no underlying medical condition exists, the employee should be told that their attendance record will be subject to a further period of monitoring (of not 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 at this meeting by a representative or a work colleague.

Employees whose levels of attendance improve 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.

8 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 Council will endeavour to discuss with them any relevant details which 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.

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

9 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.

Employees will be granted, if necessary, leave to undergo treatment and any such leave will be regarded as sick leave within the terms of their contract.

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

10 WELFARE

If, as a consequence of medically related absence, the Council has any 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.

11 TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT

Prior to termination being considered, the Town Clerk* will meet with the employee to explore whether there are any reasonable adjustments that could be made for them to remain employed.

Termination of employment may take place where:

- an employee is declared permanently unfit for work, or
- an employee is declared medically unfit for their work, and alternative employment cannot be found, or
- a decision has been taken that the service can no longer tolerate such a high level of absence, or
- a decision is taken, within the Council's 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 representative or colleague. The Hearing Panel, who will make the decision, will comprise of three members, being the Chair of Leadership, a member of the staffing committee and the Town Clerk**.

The Town Clerk will outline the history of absence and any relevant steps taken and any 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 the case and considered all relevant information the Panel will adjourn to make their decision.

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.
- If the decision is not to take action at this point and to review again after a certain time period, the applicable timescale for this.
- 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 of appeal.

12 MONITORING

Monitoring is an important part of sickness absence. The Town Clerk will ensure that an absence history is maintained for each employee. The sickness 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. These details should be maintained on the employee's personal file and should be treated with sensitivity and confidentiality at all times. Employees will be entitled to access these records on request.

** In the case of the Town Clerk being absent they will report to the Chair of the Leadership Committee.*

*** In the case of the Town Clerk being required to attend a Hearing Panel the members will be Chair of Leadership, a member of the Staffing Committee and another appropriately appointed Councillor.*

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

(Print Name) _____ **Chair, Tidworth Town Council**