

A guide for all Scottish Joint Council (SJC) Employees



Attendance Matters
May 2017

Inverclyde
council

A guide for all employees (except teachers) managing attendance at work

Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to ensure employees are aware of Inverclyde Council's approach to managing attendance which is designed to provide support for employees who are ill and to improve attendance levels across the council.

Absence levels are a key performance indicator used to compare councils across Scotland. Inverclyde Council aspires to be amongst the best performing councils and recognises the associated benefits and the importance of staff health and welfare.

This booklet concentrates on:

- Why high attendance levels are so important
- The absence reporting procedures you must follow
- Support and advice available to you during periods of illness
- How your attendance is monitored
- How our target of less than 9 days absence per year (pro rata for part time employees) can be achieved

This booklet and associated procedures recognise that most absences are genuine. In addition it is important to state that no employee who is genuinely ill will be encouraged to return to work too soon. However, there are a small number of employees who take advantage of the generous sickness provisions available and this booklet deals with such abuse of the sickness scheme.

Note: 9 days represents an average only, the majority of employees will have a non-attendance at work record of significantly less than 9 days per year.

The importance of good attendance

Inverclyde Council is committed to providing quality, effective services to all its customers and citizens. As part of this aim it is essential that all employees be committed to maintaining maximum levels of attendance. High levels of attendance lead to higher levels of service provision and heightened morale among colleagues.

You have an important part to play in achieving good attendance levels by:

- Achieving maximum attendance at work whenever possible
- Following the correct notification and certification procedures if you are ill
- Minimising the length of any absence
- Participating in meetings, occupational health reviews, and 'return to work' discussions

Implications of poor attendance

The average absence level across the council for 2015/16 was 8.58 days per employee.

This amounts to approx. 31,400 working days lost amongst staff in 2015/16.

This indicates that were approx. 120 full time employees are off every working day.

These lost days have a direct impact on service provision and morale.

Absence reporting

You and your manager must keep in regular contact throughout periods of absence. There is a responsibility on both equally to ensure contact is maintained.

Inverclyde Council wishes to ensure that you maintain regular contact with your manager, and have access to appropriate advice and assistance during any periods of illness.

Notification and certification of absence

As a contracted employee you have an obligation to attend work.

This section covers the steps you must take during periods of sickness absence.

As an employee you must fulfil all of these requirements or you may lose entitlement to occupational sick pay and may be requested to formally account for your actions.

Reporting an absence: 1 - 7 calendar days:

(Including weekends where these are worked as normal)

- If you are unwell you must contact your line manager at the latest by your normal starting time
- You must contact your manager in person or, if they are not available, someone else in authority
- It is not acceptable to telephone a colleague or to text a manager
- On the rare occasion that you may be hospitalised or so ill that it is not possible to make contact, a relative or friend should be asked to contact your manager in the first instance. You should resume contact with your manager as soon as possible thereafter
- For absences lasting up to 7 days, you must contact your manager on each day of absence (unless otherwise agreed by your manager)

Reporting an absence: 8 days or more:

(Including weekends where these are worked as normal)

- Where your absence extends beyond 7 calendar days, you must submit a fit note from either a GP or a hospital to cover the period of absence beyond the first 7 days
- It is important that if you submit more than 1 fit note, that they are received so that there is no gap in the expiry date of one and start day of the other. In addition you should agree with your manager the frequency of contact that is appropriate - this should be no less frequent than every 14 days as a general rule. Such communication should include discussion around return to work aspirations or any new information concerning your absence, for example a visit to the doctor or to a specialist

PLEASE ENSURE YOU HAVE A NOTE OF YOUR MANAGERS' DIRECT TELEPHONE NUMBER AVAILABLE AT ALL TIMES.

Return to work interview

An essential element of Inverclyde Council's Managing Attendance Policy is the return to work interview with your manager. Following each absence from work due to sickness, your manager will conduct an informal return to work interview. Ideally this takes place on the day of return and before you start to work.

The purpose of the return to work interview is:

- Consider reason for absence
- Consider attendance record
- Listen to any concerns you may have
- Respond to any help you may request
- Ensure certification requirements are satisfied
- Update on work related matters
- Take appropriate action
- Raise profile of attendance management

You can expect your manager to enquire about the reason for absence, outlining your current attendance level and posing questions related to the points above. Providing as much information as possible will assist your manager to consider their next steps based on the information available to them.

You should anticipate one of four possible outcomes to your return to work interview:

1. Support for your absence - no further action
2. Request to attend an occupational health appointment
3. Being issued with a letter of concern
4. Instigation of formal procedures

Monitoring and recording of sickness absence

It is the responsibility of managers to ensure that their employees' absences are recorded and monitored on an ongoing basis. To assist all employees to achieve the council's target for absence of less than 9 days absence per year (pro-rata for part time employees) trigger points have been established:

- 4 separate episodes of absence or more in a 12 month period
- 6 days of absence or more in a 12 month period
- 4 weeks of absence or more
- An absence due to a musculoskeletal condition, or a mental health problem (e.g. stress anxiety, depression)

These trigger points are designed to encourage early intervention and investigation into the causes of absence and ill health. Appropriate communication between you and your manager will ensure that absences do not drift along without being supported by a plan of action which is clearly developed on a case by case basis.

Short term persistent absence

If you are often absent from work for short periods you should anticipate your manager conducting a more thorough discussion about your attendance record during your return to work interview. This could result in procedures being instigated for dealing with poor attendance. Your manager has authority to issue you with an initial letter of concern as a means of providing an opportunity for you to improve your attendance without the requirement to take disciplinary action.

This letter of concern will remain live on your personnel file for up to 3 months whilst improvement is sought. Failure to improve may result in disciplinary action.

Your manager's role is to reduce the incidences of short term absence.

Note: Each and every absence requires to be supported by a good reason; manager's involvement in absence is not limited to when an employee reaches a trigger point.

Long term absence

If you are off work on a long term basis an appropriate frequency and method of contact will be agreed between you and your manager. It is likely that you will meet with or speak with your manager on a regular basis to keep up to date with progress and identify areas for support.

Should the cause of your absence dictate that:

- You are likely to be off work for a long time
- You are unlikely to return to your own post

Your manager, in conjunction with Human Resources, will discuss with you any appropriate action that may be taken.

Various options may be available including:

- Changing some elements of your job to allow a return to work where possible
- Making adjustments to your working hours, working pattern, or location to allow you to make a contribution to work
- Looking for alternative employment to allow you to return to work
- Ill health retirement
- Termination on grounds of capability due to ill health

This list is not exhaustive, may be subject to a medical opinion, and is underpinned by the belief that it is in the interests of both the employee and the council that, where appropriate, the length of the absence is minimised.

Your manager's role is to reduce the length of long term absence where possible.

Where an absence has lasted longer than 13 weeks continuously, annual leave entitlement will be abated to the statutory minimum of 28 days (pro-rated where applicable) for the full period of absence.

Employees may request to take accrued annual leave (paid) during a period of absence as a top up to SSP.

Independent medical assessment

As a result of persistent short term absence, or any episode of long term absence, you may be required to attend a medical examination with the council's occupational health advisor. This referral is a contractual obligation and is designed to provide guidance on the impact of your ill health on your ability to undertake your duties and to determine what measures can be put in place to support you. Such referrals are considered at various stages of an absence dependent on the circumstances. Occupational Health may seek an opinion from your own GP which requires your agreement by signing a mandate. Should agreement not be reached then decisions will be made with reference to the information available. Failure to attend may result in Occupational Sick pay being stopped. Employees who are off sick should be available to attend any occupation health appointments made for them and if they are unable to they must contact their manager to inform them.

In most cases there is usually an agreement between the employee's GP and the occupational health advisor and cases where there is disagreement about an employee being fit or not fit for work tend to be the exception.

The council's occupational health advisor will fully consider the employees remit, any reasonable adjustments, lighter duties and whether the employee may be fit to return to work in some capacity. The Council's approach will be determined by weighing up all relevant medical evidence.

Employees citing work related stress as the reason for absence may be asked to complete a stress questionnaire.

Employees who have a disability that can make work challenging may be able to gain assistance from the access to work scheme. This scheme provides practical advice and support to help employees to overcome work-related obstacles. Contact details for access to work can be found at the back of this booklet.

Employees aged 55 and over with at least two years pension membership can apply for flexible retirement. Flexible retirement involves a reduction in hours/grade and partial withdrawal of pension benefits while able to continue in employment. Approval from the council is required. Please refer to the council's Pension and Retirement Policy for full eligibility. The policy is available on request from Human Resources.

Equality Act (2010)

The council will ensure that in the event of an employee who is considered to have a protected characteristic as described by the Equality Act (2010), and is unable to satisfactorily perform their duties due to this, options such as the re-allocation of duties, retraining, redeployment or the making of reasonable adjustments will be fully explored and discounted as being impracticable before considerations are given to the options of early retirement or dismissal on the grounds of incapacity. This is in line with the Councils Equal Opportunities Policy.

Occupational sick pay entitlement

Entitlement to occupational sick pay (OSP) depends on length of continuous service as defined in the National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service as follows:

Service at first day of sickness	Full allowance	Half allowance
Less than 26 weeks	Nil	Nil
Over 26 weeks 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 or more	26 weeks	26 weeks

To receive OSP employees need to follow the notification requirements outlined on page 4. These requirements are met by the vast majority of employees, the small minority who regularly fail to follow absence reporting procedures or who abuse the scheme may, depending on the circumstances, have OSP withheld for the absence period not appropriately covered.

Abuse of sickness provisions

It is important for you to know that Inverclyde Council consider all absences as genuine until such time as details emerge which demonstrate the contrary. Employees who abuse the generous sickness absence provisions will be requested to account for their actions and may be subject to the disciplinary process and the occupational sick pay element of the last incident of absence which led to the hearing may be recovered from an employee's next pay normally up to a maximum of 5 days. Recovery of occupational sick pay will be considered on a case by case basis. Wherever possible employees should avoid any actions deemed detrimental to their health/recovery.

Other absences

Special leave

Inverclyde Council are justifiably proud of the range of options available to our employees to allow a proper work life balance to be achieved. For further information on other types of leave available, please speak to your manager or refer to the HR section on ICON.

Medical appointments

Medical appointments will not be considered as sickness absence, however the following guidance applies:

Doctor/dentist or similar appointments

These types of appointments should be made, where possible in your own time. Where this is not possible we request that they be made either at the beginning or towards the end of your shift to avoid disruption to the working day. When these appointments are taken during your working day, the time should be deducted from your flexi-time or made up within the same month in which the appointment occurs.

Hospital/specialist or similar appointments

We appreciate that, on most occasions, hospital type appointments cannot be organised by the employee, and that they have to accept allocated appointments. As such, time off to attend such appointments will be granted by the Council on the provision that evidence of an appointment card/letter is provided to your manager detailing the date and time of the appointment.

Employees will be entitled to take such reasonable time off without loss of pay as is required for the purpose of preventative medical examinations. Where possible appointments should be made outside core hours. Employees will be required to show proof of medical examinations i.e. appointment card or letter.

Supporting good health at work

The council is committed to encouraging healthy working lives, and as such, provide a number of support mechanisms for staff experiencing ill health or challenges which may affect their ability to attend work or provide an effective service.

Some of these are outlined below, the list is not exhaustive. If you feel the council can be of any assistance to you by providing access to any of these services, please speak to your manager in the first instance:

- Mental health first aid training
- Anti-suicide prevention training
- Stress management classes
- Self-harm awareness course
- Motivational courses
- Assertiveness courses
- Access to independent counselling services
- Access to physiotherapy
- Access to an occupational nurse
- Medical assessments.

Each of the above is subject to certain provisions, details of which can be obtained from your manager or Human Resources. Managers should also consider whether any of these courses would be beneficial to their employees.

Your role as an employee

- Follow the correct notification procedure
- Maintain daily contact for absences up to 7 days
- Agree and maintain regular contact during absences over 7 days
- Provide appropriate and timely certification of absence
- Attend review meetings as requested by management and/or Human Resources
- Attend appointments with the occupational health advisor as requested by management and/or Human Resources
- Take responsibility for personal level of attendance at work
- Ensure you have contact numbers for your managers available at home
- Be available at short notice to attend meetings with HR/managers, and if not, provide medical proof of inability to meet/discuss absence

Useful contacts

Stepwell Street Management

01475 724038

Breathing Space

0800 83 85 87

Samaritans

116 123

Inverclyde Council Domestic Abuse

01475 781689

Inverclyde Women's Aid

01475 888505

Victim Support

01475 787300

Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)

01475 784555

Childline

0800 11 11

Inverclyde Physiotherapy (Occupational Health)

01475 725285

Human Resources

01475 712740

Access to Work

0141 950 5327

Your Voice

01475 728628