

Managing Absence Policy

1. Purpose of the policy

- 1.1 The purpose of the London Borough of Barnet (the Council) Managing Absence Policy is to commit to a consistent approach of improving and supporting the health, wellbeing and attendance of its employees and providing a procedure to support employees to maintain regular attendance at work.
- 1.2 As part of this commitment, the Council recognises the importance of creating a positive environment where employees and managers feel able to talk openly and with trust about health problems (including mental and physical health). The Council also wishes to support staff to seek help when necessary and provide a supportive environment for other difficulties employees may have.
- 1.3 The Council is committed to supporting employees who have a disability or long-term health condition and making appropriate adjustments to their working arrangements.
- 1.4 Notwithstanding its wish to be reasonable and sensitive in cases of sickness absence, the Council is conscious of the fact that poor attendance at work can contribute to an increase in colleagues' work, reduced output and can impact on the quality of service to residents and customers and additional cost to the service. The Council is also mindful of the impact that absence can have on issues such as professional development and team cohesion.
- 1.5 The aim of the council's Managing Absence Policy is to encourage employees to achieve and maintain high levels of regular attendance and to support consistent and fair treatment of all employees.

2. Confidentiality

- 2.1 The Council is committed to protecting the privacy of its employees and the confidentiality of medical information.
- 2.2 Employees who are unwell may elect to share information about their health with colleagues, although they should be mindful of the risks associated with the possibility of sensitive personal information circulating more widely in the workplace.
- 2.3 Managers, HR advisors and other employees who are involved in managing a case under this process as part of their own role with the Council are expected to maintain confidentiality at all times.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all Council employees, except for employees working in schools under the direction of a Governing Body. It does not apply to agency workers, contractors, or consultants.
- 3.2 For newly appointed employees who are in their probationary period, this policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Staff Induction and Probationary Policy.

- 3.3 The Council recommends Governing Bodies in community schools within the London Borough of Barnet to adopt the principles of this policy while adapting the process to local structures and requirements. Governing Bodies should ensure that they have appropriate sickness absence management procedures for teaching staff covered by the Conditions of Service for School Teachers in England and Wales.
- 3.4 This policy does not apply to the Chief Executive Officer/Head of Paid Service.

4. References

- 4.1 The council's Code of Conduct and the following policies (although on occasions it may be necessary for other policies to be recognised and followed) are associated with this document:
- Particulars of employment and other documents setting out relevant terms and conditions.
 - Grievance Policy and Procedure
 - Health and Safety at Work Policy
 - Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

5. General Principles

- 5.1 Many potential concerns about an employee's individual sickness absence can be quickly resolved informally; so, managers and employees should always look to resolve issues at the informal stage within the workplace.
- 5.2 The Council is committed to treating employees in a way that is sensitive and fair, taking into account the needs of the employee and the Council and its residents.
- 5.3 The Council is committed to dealing effectively with sickness absence and minimising any impact on service delivery as early as possible.
- 5.4 A copy of this Policy and Procedure is available to employees on the Council intranet or via a request to their line manager and should be given to all employees due to attend any absence review meetings. Any schools which choose to adopt this policy should make appropriate local arrangements to ensure that their staff can access it.
- 5.5 It is important that the Council manages attendance (sickness absence) in a systematic and sympathetic way and seeks to focus on supporting staff to enable them to improve attendance and return to work as soon as their condition allows and to improve their well-being by promoting a healthy working environment.
- 5.6 This Policy supports applying a consistent approach to the reporting, monitoring and management of attendance, taking into account time lags in obtaining specialist advice and other management reports.
- 5.7 The principles of this Policy will apply to all sickness absence cases within the Council. However, employees, managers, and trade union representatives should remember that the Absence Management Procedure contains steps which may not be relevant to some cases (e.g. the requirement to have separate managers chair Stage 1, Stage 2, and Stage 3 review meetings may not be realistic for reviewing the attendance of a Director or other officer who reports directly to the Chief Executive). Similarly, the circumstances of a case may result in

some adjustment to the application of certain steps (e.g. if an employee is too unwell to attend a review meeting, the Chair will need to decide whether to postpone the meeting, request advice from Occupational Health, or hold it in the absence of the employee), or a need to formally review a case directly under Stage 2 or 3 of the Absence Management Procedure (e.g. in the case of long-term sickness where the employee seems unlikely to return to work).

- 5.8 The Council does not treat absence from work for the purposes of attending pre-arranged medical, dental, and associated appointments as sickness absence. However, the Absence Management Procedure does articulate the Council's general expectations around the way in which such absence should be handled by employees and line managers.

6. Health and Safety

- 6.1 The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employees to know and understand the responsibilities they have for health, safety and welfare and that they must take reasonable care of their own health and safety and for other employees, Barnet residents, and other stakeholders who could be affected by what they do or fail to do.
- 6.2 It is important that employees have access to the Council's Health and Safety policies, procedures and guidelines which can be accessed on the intranet. Employees may also ask their line manager to provide them with a printed copy of the relevant documentation.
- 6.3 New employees will ordinarily undergo health and safety training as part of their induction- depending on the nature of their duties, this can be done online and/or in person. Should training be delayed and/or impeded due to technical or practical issues, managers are required ensure that employees have access to and are able to review the relevant documentation (whether through accessing the intranet or by issuing them with printed copies).

7. Meetings and hearings

- 7.1 Any references to 'meetings' or 'hearings' within this policy will be applicable to discussions held in a defined physical location (normally on Council premises) and those held remotely through the use of teleconferencing/videoconferencing facilities.
- 7.2 The Council generally expects that informal meetings (e.g. return to work discussions) will be held on an one-to-one basis between an employee and their line manager. There is no formal right for an employee to attend such a meeting with a companion. More details can be found in the Absence Management Procedure.
- 7.3 Employees have a right to bring a companion into a formal meeting or hearing. More details can be found in the Absence Management Procedure.

8. The role of HR

- 8.1 HR is responsible for making sure that the Managing Absence Policy and Procedure is regularly reviewed and advising on its fair and consistent application, providing managers and employees with advice, support, training and assistance where required.

9. The role of managers

- 9.1 Managers will participate in training workshops when required. Newly-appointed/promoted managers are expected to familiarise themselves with the Absence Management Policy and Procedure, and seek HR advice if they require additional clarification or support.
- 9.2 Managers will ensure employees have access to the Absence Management Policy and Procedure and that health and attendance issues are dealt with in a manner which is fair, sensitive, and timely. Managers who chair meetings or oversee other steps within this Policy and Procedure will be responsible for issuing relevant correspondence to the parties involved.

10. The role of employees

- 10.1 Employees have a responsibility to do whatever they can to help improve their attendance, including alerting management to potential health concerns/issues that may impact their future attendance (or performance) at work, and consulting with their GP or other medical professionals in establishing options for managing their health and well-being.
- 10.2 Employees are expected to engage in any informal or formal processes under this Policy and Procedure in good faith and to the best of their ability.

11. Equality Statement

- 11.1 In applying this policy, the Council will have due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and provide for good relations between people of diverse groups, in particular on the grounds of the following characteristics protected by the Equality Act (2010); age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (in employment only), pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. In addition, the Council will ensure that employees and job applicants are not unreasonably discriminated against on the basis of other characteristics including socio-economic status, offending background, political affiliation and trade union membership. An Equality Impact Assessment is used for all policies and procedure.

