



Okehampton Town Council

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Absence Management Policy

1. Introduction & Policy Objectives

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.

1.1 Aims

In order for the Council to meet its operational responsibilities, it will ensure that:

- It provides a supportive, safe environment for those employees affected by ill-health.
- Managers and employees strictly adhere to this policy and its tracking procedures.
- Levels of sickness absence are the subject of routine corporate monitoring.

1.2 Responsibilities

The onus for attending work on a regular basis and for reporting absence in accordance with the Council's agreed procedures rests entirely 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 the Council's Absence Management Policy and Procedures.

1.3 Day-One Notification & Reporting Procedure

Employees who are unable to work due to illness or injury must contact the Town Clerk, or relevant line manager, personally via telephone as soon as possible.

- Notification must be given no later than 09:30am on the first day of absence or the nearest working day.
- Messages left with colleagues are not acceptable forms of notification unless in exceptional circumstances. If the Town Clerk or line manager is unavailable, the employee must contact the main council office.
- If the employee is physically incapacitated, they must arrange for a relative or representative to call on their behalf within the timeframe.

The employee must provide a clear indication of:

- The precise nature of the absence or injury.

- The date the injury/illness began (including weekends and public holidays).
- The expected duration of the absence.
- Details of any immediate public-sector commitments or council meetings that need completing or reassigning.

The employee must maintain regular contact with the Town Clerk or line manager during any period of sickness absence lasting longer than one day, ensuring the Council is aware of recovery progress and the expected date of return. Failure to follow this process without a valid reason will lead to the absence being considered unauthorised, resulting in an automatic loss of pay and possible disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

2. Evidence of Absence & Certification

The Council requires precise tracking of all absences to remain publicly accountable for public resource spending.

2.1 Self-Certification

Where the absence is for a period of up to seven calendar days (inclusive of weekends) and is not covered by a doctor's certificate, the employee will be required to complete and sign a confidential Self-Certification/Sickness Declaration Form immediately upon their return to work. This may be managed or distributed digitally via BrightHR.

2.2 Medical Certification (Fit Notes)

If the absence exceeds seven calendar days, the employee must provide a doctor's certificate ("Fit Note") covering the remainder of the absence. The employee must ensure that consecutive certificates are submitted without gaps to cover the entire duration of the sickness period.

If a doctor's certificate states that the employee "may be fit for work," the employee must inform the Town Clerk immediately. The Town Clerk will discuss whether additional temporary adjustments, altered duties, or workplace measures can facilitate a safe return to work. If appropriate measures cannot reasonably be accommodated, the employee will remain on sick leave, and a future review date will be established.

In the event that a medical practitioner recommends a phased return to work via reduced hours over a set period of time, any unworked hours during that phased transition will be recorded and classified as sick leave.

3. Return to Work Interviews

When an employee returns to work after any period of absence, the Town Clerk or their direct line manager will arrange an informal Return to Work Meeting. This meeting will take place on the employee's first day back, or as soon as practically possible. The critical core purposes of this meeting are:

- To verify that the employee is fully fit to resume their standard operational duties.
- To give the employee a confidential forum to voice any domestic, welfare, or work-related challenges.
- To update the employee on key council business and operational decisions that occurred during their absence.
- To review, complete, and sign the official Sickness Declaration Form.

4. Sickness Absence Triggers & Monitoring

The Council proactively monitors, records, and manages sickness absence to maintain workforce efficiency and minimize disruption to community operations. A formal attendance review will be initiated if an employee triggers any of the following parameters within a rolling 12-month period:

- Four distinct episodes of short-term sickness absence.
- A total cumulative duration of 10 working days of short-term sickness absence.

- Any distinct pattern of absence that raises operational concern (e.g., persistent absences immediately preceding or following weekends, public holidays, or scheduled council committee dates).

5. Managing Attendance: Review Procedures

The core objective of the review procedure is to evaluate the causes of absence and discuss ways to support attendance improvement. If no sustained improvement occurs, the employee may face formal disciplinary action up to and including termination on capability grounds.

5.1 Right to Be Accompanied

For all formal review meetings under this policy, the employee has the right to be accompanied by a workplace colleague or a recognised Trade Union representative.

5.2 Cross-Over Conduct Protection

The Council maintains absolute discretion to review an employee's cumulative performance record. The Council reserves the right to issue the next level of warning if an employee is already subject to a live warning for conduct or attendance (e.g., if an employee has a current verbal warning for lateness and subsequently hits a trigger for sickness absence, this may result in a formal written warning being issued).

5.3 Administrative Discretion

The Council retains full discretion to vary these absence management procedures to take reasonable account of an employee's length of service, structural role, or exceptional individual circumstances.

6. Sickness Review Pathway

6.1 Initial Review Meeting

The Town Clerk or line manager will write to the employee to arrange a meeting at a convenient time, date, and venue. The employee will be provided with an exact breakdown of their absence record prior to the meeting.

At this meeting, management and the employee will discuss the attendance record, the core reasons for the absences, any support frameworks the Council can offer, and the exact improvement targets required.

- If the absence is continuous and long-term, the case will transition to the **Long-Term Sickness Procedure (Section 8)**.
- If an underlying medical issue is disclosed, the case will transition to the **Underlying Health Conditions Procedure (Section 7)**.
- If no underlying health conditions are identified, the employee will be informed that their attendance must improve. Review meetings will then be formally scheduled at 12-weekly intervals using the Sporadic Absence Process detailed below.

6.2 The Sporadic Absence Process (12-Week Cadence)

1. **First Review (12 Weeks After Initial Meeting):** The manager will write to arrange a formal meeting and provide updated absence records. If attendance has not improved to an acceptable level and no underlying medical condition is identified, the employee will be issued a Formal Verbal Warning. This will be confirmed in writing alongside their right of appeal. A further 12-week monitoring period will be set. If targets were met, no disciplinary action is taken, but tracking continues to the next 12-week checkpoint.
2. **Second Review (12 Weeks Later):** If attendance remains unacceptable and no underlying medical issues are highlighted, the employee will be issued a Formal Written Warning (or a Formal Verbal Warning if none was previously active). This is confirmed in writing with appeal rights, and a further 12-week monitoring phase is scheduled. If

attendance has improved to the required level, no further disciplinary action will be taken at this time, and a further meeting will be set in 12 weeks' time. If your attendance has reached the required level at the first and second reviews, you will no longer be subject to attend further review meetings.

3. **Third Review (12 Weeks Later):** If attendance has not improved to the required level, the employee will be issued a Final Written Warning (or escalated to a Formal Written Warning if a verbal warning was the only active penalty). Appeal parameters will be provided, and a final 12-week monitoring window is established. If attendance has been successfully met and maintained the required standard across both the second and third review periods, the employee will exit the active review pathway.
4. **Fourth Review Meeting (12 Weeks Later):** If attendance has failed to reach an acceptable level and no underlying medical conditions are active, the employee may be dismissed. You will have the right to appeal against your dismissal. If the employee did not receive a Final Written Warning at the previous turn due to fluctuating attendance, a Final Written Warning will be issued at this stage, and a final 12-week tracking period will be set with appeal details. If your attendance has reached the required level at the third and fourth reviews, you will no longer be subject to attend further review meetings.
5. **Fifth Review Meeting (12 Weeks Later):** If the individual was placed on an extended tracking track at Stage 4 and attendance remains structurally unacceptable without an underlying medical cause, they may be dismissed. You will have the right to appeal against your dismissal. If attendance has improved to the required level, no further disciplinary action will be taken at this time, and a further meeting will be scheduled in 12 weeks' time. If attendance has reached the required level at the fourth and fifth reviews, you will no longer be subject to attend further review meetings.
6. **Subsequent Review Meetings:** Should there be further cause for concern regarding your attendance levels, the above reviews may be continued or the process started again.

7. Underlying Medical Conditions & Occupational Health

If at any stage of the Managing Attendance Review Process the employee or their line manager identifies that an attendance issue may be driven by an underlying medical condition, the Town Clerk will determine whether an Occupational Health referral is required.

This process involves gaining the employee's written consent to refer them to the Council's designated Occupational Health advisor or an independent physician selected by the Council. The core purpose of this referral framework is to secure independent medical advice regarding:

- The precise nature, prognosis, and expected duration of any underlying or recurrent condition.
- Practical, objective recommendations for reasonable adjustments to the employee's workspace, hours, or duties, which the Council will evaluate under the Equality Act 2010.

Any mutually agreed workplace adjustments will be documented in writing and taken into account when executing the subsequent procedures. It may be necessary to hold regular tracking meetings over a period of time to consider how your illness or condition is affecting your attendance at work. While it is the Council's aim to offer support, if your level of attendance is still unacceptable and all other viable options (including alternative redeployment) have been completely exhausted, the Council may need to consider dismissal on the grounds of medical incapacity as a last resort. Any such decision will result in payment in lieu of notice and include formal appeal details within the dismissal letter.

8. Long-Term Sickness Absence Procedure

The Council views continuous sickness absence extending beyond four consecutive weeks as long-term absence. All such cases are handled sympathetically, with an emphasis on supporting a safe, structured return to work.

8.1 Case Management and Welfare Support

The Town Clerk will maintain proactive, regular contact with the employee throughout their absence. Around the four-week continuous mark, the Council will arrange an informal welfare meeting at a mutually convenient, accessible location (which may include the workplace, a neutral venue, or the employee's home). The employee has the right to be accompanied at this informal meeting by a colleague, friend, or relative. The aim of the meeting is to keep you in touch with events at work, to discuss your absence and offer any relevant support.

8.2 Medical Evaluation & Return Plans

To ensure decisions are made using accurate medical evidence, the Council will request the employee's consent to secure a medical report from their GP, specialist, or the Council's Occupational Health Physician.

Upon receipt of the report, a formal meeting will be held to discuss the findings and explore return pathways. You have the right to be accompanied at this meeting by a work colleague. Where a return to standard duties is supported by medical advice but requires a gradual transition, the Council will provide structured mechanisms such as:

- Temporary redeployment or modified tasks.
- A defined phased return to work plan involving reduced hours or part-time working.

These adjustments will be bound to a strictly defined, temporary trial period and will be subject to ongoing joint review. If the medical professional determines that an employee is permanently or long-term unfit to perform their specific job role but retains the capacity for other types of work, full consideration will be given to finding alternative positions within the Council. If no alternative vacancies exist or adjustments are structurally unviable, and a return to work is not foreseeable within a reasonable timescale, the Town Clerk will arrange a Final Sickness Review Meeting, which may lead to an Attendance Hearing to consider dismissal.

9. Final Sickness Review Meeting

Prior to dismissal being considered for either frequent intermittent absence or long-term absence, the Town Clerk will meet with the individual to explore whether there are any reasonable adjustments that could be made to enable an employee to remain employed.

Termination of 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 cannot be found;
- A decision has been taken that the service can no longer tolerate 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 or absented themselves without permission.

10. Attendance Hearing

To reach a final decision about whether dismissal is appropriate, an Attendance Hearing will be arranged.

10.1 Panel Composition and Documentation

- The Panel: The Hearing Panel will be comprised of three members of the Personnel Sub-Committee, who will make the decision in relation to dismissal. The Town Clerk and if necessary the line manager will attend to outline the history of absence and any relevant steps taken and advice received.

- **Notice and Representation:** 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.
- **Evidence Pack:** All paperwork relating to the hearing will be circulated 5 days in advance of the hearing to all parties attending.

10.2 Hearing Conduct and Outcomes

Once the Panel has considered the Town Clerk, line manager's and employee's cases, and all other relevant information, it will adjourn to make a decision. 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 warning has been issued, the timescale for this and the level of improvement required;
- b. 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
- c. If the decision is to dismiss the employee, inform them of their relevant notice period (paid in lieu of notice where appropriate) and provide them with any relevant pension information; and

2. The employee's right of appeal.

11. Appeals Process

Employees have the right to appeal against any decision to issue a formal warning or dismissal under this procedure.

11.1 Lodging an Appeal

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 Attendance Hearing.

11.2 The Appeal Hearing

Appeals will be heard by a separate panel of three members, who will normally be part of the Personnel Sub-Committee and/or the Policy & Resources Committee. An appeal hearing will be held where the employee can present their appeal. The Chair of the original panel will also attend to explain the original decision. Witnesses may be called.

Once the Appeal Panel has considered all relevant information, they will make a final decision, which will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days. There is no further right of appeal.

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Absence Management Policy
Return to Work Discussion

Name:				
Date of Meeting:				
Time of Meeting:				
Period of Sickness Absence:	From		To	
Number of Working Days Absent				

* Self Certificate / Doctors Certificate provided (*delete as appropriate) – Attached

Provide brief details of the content of the discussion:

Signed Date.....
(Employee)

Signed Date.....
(Town Clerk)