

VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ABSENCE POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1 Introduction and Policy Aims

Vale of White Horse District Council is committed to providing a high quality, cost-effective service to its customers. It is equally committed to the care and wellbeing of its employees. Whilst it is recognised that there will inevitably be sickness absence, high levels can lead to a reduction in service provision and place additional burden on colleagues.

To ensure that we can provide the highest levels of service we also have to commit to ensuring high standards of attendance. Procedures for recording and monitoring absence are detailed in the policy along with the responsibilities of both Managers and Employees in managing sickness absence. These procedures focus on ensuring all employees are treated fairly and given the appropriate support whilst maintaining service levels.

2 Responsibilities under the Policy and Procedures

2.1 Human Resources (HR) Responsibilities

To maintain the policy and update as appropriate to reflect legislative changes, best practice etc.

To ensure employees and managers understand their responsibilities in the context of the policy

To provide managers with training and guidance in delivering return to work interviews, information counselling etc.

To ensure all staff are trained as appropriate in the use of HRPro self service system.

To provide advice and guidance to Senior Management Team (SMT), managers and employees

To liaise with welfare and occupational health advisors as appropriate

To provide monthly reports and statistics as required.

2.2 Manager Responsibilities

To understand and observe their responsibilities in upholding the absence policy.

To ensure that all employees are treated with respect and receive fair and consistent treatment.

To ensure employees feel valued during periods of sickness absence and in the way their return to work is managed.

To ensure good health and safety standards in their area and to comply with the Council's health & safety policies.

To ensure employees are aware and observe their responsibilities regarding sickness notification and reporting procedures and when recording self certified sickness absence on HRPro.

Authorising self-certified sickness on HRPro, normally within 24 hours of it being recorded by individual employees.

To ensure that HR are notified of any long term sickness immediately for recording on HRPro and the appropriate paper work forwarded to HR to authorise the long term sickness. (i.e. doctor's certificate etc.)

To maintain contact with the employee during their absence. During long term absence it is recommended that managers arrange to personally visit or meet with employees.

Where there is insufficient information or lack of clarity about the employee's absence HR should be contacted for advice and possible referral to the Council's Occupational Health (OH) Advisors.

To establish whether there is any work-based contributory cause to the absence and to consider taking any appropriate action to enable the employee to return to work (e.g. flexible working arrangements, temporary or permanent.)

To ensure records are made of any sickness or action surrounding sickness and kept up to date.

To conduct return to work interviews as appropriate.

To ensure that employees are not discriminated against under the Disability Discrimination Act.

2.3 Employee Responsibilities

To comply with Health & Safety regulations and policies.

To care for their health and seek medical help as appropriate

To understand and observe their responsibilities in respect of the sickness notification and recording procedures

To record **all** periods of absence on HRPro, including, but not limited to: Compassionate Leave, statutory parental leave, time off for ante-natal care, jury service, annual leave, flexi leave and sickness. Unauthorised absence will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedures.

To submit a Doctor's Certificate for periods of sickness absence exceeding 7 consecutive

days from the date of notification (including weekends/days not normally worked).

To refrain from participating in any activity inconsistent with their illness or which might aggravate it.

To comply with the directions of their own GP or the Council's Occupational Health (OH) Advisors.

To refrain from undertaking any unauthorised work or employment whether paid or voluntary during the period of their sickness absence.

Where an employee has been absent for some time or has consistent short term absences, the Council may require an additional opinion for the Council's OH Advisors. In this circumstance the employee will be expected to give their permission for the Council's OH Advisors to contact their own GP/Medical Advisor for further details. Depending on the circumstances it may be necessary for the employee to have an appointment with the Council's OH Advisors. Failure to comply with this request without an adequate or acceptable reason will be regarded as a disciplinary offence.

To attend a return to work interview as appropriate and provide his/her manager with an explanation of each sickness absence.

3 Notification of Absence

Employees must ensure that they have notified their manager within one hour of their usual start time (or as soon as is reasonable to do so) on the first day of sickness absence, the reason for absence and the likely date of return.

Personal contact must be made either by the employee or an appropriate person on their behalf. The most appropriate method of communication is via telephone, and when ever possible to the manager. (Sending a text message via a mobile phone or an e-mail is not an acceptable method of notifying a period of absence).

If an employee is unable to return to work when indicated the above procedure should be repeated.

If an employee is absent due to sickness for more than seven consecutive days (including weekends/days not normally worked) a Doctor's Certificate must be obtained from the employee's own GP/Medical Advisor and forwarded immediately to his/her Manager.

It is important that employees maintain regular contact with their Manager throughout the period of absence.

For extended periods of sickness absence, the employee should notify their Manager each time a new medical certificate is issued. All medical certificates should run consecutively to ensure that there are no days during the period of absence when there is no certification.

4 Recording Absence

All absences must be recorded on HRPro self service following the appropriate instructions for the type of absence.

For sickness of less than 7 consecutive days (including weekends and days not normally worked), the employee will record their sickness immediately on their return to work, on the HRPro self service system. (Details of how to do this are laid out in the HRPro training manuals available on the intranet.)

As soon as the sickness is recorded the manager* should aim to authorise the absence within 24 hours of it being entered and this in turn will notify the HR and Payroll Team.

For absences over 7 consecutive days from the first day of sickness, the employee will forward a Medical certificate immediately to HR. HR will record and authorise the employee's absence on HRPro which will immediately notify Payroll and their Manager.

Please note that if absence is not recorded and authorised as above, then this may lead to delay, subsequent adjustment or loss of pay. Where medical certificates are required by the Council but employees are unable to obtain one without cost, the reasonable cost will be fully met by the Council.

*in the absence of the line manager, sickness may be authorised by the senior manager or HR.

5 The 'Bradford Factor'

The Bradford Factor (BF) is a recognised way of monitoring individual sickness absence on an ongoing basis. The Bradford Factor calculates a score based on the number of times an employee is absent and the number of days they are absent in a rolling 12 month period.

The actual formula used to calculate an individual's BF score is:

Number of times absent x number of times absent x total number of days absent = BF

E.g.

In the 12 month period an employee is off 2 separate times. One time for 1 day and the other time for 2 days. The score will be worked out as:

2 (no. of times they are off) x 2 (no. of times they are off) x 3 (total days off) = 12 (BF score)

Depending on the BF score, different steps will be taken in order to manage the employee's absence.

There are several reasons for introducing the Bradford Factor.

Firstly short term absence is very disruptive to a service generally and can severely affect the performance of the organisation and the services we provide. Short term absence can also put adverse pressure on colleagues as short term absences are unpredictable. Repeated short term absence can also be the symptom of a more serious health or personal problem, and so monitoring it using the BF can help these problems be avoided.

The BF helps by monitoring sickness absence on a rolling 12 month period and picks up when an employee reaches a certain score as laid out in the table below. Each step can then be taken to help manage the absence appropriately.

Each period of sickness will be assessed individually and the potential action as laid out in the table is by no means the definitive outcome. Employees are encouraged to work with their managers to resolve sickness absence problems before the BF score becomes exceptionally high and it is felt action must be taken. Any action taken will be firstly informal and then becomes progressively more formal until the Capability Policy is required.

Below is the BF table which shows the scores and the interventions that will normally be considered at each score.

BF points total in 12 month rolling period	Action	Potential Outcome	Notes
Under 27	Manager talks to member of staff informally	Employee knows manager is aware of sickness and is concerned	Sickness recorded on HR Pro
27 – 124	Return to work interview with Manager	Employee knows Manager is concerned. Recording is essential	Return to work interview notes recorded on HRPro
125 - 249	Return to work interview with Assistant /Deputy Director. Improvement Plan	Counselling by HR if required. Improvement plan agreed by employee and manager	Only instigate if 3 or more absences. Inform employee of Council's provision of OH and Welfare.

250 - 499	Capability Policy invoked	Possible verbal warning issued	HR and Welfare involved from this stage
500 - 999	Capability hearing	Possible written warning issued	
1000 - 1499	Capability hearing	Possible Final written warning issued	
1500 +	Capability hearing	Possible Dismissal with notice	

The above table sets out the expected actions at each stage, but it is realised that cases may need to be looked at individually. The process can be entered at any level within the table where there is good reason to do so.

5.1 Bradford Factor (BF) Actions

5.1.1 Return to Work Interview with Manager

All employees should be asked by their Manager, informally, how they are feeling and if they feel able to do their job, on their return to work following any period of sickness.

Once the number and days of absence has reached the BF score of 27 or over, a formal return to work interview with the employee's manager will be carried out. This should be done on the employee's first day back, or as soon as possible, from their absence and the form attached to this procedure used (this will be available online on the HRPro self service system). As the absence process will be owned by the employee, the online form will need to be completed by the individual concerned. The HRPro self service system will then ask the manager to authorise the form, confirming the discussion.

The aim of the return to work interview is to:

- confirm/establish the cause of absence
- ascertain whether the employee's work environment was a contributing factor in the sickness absence
- show interest/concern regarding the welfare of the employee
- allow discussion of the general attendance record of the employee
- provide the opportunity to discuss ways in which the employee can be further supported by their colleagues, manager and the organisation.

- ascertain whether the employee's return to work can be aided by different duties in the immediate short term.
- any actions identified at the return to work interview should be acted on without delay.

5.1.2 Return to Work Interview by Assistant/Deputy Director (AD/DD)

Should the next level of the BF score be reached, the same process will be performed by the next level manager taking in to account all the above factors.

The AD/DD will agree with the employee an improvement plan of which the details will be entered by the employee on the return to work form on their HRPro Personnel Record. The Manager will then be automatically asked to authorise this form by HRPro.

Employees and managers are reminded that HR and Welfare are there to support their needs and are available at any time for discussion and advice.

5.1.3 Use of the Capability Policy

The Council will believe that every absence is genuine unless there is evidence to suggest otherwise. However repeated short term absence and long term absence can be extremely disruptive and so can become a capability issue. As such this may be dealt with under the Council's Capability Policy.

Once a BF score of 250 is reached a decision as to whether to use the Capability policy will be made between the Manager and HR. Please see the Capability Policy which shows how the process would be followed should the Capability Policy be invoked.

The Manager and HR will ascertain whether the use of the policy is appropriate by looking individually at each employee who reaches this score. HR will ensure that all cases are viewed fairly and consistently with regard to all the factors involved, and that this policy is applied appropriately and in line with all relevant legislation.

6 Long Term Absence

When an employee is absent through sickness for over 28 consecutive calendar days in one episode, the Manager will arrange to meet or visit the employee

unless there are special circumstances which prevent this. Managers must seek the advice of Human Resources prior to any visit.

Regular contact will be maintained with an employee on long- term sick to ensure communication is working both ways. The Manager should ascertain the employee's expectations of when they will return to work (see Section 6.1 below).

Employees on long term sickness absence may be referred to the Council's Occupational Health Advisors, through HR. Full discussions will take place with the employee before this referral and consent sought to obtain the necessary enquiry forms.

If there is no satisfactory indication of a return to work in the foreseeable future, and the team are being put under strain because of the employee's absence, consideration may then need to be given to whether continued employment is reasonable in the circumstances.

Taking the employee's views into account and examining all the available evidence, the Manager will have a number of options:

- Allow more time for improvement;
- Offer alternative employment (if possible);
- If an employee is or has become disabled then new working methods should be explored;
- Refer to their Assistant/Deputy Director in order to terminate the contract of employment under the Capability Policy (in extreme cases).

Although an employee will continue to accrue annual leave during a period of sickness absence, at the end of the leave year they will only be able to carry over a maximum of 5 days annual leave, to be used within 2 calendar months.

6.1 Returning to Work after Long Term Absence

Every employee is valued for their contribution and as such it is the Council's aim that every employee be helped to return to work from long term sickness and that the return to work is made as easy as possible.

If an employee has been absent from work for over 28 consecutive calendar days in one episode due to sickness, and where appropriate, HR will discuss with the employee and the Manager a suitable return to work plan. This may include returning to work on reduced hours or with reduced responsibilities.

Phased returns to working the employee's normal hours will need to be

discussed and agreed with our Occupational Health advisors and HR. When the employee returns to work they will return on full pay but will be requested to use any holiday entitlement to make up the full time hours if possible.

Employee and manager need to work together with HR and Occupational Health, to ensure that the return to work plan is appropriate. Any issues should be discussed immediately as they arise and the plan re-worked if required.

7 Sick Pay

7.1 Occupational Sick Pay (for employees on VWHDC conditions of service)

Where sick, staff have a contractual entitlement to the following:

During 1st year of service	1 month's full pay and (after 4 months' service) 2 months' half pay
During 2nd year of service	2 months' full and 2 months' half pay
During 3rd year of service	4 months' full and 4 months' half pay
During 4th and 5th year	5 months' full and 5 months' half pay
After 5 years' service	6 months' full and 6 months' half pay

In the case of full pay periods, sick pay will be an amount which when added to Statutory Sick Pay and Incapacity Benefit receivable will secure the equivalent of normal pay.

In the case of half pay periods sick pay will be an amount equal to half normal earnings plus an amount equivalent to Statutory Sick Pay and Incapacity Benefit receivable, so long as the total sum does not exceed normal pay.

7.2 Statutory Sick Pay

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) was introduced in 1983 and eligible employees are entitled to receive up to 28 weeks SSP in a period of incapacity for work. Eligibility does not depend on length of service and includes married women and widows paying reduced rate of National Insurance Contributions. If applicable this will be offset against any payments made under the Occupational Scheme.

ELIGIBILITY

The following categories of employee are excluded from the right to Statutory Sick Pay if on the first day of incapacity:

- the employee is engaged on a short term contract of three calendar

months or less

- the employee's average earnings are less than the lower earnings limit for National Insurance
- the employee was claiming sickness or invalidity benefit or maternity allowance from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in the period of 57 days immediately before the first day of incapacity. In these cases the employee will be given a 'linking letter' by the DWP to pass onto Human Resources
- a new employee who has done no work at all under his/her contract of employment
- there is a stoppage of work due to a trade dispute at the work place unless the employee can show that he/she did not have a direct interest in the dispute
- the employee has provided a leaver's statement which shows that 28 weeks SSP has already been due from the former employer, and there is a gap of 56 days or less since the last day of SSP shown on the statement; or the employee has already received 28 weeks SSP from his employer for a continuous period of incapacity to work or linked period of incapacity to work
- the employee is pregnant and is within the disqualifying period which is a period of 18 weeks covering the maternity pay period. If the employee is still working, the 18 weeks begins at the fourth week before the expected week of confinement if she is sick with a pregnancy related illness
- the employee is outside the European Economic Area and the employer is not liable to pay Class 1 National Insurance contributions, or would not be liable even if the earnings were high enough
- the employee is detained in legal custody or is serving a period of imprisonment.

QUALIFYING DAYS

Statutory Sick Pay can only be paid for qualifying (ie working) days.

Employees are not eligible for SSP unless they are sick for four consecutive qualifying days: the first three qualifying days are called waiting days and do not attract payment.

PAYMENT OF STATUTORY SICK PAY

Payment of SSP will be made on the first normal pay day practicable after the qualifying conditions have been met. The rate of SSP is reviewed annually and current rates are available from HR.

8 Sickness Monitoring

HR will monitor sickness and provide Directors and Assistant/Deputy Directors with a monthly report, based on the BF, for all their staff. HR also produces monthly and annual sickness reports for BVPI's.

In respect of the Bradford Factor, individual sickness will be monitored on a rolling 12 month basis and each stage of the BF model followed as appropriate although managers will be expected to use discretion and evaluate each individual case of sickness before the Capability Policy is used.

Employees and managers are expected to follow this procedure in regards to reporting sickness. Failure to do so will be seen as a fraudulent act against the Council and will be taken seriously. Disciplinary action will be used if required.

9 Grievance

If an employee feels he or she has been treated unfairly in the operation of this Policy and Procedure, he or she has the right to raise the matter under the Council's Procedure for Settling Individual Grievances.

10 Communication of the Policy and Procedure

The Absence Policy and Procedure will be communicated and explained to new employees, via the induction process, and to existing employees and to managers and supervisors.

Glossary

HR – Human Resources, includes payroll and welfare.

BF – Bradford Factor

SSP – Statutory Sick Pay

OSP – Occupational Sick Pay

AD/DD – Assistant or Deputy Director

Human Resources

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Appendix 1 – Return to Work Interview Questions

These questions will be part of an electronic form that is intended to be part of the self service sickness page.

Reason for absence in more detail (*there are only a limited number of options to choose in a drop down menu when recording sickness*)

Are there likely to be any longer term implications of the illness? (*e.g. are you likely to have any further absence?*)

Would changing your working environment be beneficial? If so, can we make reasonable changes to help?

Appendix 2 – Checklist for employees absent through sickness

1. Contact your manager by phone within one hour of your usual start time (or as soon as is reasonably practicable) on your first day of absence. Explain the reason for your absence and your likely date of return. If you are unable to make contact yourself, an appropriate person may do so on your behalf.
2. If still unable to return when expected (or when a medical certificate expires), follow step 1 again.
3. If your sickness lasted less than 7 consecutive days (including weekends and days not normally worked), record your sickness immediately on their return to work, on the HRPro self service system.
4. If your sickness lasts more than 7 consecutive days, obtain a medical certificate from your doctor and forward it to your manager.