

# Ealing Council

## Managing Sickness Absence Policy

21<sup>st</sup> June 2007

## Managing Sickness Absence Policy

### 1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 Ealing Council is committed to encouraging and improving the health, wellbeing and attendance of all employees.
- 1.2 Ealing Council will aim to minimise the incidence of ill health and to give appropriate guidance and support to employees to achieve this. Special consideration will be given in cases where employees are disabled or have a serious illness. Ealing Council expects sickness absence levels to be comparable with that in other high performing organisations.
- 1.3 Employees will be treated objectively, consistently and fairly, whilst at the same time managers will monitor and control absence through ill health. Ealing Council cannot indefinitely support employees with high levels of sickness through ill health, which can be costly, disruptive and can lead to a reduction in the quality and quantity of services provided. Managers will manage sickness absence proactively taking into account all relevant circumstances.

### 2. Who Does The Policy Cover

- 2.1 This Policy and the supporting Guidance for Managers document applies to all employees who have a contract of employment with the Council except for chief officers, teaching and support employees in schools (who are covered by similar arrangements).
- 2.2 The term 'manager' refers to any employee with a supervisory or line management responsibility for employees.

### 3. Definition of Sickness Absence

- 3.1 "Sickness" is defined as the 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 only applies to sickness absence caused by an employee's ill health.
- 3.2 Ealing Council has other provisions to deal with the need to take time off work, for example, special leave for study and compassionate reasons, bereavement leave, time off to attend medical appointments, maternity and adoption leave, parental leave and family emergencies, in accordance with relevant policies and procedures.

### 4. Key Elements in Managing Sickness Absence

- 4.1 Managing sickness absence forms part of every manager's day to day management responsibilities and is a key performance indicator for Ealing Council. Managing sickness absence is integral to Ealing Council's 'Managing People' competency and performance appraisal process.

4.2 Regular attendance is an essential part of every employee's contract of employment with Ealing Council. Employees are responsible for achieving and maintaining regular attendance and will be supported by managers as appropriate.

4.3 The key elements of the Guidance for Managers document are as follows: -

- Employees are required to contact their manager to report sickness absence in accordance with the contractual Sickness Absence Reporting procedures and keeping their manager informed of the nature of the illness, progress and likely return to work date.
- Managers are responsible for ensuring employees comply with the sickness absence reporting procedures and for providing appropriate documentation to Payroll for sick pay and management information purposes.
- Managers must conduct return to work meetings for all employees for every period of sickness absence.
- Managers will consider using the disciplinary procedures in cases of unauthorised absence from work and failure to comply with sickness absence reporting procedures.
- Managers must maintain attendance records, keep them locally and review them when trigger points are reached to consider whether action needs to be taken.
- Employees are required to participate in any necessary medical examinations at the request of their manager.
- Managers will seek medical advice from the Occupational Health Unit to inform their decision making.
- The Medical Capability Review procedure will be applied where attendance has not reached an acceptable level and/or where there is no realistic prospect of a return to work in a reasonable timescale.

## **5. Confidentiality**

5.1 Ealing Council respects the confidentiality of information relating to sickness. Sickness absence and medical records will be managed in line with the Data Protection Act 1995. Relevant managers will have access to sickness absence records, i.e. the basis and dates of illness and are required to maintain confidentiality in storing and transferring information between relevant line managers and the Human Resources department. The Occupational Health Unit in line with the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988 process information about an employee's medical records and only divulges what is relevant to the appropriate manager on a need to know basis.

## **6. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995**

6.1 Employees who are disabled or become disabled in the course of their employment are encouraged to inform Ealing Council if they require an adjustment due to their condition, which is considered necessary for the performance of their duties. Sickness absence relating to a disability will be managed with due regard and as recommended in Ealing Council's 'Good Management Guide on the Employment of

Disabled People'. Ealing Council's Performance Management appraisal process provides for disabled employees to discuss and/or review reasonable adjustments.

## **7. Management Information Statistics**

- 7.1 Ealing Council monitors sickness absence by collating information received from monthly Staff Returns submitted by managers to the Payroll team. This information is recorded on the HR database to process sick pay and used to monitor sickness absence levels. The average number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence is reported externally to the Audit Commission as required by 'Best Value Performance Indicator 12'. The number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness includes industrial injury, irrespective of whether this is self certified, certified by a GP, sickness absence due to disability or long-term illness. Employees on maternity or paternity leave are excluded from the figure.

## **8. Relevant Legislation, Best Practice and Other Provisions**

- 8.1 The policy and associated guidance has been designed to reflect relevant employment legislation and best practice. The policy and associated guidance must be read alongside other key provisions, including the Health and Safety Policy and Handbook and the Good Management Guide on the Employment of Disabled People.

## **9. Monitoring and Review**

- 9.1 The Director of Human Resources will approve changes to this policy and associated guidance, which are required by legislation, best practice or key performance indicators. The employee's side has been consulted in preparation of this policy and associated guidance and will be notified or consulted on any revisions.