



Sickness absence policy and procedure

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1. Policy statement

Our Vision and Values describe what is important to us about how we work and underpins our policies and procedures.

One of our values is Wellbeing and Growth - We care about increasing wellbeing and supporting the growth and learning of everyone, and of organisations. We are respectful, supportive and kind and encourage flexibility and a healthy work-life balance.

Levels of attendance at work directly affect the quality of work through the ability of employees to carry out their work efficiently and effectively. High levels of attendance

have positive effects for the whole Improvement Service with better performance through increased levels of morale and job satisfaction. Low levels of attendance can adversely affect the work environment and often result in low morale and motivation amongst employees. Whilst some absence due to sickness is inevitable,

the Improvement Service objective is to ensure that sickness absence is minimised through effective management supported by a fair and consistent procedure.

Absence due to sickness can be for a number of reasons. It is important that within

a corporate policy approach, instances of sickness absence are dealt with on an individual basis. A balanced approach is required which takes into account the need

to maintain high levels of attendance whilst ensuring that employees are treated fairly, consistently and sympathetically.

Successful management of sickness absence also requires a positive approach to occupational health and safety. Effective sickness absence management seeks to address possible underlying causes of absence and to take appropriate remedial or preventative action.

Managers have a key role in applying the policy, however it is recognised that employees at all levels of the Improvement Service equally have a responsibility to maintain good attendance at work.

2. Principles and aims

This policy is underpinned by the following twelve key principles:

1. recognition that a positive attendance culture is encouraged by a working environment in which individuals are valued and where fair, consistent and supportive management practices are applied. IS supports a culture of active absence management and attention to employee wellbeing.
2. briefing managers in the application of the policy and procedure is critical to its success, as is the need to ensure that its terms are effectively communicated to all employees.
3. the IS is committed to advance gender equality by assuring women that we are a responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during menopause.
4. regular monitoring and early management intervention is central to maintaining high levels of attendance.
5. a case by case basis will be applied, taking into account prognosis, individual circumstances and the needs of the business.
6. effective implementation of the policy requires not only the symptoms arising from unacceptable attendance levels to be addressed but also wherever possible, the causes.
7. wherever appropriate, a practice of early intervention by the Improvement Service's occupational health advisory service will be pursued on the basis that evidence indicates that early referral for medical assessment can facilitate a quicker return to work as a consequence of obtaining prompt access to specialist treatment/support.
8. the IS recognises the menopause as an occupational health issue and will seek to support women during this time in their life. Staff who are experiencing symptoms at work relating to the menopause are encouraged to discuss their needs with their line manager if they feel able to do so. The IS recognises that some women may not be comfortable discussing such issues with their line manager, so they may contact the business support team for a confidential discussion in the first instance.
9. a key objective is to minimise sickness absence in recognition of the fact that high levels of absence impact detrimentally on the standard and cost of IS business plan deliverables.
10. in the case of severe menopause symptoms or any other illness resulting from a disability, 'reasonable adjustments' will be made to the working environment

and working patterns wherever practicable to support and facilitate an employee's attendance at work in accordance with disability discrimination legislation.

11. the effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through regular reporting of relevant sickness absence management information to the Improvement Service's audit committee and board.

12. with the exception of counselling and occupational health appointments, employees are entitled to be accompanied by a person of their choice at all meetings conducted under the terms of this policy.

3. Policy implementation

The policy on managing sickness absence will be implemented in accordance with provisions contained within this document and the detailed procedures for reporting on and managing sickness absence.

Responsibility for implementing and complying with the policy for reporting and managing sickness absence lies with individuals at all levels of the Improvement Service.

Advice will be available to assist managers to implement the policy. The nature of that advice and support and the manner in which it is provided, will be tailored to the circumstances of each individual case.

In addition, line managers are responsible for ensuring that no one experiences less favourable treatment as a result of the menopause. They need to be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally. Additional guidance and information relating to the menopause has been uploaded to the managers' resources folder.

4. General policy provision

4.1 Notification and certification

On each occasion of sickness absence, employees must comply with the standard notification and certification requirements. In exceptional circumstances, if an employee is unable to make contact personally he/she should arrange for someone else to do so on their behalf. The standard requirements for notifying sickness absence appear as part of the procedure for reporting and managing sickness below.

A self-certificate absence form must be completed to cover absence from the first day. Where the absence continues beyond seven calendar days, the employee must obtain a GP's medical certificate and submit to his/her line manager within 2 working days.

Failure to comply with the notification and certification requirements without reasonable explanation will result in entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay or Occupational Sickness Allowance for all or part of the absence being forfeited and in the case of persistent absence, the right to self – certify may be temporarily suspended.

Abuse of the sickness scheme will be dealt with under the terms of the Improvement Service's disciplinary procedures.

4.2 Sick pay

An employee who is absent from work due to illness is entitled to sickness allowance according to their length of continuous Local Authority service. The allowances are detailed below.

Continuous service at commencement of absence from duty	Full allowance for	Half allowance for
Less than 26 weeks	Nil	Nil
26 weeks or more but less than 1 year	5 weeks	5 weeks
1 year but less than 2 years	9 weeks	9 weeks
2 years but less than 3 years	18 weeks	18 weeks
3 years but less than 5 years	22 weeks	22 weeks
5 years and over	26 weeks	26 weeks

The above is inclusive of any Statutory Sick Pay to which employees may be entitled. Should you qualify for National Insurance Benefit including Dependents' Allowance, this will be deducted from full sick pay. Where half pay plus Statutory Sick Pay or any National Insurance Benefit, including Dependents' Allowance to

which you are entitled exceeds your normal pay, the amount in excess will be deducted from the half pay allowance.

4.3 Sickness absence during annual leave

An employee who falls sick during the course of annual leave will be regarded as being on sick leave subject to producing a doctor's statement covering those days on which the employee was sick. In these circumstances, the employee will be entitled to have the period covered by the doctor's statement reinstated as annual leave.

4.4 Maintaining Contact with Absent Employees

It is essential that managers maintain contact with absent employees, particularly where the absence is for a lengthy period. This helps to prevent employees from becoming isolated and distanced from the workplace and their colleagues. It also enables appropriate management action to be taken on an informed basis that takes into account the interests of both the IS and the employee.

Contact by an appropriate person should always be handled sensitively with due consideration to the nature of the employee's illness. Contact by telephone and/or letter/email will be sufficient in many cases. In cases of prolonged sickness, it is likely to be desirable to meet with the employee. This would normally take place at the employee's place of work or at another suitable location, for example, the employee's own home with their agreement.

4.5 Return to Work Meeting

Line managers are required to have an informal meeting with employees on their return to work following each occasion of sickness absence. Return to work meetings should be held on the employee's first day back at work but in any event no later than 3 working days following their return to work.

Line managers must conduct and record that a return to work meeting with employees has taken place following each occasion of sickness absence. On receipt of the self-certificate or GP medical certificate business support will issue the return to work form to the line manager.

The return to work meeting is a key element of the procedure and should be routinely carried out for all absences. Repeated failure of a manager to do so will be deemed to be a breach of the Improvement Service's policy on managing sickness absence and will result in disciplinary action being taken.

4.6 Absence Patterns

For the purposes of applying this procedure, absence constitutes either, periods of continuous absence or periods of intermittent absence or a combination of both. Continuous absence relates to a period of absence of 4 weeks or more.

4.7 Monitoring and Prevention

Effective implementation of the policy on managing sickness absence requires managers to actively monitor the attendance levels of their staff on an ongoing basis. Monitoring enables emerging trends to be identified with a view to taking early action to prevent absence/health issues from developing into potentially longer-term problems.

Managers should use monitoring information to identify possible symptoms of stress (work – related or otherwise), motivational/behavioural matters or physical well-being issues that may be causing or contributing to an employee's absence from work.

Issues relating to workload, the quality of working relationships, poor or inappropriate management styles, and inadequate communication systems can all contribute to the creation of stressful working conditions. Similarly, pressures out with the workplace can adversely affect an employee's health and work performance. Identification of those issues combined with appropriate intervention at an early stage can help avoid absence from work.

The Improvement Service also aims to encourage employees to pursue healthy lifestyle options as such measures are seen to impact positively on attendance and work performance.

5. Sickness absence procedure

5.1 Trigger level

A sickness absence trigger level is defined as the level or frequency of sickness absence over a prescribed period that gives rise to concern. It is also the level set by the Improvement Service that prompts an automatic intervention by an employee's line manager under the policy on managing sickness absence.

For absence that occurs on an intermittent basis, the trigger level for the Improvement Service is set at 6 cumulative days within a rolling 12 month period or 4 separate occasions of absence within a rolling 12 month period.

For periods of absence that are continuous, the trigger levels are set as follows:

- Trigger level 1 - 4 weeks of absence
- Trigger level 2 - 3 months of absence

- Trigger level 3 - 6 months of absence
- Trigger level 4 - 9 months of absence.

Where a trigger level is reached, either as a result of intermittent absence, continuous absence or a combination of both, action must be taken by the line manager at one of the following stages of the procedure:

5.2 Trigger level 1- Counselling meeting

A counselling meeting will be held on the first occasion that an employee reaches the Improvement Service's trigger level as noted in item 5.1.

Counselling involves a positive and constructive, informal one to one discussion between the line manager and employee. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the reason(s) why an employee has reached the absence trigger level and to consider any support/measures that may be necessary to help avoid future episodes of absence.

The line manager will hold the counselling meeting as soon as possible following the employees' return to work. A medical referral will not normally be appropriate at this stage but exceptionally, may be made if considered necessary.

At the conclusion of the counselling meeting, the line manager should ensure that the employee understands the consequences of reaching the Improvement Service's sickness absence trigger level again.

Following the counselling meeting, the employee's attendance will be monitored over a period of 12 months. Provided the employee doesn't reach the trigger level again during that period, no further action will be taken.

If the employee does reach the trigger level again during the 12 months rolling period, a trigger level 2 absence meeting will be held with the employee.

5.3 Trigger level 2- absence meeting

The absence meeting will be held when an employee's absence again reaches the Improvement Service's trigger level as noted in item 5.1, within a rolling 12 month period or on reaching 3 months of continuous absence. The absence meeting is a formal meeting convened to discuss an employee's absence record, confirm the stage they have triggered on this policy and consider ways of improving their attendance.

These meetings should normally be held within 2 weeks of an employee's return to work or within 2 weeks of receipt of the occupational health report where the employee has been referred to the occupational health adviser. In dealing with continuous absence, the meetings should be held within 2 weeks of the trigger

level. Timescales may be subject to change in certain circumstances, for example, if further medical information is required etc.

The employee will normally be given a minimum 5 working days written notice of the meeting and will be provided with details of their sickness absence record in advance.

In the event that the occupational health adviser's report confirms the existence of an underlying medical condition, further formal action may be deferred to enable any reasonable adjustments or other appropriate support mechanisms to be put in place. This will be particularly relevant where the employee is diagnosed as suffering from a prolonged or serious health condition, including a terminal illness

Reasonable adjustments to the employee's working environment and/or working arrangements including the possibility of alternative employment will be considered where appropriate. The need for further specialist medical advice or interventions such as physiotherapy or psychological counselling will also be considered.

The outcome of these meetings will be confirmed in writing to the employee within 10 working days and a copy of the confirmation letter will be forwarded to business support. The employee will be informed that their attendance will continue to be monitored over a period of 12 months. If the trigger level is reached again, this will automatically result in the matter being progressed to trigger level 3 of the procedure.

5.4 Trigger level 3- absence review meeting

The absence review meeting will be held when an employee's absence again reaches the Improvement Service's trigger level as noted in item 5.1, within a rolling 12 month period or on reaching 6 months of continuous absence.

The employee will normally be given a minimum of 5 working days written notice of the meeting and will be provided with details of their sickness absence record in advance.

Similar to the trigger level 2 absence meeting, the absence review meeting is a formal meeting and should normally be held within 2 weeks of an employee's return to work or within 2 weeks of receipt of the occupational health report where the employee has been referred to the occupational health adviser. In dealing with continuous absence, the meetings should be held within 2 weeks of the trigger level. Timescales may be subject to change in certain circumstances, for example, if further medical information is required etc.

The line manager will discuss with the employee the content of any further medical report/advice received and any issues/possible solutions discussed at the trigger level 2 absence meeting will again be considered.

The employee will be informed that their attendance will continue to be monitored over a period of 12 months. If the corporate trigger level is reached again, this will automatically result in a final absence meeting being convened that is likely to result in the employee's dismissal from the service on the grounds of unsustainable absence levels.

The outcome of these meetings will be confirmed in writing to the employee within 10 working days and a copy of the confirmation letter will be forwarded to business support.

5.5 Trigger level 4- final absence meeting

The final absence meeting will be held when an employee's absence again reaches the Improvement Service's trigger level as noted in item 5.1, within a rolling 12 month period or on reaching 9 months of continuous absence. Prior to arranging a final absence meeting, the employee will be referred for an up-to-date medical opinion.

On receipt of the medical report, the relevant head of service will meet with the employee to discuss the contents of the report.

The employee will normally be given a minimum of 5 working days written notice of the meeting and will be provided with details of his/her sickness absence record in advance.

At the meeting, the employee will be informed of the occupational health adviser's opinion. The employee will be advised that their level of absence can no longer be sustained by the Improvement Service. Any representations from the employee or their representative will also be taken into account.

The relevant head of service may apply discretion to determine that a decision to dismiss is inappropriate in the circumstances.

Where discretion is applied, the employee will remain on trigger level 3 of the procedure and a further 12 month monitoring period applied.

Where the head of service concludes that after considering all the available information, other options, including alternative employment are not feasible, the employee will be advised that he/she is to be dismissed on the grounds of

unsustainable levels of absence or retired on the grounds of permanent incapacity.

The outcome of the final absence meeting will be confirmed in writing to the employee within 10 working days and a copy of the confirmation letter will be forwarded to the business support team.

5.6 Appeal

The employee has a right to appeal and any appeal should be made to the Remuneration, Appointments and Appeals Committee.

5.7 Absence triggers

Trigger level 1 - counselling meeting with line manager

Trigger level 2 - formal absence meeting with line manager

Trigger level 3 - formal absence review meeting with line manager

Trigger level 4 - final absence meeting with relevant head of service.

The final absence meeting has 3 possible outcomes:

1. Discretion: the employee will remain on Trigger level 3 of the procedure and a further 12 months monitoring period applied
2. Alternative employment (see section 8)
3. Dismissal

6. Medical referral

The purpose of referral is to obtain a medical opinion to assist managers determine the most appropriate action taking into account the interests of the company and the employee. By establishing whether or not an employee's absence pattern may be caused by an underlying medical condition, a manager is better able to determine how the absence should be managed and the timescales for doing so, taking into account factors such as the disability discrimination act. Medical referral also provides the opportunity for employees to benefit from accessing counselling or physiotherapy services where appropriate.

Where it is indicated that an employee is likely to be absent from work for a continuous period in excess of 4 weeks, referral will be made to the Improvement Service's occupational health adviser for assessment by the 5th week or earlier if necessary. Referral within those timescales is particularly appropriate where the reason for the absence is stress-related or musculoskeletal in nature (e.g. back

pain or limb injury). However, early referral is unlikely to be necessary where the reason for absence is for example, a heart attack or a broken limb. In these circumstances any occupational health referral will normally be deferred until such time as further clarity on the individual's medical prognosis becomes available.

Line managers should provide the occupational health adviser with relevant employee details including the individual's sickness absence record, a summary of their key duties together with any information provided by the employee and/or their GP. In return, the line manager will seek the occupational health adviser's opinion on specific issues. These could include the likely duration of an absence, whether or not an underlying health condition exists, the possibility of a recurrence of the illness, whether the employee is permanently unfit to carry out his/her duties, the nature of any possible alternative employment that could be offered.

7. Phased return to work

Where it is recommended by the Improvement Service's occupational health adviser, consideration will be given to allowing an employee to return to work on a part-time basis or alternatively on a full time basis but temporarily undertaking alternative duties. Any such arrangement will be implemented through consultation with the employee and the occupational health adviser. A phased return will normally be implemented for no more than 4 weeks during which the employee will incur no loss of contractual earnings. Exceptionally, the occupational health adviser may recommend a phased return over a longer period, however in any event this should not exceed a maximum of 6 weeks.

The line manager can request a return to work form from absencereporting@improvementservice.org.uk

8. Alternative employment

In the event that the Improvement Service's occupational health adviser concludes that an employee is no longer fit to carry out the duties of his/her post, the possibility of offering the employee an alternative post will be investigated before a decision is taken to terminate the employee's employment.

The ability to redeploy an employee will depend on the availability of suitable vacancies at that time within the Improvement Service. The search for alternative employment in these circumstances will normally be undertaken for no longer than 3 months after which the employee's contract of employment will be terminated.

If an employee refuses to accept an offer of alternative employment that is considered to be reasonable in all the circumstances, the reasons for the refusal will be discussed with the employee and his/her representative if any. Where the IS is satisfied that the offer is reasonable but the employee still refuses to accept it, the IS will have no option but to dismiss the employee.

Where it is possible to identify an alternative post the employee shall be offered the post on the basis of the terms and conditions that apply to that particular post. No protection of the employee's existing contractual terms will apply. Offers of alternative employment will normally include provision of a probationary period in accordance with the IS terms of employment.

9. Handling personal data

The reasons for sickness absence are sensitive personal data according to the Data Protection Act 2018. The Improvement Service recognises the general principle that employers should only collect information relating to the health of individual workers if:

- express, freely given consent has been provided by the worker(s) concerned, or
- collection is necessary to enable compliance with the employer's legal obligations, for example to prevent breaching the health and safety regulations and/or anti-discrimination rules.

10. Procedure for reporting and managing sickness absence

Notification

You must personally notify your line manager at the earliest possible time of your absence. This should be no later than one hour after normal starting time. If, in exceptional circumstances, you are unable to make contact yourself, you may arrange for someone else to do so on your behalf. If your line manager is not available, you must contact Business Support, who will then notify your line manager. You are required to give the reason for illness - the terms 'illness' or 'sickness' are not acceptable reasons.

Line managers should inform absencereporting@improvementservice.org.uk as early as convenient.

Keeping in touch

In the first week of illness you are required to contact your line manager on the 4th day and again on the 7th day of absence to give an update on how you are feeling. Where an absence continues beyond 7 days, you should contact your line manager on a weekly basis. Line managers may renegotiate a particular contact time depending on the reason for absence (e.g. absence due to a broken leg may not require the employee to make weekly contact). It is your responsibility to personally contact your line manager at the appropriate intervals. If, in exceptional circumstances, you are unable to contact him/her yourself, you may arrange for someone else to do so on your behalf.

Certification

For periods of absence of 7 days or less, a self-certificate must be completed on return to work, from the FIRST day of absence. If an absence continues beyond 7 days, you must obtain a medical certificate from your GP and send it to your line manager within two working days. Business support will send you a self-certificate for you to complete and return. If an absence continues you must, timeously, submit medical certificates covering the full period of absence on each occasion to your line manager or absencereporting@improvementservice.org.uk.

Certification documentation will be collated centrally and as such line managers should forward to absencereporting@improvementservice.org.uk

Failure to comply with this procedure will be regarded as misconduct and may result in action being taken against you under the Improvement Service disciplinary procedure.

Review

This policy and procedure will be reviewed from time to time in consultation with the appropriate parties.