

Absence Management

Policy principles

Shropshire Council recognises the benefits of having a healthy and committed workforce whilst at the same time having a clearly understood procedure for managing sickness absence. This policy outlines our approach to managing attendance.

Shropshire Council understands that people will occasionally be unwell and respects their right to take sick leave, within the scope of this Absence Management Policy, when they are unable to work due to illness or injury.

Shropshire Council takes a work-focussed approach to help minimise the impact of ill-health on an employee's attendance. A work focussed approach is defined as one that:

- recognises that work is generally good for physical and mental health and wellbeing and that many people with health conditions can, with basic support, work as they recover from their condition
- recognises that employees do not need to be fully fit to undertake work
- allows your manager to make temporary workplace adaptations so that you can work rather than be on sick leave
- allows your manager to consider reasonable adjustments under the reasonable adjustments part of the procedure if you have a disability or serious underlying medical condition
- where appropriate makes use of Occupational Health advice to inform decisions about fitness for work.

This approach is not about trying to get you back to work before you are ready, but about you working with your manager to remove the challenges to you returning. The following principles and aims underpin the Absence Management policy and procedure:

- Shropshire Council is committed to promoting a culture of attendance where employees feel valued, supported and committed to the core business of the council and to their colleagues
- attendance will be managed fairly and effectively across the organisation in a clear and transparent way. Action will be taken when health and well-being are at risk or when absence levels are unsatisfactory attendance discussions will focus on what the employee can do rather than what they cannot, enabling them wherever possible to remain at work instead of taking sickness absence.
- Shropshire Council is committed to reducing the number of working days lost through sickness absence and the impact this has on council business and other employees by:
 - controlling any risks to employees especially those with continuing poor health from work activities
 - early intervention to enable any help and support to be identified
 - keeping in contact with absent employees and planning with them for their return to work
 - access to professional or other advice and treatment to help our employees.

Managers will support employees in achieving a satisfactory level of attendance by helping them to remain at work when they experience ill-health, or return to work as soon as possible following a period of sickness absence.

To enable this Shropshire Council has a commitment to:

- work with employees and Trade Union representatives in developing policies and procedures
- train line managers and team leaders in managing sickness absence and return to work
- record, monitor and measure sickness absence

- fair and equal implementation of this policy across all areas of the organisation

Being ill does not always prevent an employee from getting to or undertaking some work.

During continuous sickness absence, review meetings will take place to provide an opportunity for the employee and manager to identify any help needed to enable the employee to return to work as soon as they are well enough.

Where sickness absence levels cause concern e.g. Sickness Trigger Points are reached then managers will take appropriate steps to improve attendance, which may include formal action.

Scope of policy

This policy applies to all Shropshire Council employees including those on fixed term contracts. It does not apply to agency workers or contractors. The policy complies with the Equality Act 2010.

Policy summary

Employees are responsible for managing their own attendance and should attend work unless they are unfit to do so. Good management can lead to good health, well-being and improved performance. This policy supports managers in managing attendance effectively and encourages employees to work with their manager to achieve and/or maintain a satisfactory level of attendance.

Absence Management Policy & Procedure

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Supporting policies and procedures:

| Policy to refer to: | When |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Disciplinary Procedure | Shropshire Council will treat each individual case on its merits however, the Disciplinary Policy may be invoked where there are serious concerns regarding an employee's attendance and/or behaviour. |
| Annual Leave Policy | Where sickness occurs during a period of annual leave. |
| Special Leave Policy | Where unexpected leave is required. |
| Parental Leave Policy | Where time off is required for childcare purposes. |
| Hours of work Policy | Absences for agreed medical reasons, which an employee has no control over the timing. |
| Substance Misuse Policy | When a manager becomes aware of an employee with a drug or alcohol related problem. |
| Domestic Abuse Policy | When absence is attributed to domestic abuse. |

The Absence Management Policy and Procedure has been agreed by Shropshire Council, Policy Forum, EJCC and the following trade unions:- UNISON, GMB and UNITE.

Absence Management Policy Statement

1. Introduction

This guide has been written to ensure that Shropshire Council presents a fair and consistent approach towards the effective management of employee sickness absence across the organisation, thereby ensuring that the costs and service implications for such absence are kept to a minimum.

- 1.1 This guide (or a summary of key points) will be made available to all employees of the Council (other than in schools where separate similar guidelines are in place) and set out the responsibilities of both the Council and employees in relation to sickness issues. All employees are expected to comply with the requirements and responsibilities explained to them.
- 1.2 As a Public Body, the Council has a responsibility to the public to provide high quality cost effective services, as such Shropshire Council is committed to encouraging high levels of attendance and appropriately managing sickness absence across the organisation.
- 1.3 The Council recognises its responsibilities to those who are genuinely ill and unable to attend work. The management of attendance and sickness absence is very much a line management responsibility and all managers will be provided with training, support and guidance to help them meet these responsibilities. Managers are asked to use the Absence Management managers' toolkit in conjunction with this policy.
- 1.4 The Attendance Management procedure is supported by "How To" guides for team leaders/managers. These guides are part of the procedure and will support managers in managing attendance issues. Where necessary, managers should consult the HR for further advice.

2. Aim of the Policy

- 2.1 By managing absence, Shropshire Council aims to minimise the amount of employee time lost at work through reasons of ill health, whilst also providing reasonable support to those absent for legitimate reasons and in promoting healthy living initiatives.

3. Policy Objectives

- 3.1 To equip all Managers to deal with sickness absence more effectively through the foundation of clear procedures and guidelines on how to manage sickness absence within the workplace.

- 3.2 To encourage and assist all employees to achieve and maintain acceptable standards of attendance at work by:
- Promoting a safe and healthy working environment;
 - Providing adequate 'Staff Support Services' to deliver professional advice to Employees and Managers on ill health matters (Details of Staff Support Services are available in Appendix 4)
 - Ensuring all employees experiencing ill health problems are treated in a fair and consistent manner and receive the necessary support wherever possible to enable them to improve their health and to maintain their employment with Shropshire Council
 - Providing all employees with a clear Policy which outlines their obligations and entitlements when they are unable to work because of illness.
- 3.3 To collate sickness data and information so as to identify issues and areas of concern that may impact upon service delivery and the functioning of the council, and to review sickness absence levels on a regular basis in order that this policy remains appropriate and up to date.

4. Absence Management Procedure

- 4.1 "Sickness" is defined as incapacity to carry out the duties and responsibilities, which the employee is contractually obliged to do because of their own illness or accident. This Policy and Procedure therefore applies to absence caused by personal illness or accident, not for the purpose to take time off work because of the illness or accident of others e.g. children, dependent or partner. The special leave policy should be referred to in these situations.
- 4.2 It is not the intention to lay down a rigid definition of what constitutes an acceptable or unacceptable level of sickness absence, as each case is unique and will be treated on its own merits. However, it is important that any concerns or patterns of absence are recognised by managers and that the employee is made aware of management concerns.
- 4.3 It is a manager's responsibility to deal promptly with any cases of absence from work seeking appropriate advice and guidance where necessary.
- 4.4 Where there is reason to believe an employee's absence is not genuine, Shropshire Council reserves the right to challenge such absence and if necessary, conduct an investigation in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Policy.

4.5 Special Considerations

4.5.1 Cosmetic Surgery (Elective/ Reconstructive)

- When an employee elects to undergo cosmetic surgery, Occupational Sick Pay will not be payable in accordance with this Policy. However, Occupational Sick Pay may be payable in cases where written confirmation is received from the employee's medical practitioner that the surgery is essential for the physical and/or mental wellbeing of the individual.
- Whilst Occupational Sick Pay is not normally payable for elective cosmetic surgery, it may be paid if an employee develops serious complications following surgery necessitating in hospital treatment.
- Where an employee is undergoing cosmetic surgery for the purposes of reconstruction (for example following a previous illness, accident or defect of birth), Occupational Sick Pay is payable subject to appropriate evidence and certification in accordance with this Policy.
- Managers should offer appropriate support to employees undergoing such treatment.

5. Responsibilities

Shropshire Council recognises its duty of care to all its employees and expects all staff to act reasonably when dealing with individual absence issues.

5.1 Senior Management Team will:

- Promote support individual managers in their role to manage sickness absence. Shropshire Council expects all members of its senior management team to promote and establish an attendance culture where absence is recognised as an important factor affecting the efficient running of the council

5.2 Managers will:

- focus on early intervention and be proactive in addressing health issues which may affect attendance or performance
- support employees in achieving a satisfactory level of attendance by helping them to continue to work when they experience ill-health or return to work as soon as possible following a period of sickness absence
- make certain that a Return to Work Discussion is carried out within required timescales following every period of sickness absence

- hold a Formal Unsatisfactory Attendance Meeting with all employees who reach the Sickness Trigger Points and make a decision on whether to take formal action.

5.3 **Employees will:**

- attend work unless they are not well enough to do so and return to work as soon as they are able
- talk to their team leader/manager, Human Resources and/or Occupational Health at the earliest opportunity about any health issues which might affect their attendance or performance
- be aware of the standard of attendance expected of them i.e. their Sickness Trigger Point and the consequences if they reach or exceed it
- work with their team leader/manager to achieve or maintain a satisfactory level of attendance. This means exploring ways to enable them to work when they experience ill-health or return to work as soon as possible following a period of sickness absence.

5.5 **Human Resources will:**

- will advise and support both managers and employees in the application of the Absence Management Policy.

5.4 **Trade Union Representatives will:**

- be responsible for advising and supporting their members during formal processes and Health and Safety issues when requested.

5.6 **Occupational Health Services will:**

- provide medical advice, reports for consideration on any reasonable adjustments and on various health, safety and wellbeing initiatives.

5.7 **Health & Safety will:**

manage effectively the various risks associated with the work activities, managers may need to seek specialist help from the Health & Safety Team to help identify and assess risks, and to find practical and effective means of eliminating or controlling risks.

6. Pay while off sick

The amount of sick pay employees receive will depend on their service at the point an absence commences and compliance with the expectations set out in this Policy and Procedure:

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| During 1st year of service | 1 month's full pay |
| During 2nd year of service | 2 months' full pay |
| During 3rd year of service | 4 months' full pay |
| During 4th and 5th year of service | 5 months' full pay |
| After 5 years' service | 6 months' full pay |

- 6.1 To aid flexibility for long term, serious absence cases; Employees, or their representative, may request, in writing to the Assistant Director - Workforce, an extension to their sick pay stating the reasons for the request. A half pay extension will be agreed, in conjunction with the relevant Director, if on the basis of medical opinion(s) there is every likelihood of an employee's return to work, within a period of three months. Any payment of half pay will be in accordance with the employees service entitlement as outlined above.
- 6.2 Where a phased return to work is agreed, employees will immediately return to their normal full pay. The period of the phased return can be considered and discussed but in all cases will not exceed 4 weeks duration.
- 6.3 If any of the above requests are refused, a written appeal must be sent to the Chief Executive as Head of Paid Service.