



DORCHESTER TOWN COUNCIL

STAFF DOCUMENTS SERIES

SICKNESS ABSENCE CONTROL POLICY

Last Reviewed:

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SICKNESS ABSENCE CONTROL POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Policy and General Principles

- 1.1 The Council recognises that, from time to time, members of staff will fall sick and be unable to work as a result. The Council believes that it owes a duty to the staff and the people of Dorchester to monitor sickness through this policy.
- 1.2 This policy provides a framework to assist in:-
- Dealing with sickness and absence objectively and reasonably
 - Being consistent
 - Exploring remedies which will assist the individual as well as assisting management and staff in providing an effective service
 - Compliance with relevant legislation.
- 1.3 The policy and procedures set out are implemented against a background of monitoring sickness absence trends amongst staff and identifying potential problems at an early stage.
- 1.4 Absence problems fall into two main categories:-
- Frequent and persistent short term absence
 - Longer term absence due to ill health
- 1.5 In all cases it is essential that appropriate medical advice is sought to determine if the absence is due to an underlying medical condition or, in the case of long term absence, to obtain a medical opinion on the likely prognosis.
- 1.6 Where there are reasonable grounds to believe that an individual is abusing the procedure or regulations for sickness absence disciplinary action will be considered in accordance with the Council's disciplinary procedures.
- 1.7 The Council accepts that matters involving the ill health of individuals require sensitive handling and any information relating to the health of an individual will be treated with the utmost confidence.

2. General Procedure for Notification of Sickness Absence

- 2.1 Appendix A to this document provides clarification as to the procedure to be followed in respect of the notification of sickness. Appendix B shows the self certification of sickness form to be completed for periods of absence up to seven days (including weekends).

3. Frequent and Persistent Short Term Absence

- 3.1 In order to monitor short term absence it is essential that accurate records are kept and reviewed to ensure that all cases are considered. Concern may be caused by such factors as the number of occasions, the pattern, or the total number of days absence.
- 3.2 On each occasion that a member of staff returns from a period of sickness he or she will report to their supervisor. Those officers will then hold a return to work interview to establish the cause of the absence, to register that an individual's absence was noticed and they were missed and to ensure that the individual is made aware of any factors affecting their work which have arisen during the absence and to see if any help is needed. A file note of the return to work meeting should be made and signed by both parties.
- 3.3 A sensitive approach should be adopted to return to work interviews and it should be acknowledged that some individuals may find discussing health-related problems embarrassing.
- 3.4 Should environmental factors appear to be relevant to the absence, necessary action should be taken as soon as is practicable.

3.5 *Preliminary Investigation*

- 3.5.1 If the periods of absence are either frequent, forming a pattern, unexplained or from recurring ailments action may be necessary. In these circumstances a preliminary investigation into the circumstances surrounding the absences is required to determine if further action is necessary. When action is appropriate the following procedure must be followed:-

3.6 *Fact Finding Interview*

- 3.6.1 If, following the preliminary investigation, it is considered necessary to convene a fact finding interview, the individual should be seen to discuss the situation.
- 3.6.2 The fact finding interview should involve the following stages:-
- Both parties should attempt to establish the cause of the absence and to consider possible action to help resolve the problem.
 - The interviewer should ensure that the member of staff is clear about the action agreed and what changes are required.
- 3.6.3 Following the interview a file note should be written to confirm the outcome of the interview; this should be copied to the member of staff.
- 3.6.4 If it is considered appropriate, the member of staff may be referred for an independent medical examination.
- 3.6.5 If it is determined that the absences are due to a single underlying medical cause, further action could be taken following the procedure outlined in the section relating to long term sickness due to ill health.

3.7 *Formal Interview*

- 3.7.1 If the member of staff's attendance record does not improve sufficiently a formal interview should be called to discuss the matter further. A letter should be sent to the member of staff outlining the purpose of the interview and confirming the right to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative.
- 3.7.2 At the interview, it should be indicated that the level of sickness is unacceptable and the member of staff should have the opportunity to respond. Further attempts to resolve the matter should be made at this stage. However, the potential seriousness of the situation should be stressed and the possible consequences detailed.
- 3.7.3 The outcome of the interview should be confirmed in writing. Depending on the circumstances the letter might be in the form of a formal written warning indicating that the employee has a right of appeal.

3.8 *Further Formal Interview*

- 3.8.1 If the member of staff's attendance record continues to be unacceptable a further formal interview will be held in accordance with the arrangements already set out.
- 3.8.2 At this stage the individual will be advised of the serious concern that is being caused and that should matters not improve further action will be taken which may result in dismissal.
- 3.8.3 Once again the outcome of the interview should be confirmed in writing and will normally constitute a formal written warning.

3.9 *Dismissal*

- 3.9.1 If, ultimately, following all the stages outlined above, the member of staff's attendance record does not improve to the required standard, a formal interview will be held and the situation will be outlined by the manager who will confirm that the likely outcome of the interview will be dismissal. The member of staff will be given the opportunity to respond and present any evidence in mitigation as they consider appropriate.
- 3.9.2 Dismissal can only be decided upon by the officer empowered to dismiss under the terms of the disciplinary procedure – the Town Clerk. The letter of dismissal will confirm:
 - The date and outline details of the interview
 - Reference to records of any previous related valid warnings
 - The effective date of dismissal
 - The employee's right of appeal
- 3.9.3 Appeals against dismissal will be heard in accordance with the arrangements set out in the Disciplinary Procedure.

4. Long Term Absence due to Ill Health

4.1 Definition

- 4.1.1 For the purpose of this procedure long term sickness absence is defined as a continuous period of sickness absence of six working weeks or more.

4.2 Investigation

- 4.2.1 The absence situation should be fully investigated to determine the likely outcome for the member of staff concerned. If the outcome is uncertain or it becomes clear that the member of staff is unlikely to return to their present job, the manager should arrange an interview with them.

- 4.2.2 The interview should normally cover the following points:

- The manager should outline his or her initial assessment of the situation
- The member of staff should be asked for their assessment of the situation
- The manager should ask for the member of staff's permission to seek medical advice from an independent medical expert
- The manager and member of staff should agree to meet again to discuss alternative options once the medical report has been obtained

- 4.2.3 A file note of the meeting should be kept and copied to the member of staff.

4.3 Further Interview

- 4.3.1 Having obtained all the available information concerning the member of staff's condition (most importantly the medical advice) a further meeting should be convened in the same way as outlined above.

- 4.3.2 At this stage the following points would normally be considered:

- The manager's assessment of the situation
- The member of staff's assessment of the situation
- A discussion of the likely outcome e.g. return to full duties, early retirement or dismissal
- Determine an appropriate course of action which may result in further meetings.

4.4 Possible Outcomes

- 4.4.1 In light of all the evidence and in consultation with the Town Clerk one or more of the following options may be followed:

- The possibility of alternative employment within the Town Council
- Consider the member of staff's return to work for a limited period under medical advice on restricted duties and/or reduced working hours
- If medical opinion is that the member of staff is unlikely to be fit to return to undertake the full range of duties within an appropriate timescale and suitable alternative employment is not available, then dismissal on the grounds of incapacity due to continuing ill health should be considered. Where possible this should be achieved through the procedure for early retirement on the grounds of ill health.

4.5 *Dismissal on the Grounds of Incapacity due to Ill Health*

- 4.5.1 Before dismissing a member of staff on the grounds of incapacity due to ill health, the following points should have been adequately covered:
- The member of staff has been regularly consulted and at each stage the employee has been informed of the likely outcome including the possibility of dismissal
 - A medical opinion has been obtained and the member of staff has been given the opportunity to comment on this opinion
 - The member of staff has been given the opportunity of discussing the situation and has been made aware of their right of representation
 - Consideration has been given to alternative employment
 - Consideration has been given to early retirement on the grounds of ill health.
- 4.5.2 Dismissal can only be decided upon by the officer empowered to dismiss under the terms of the disciplinary procedure – the Town Clerk.
- 4.5.3 It should be stressed that all employees dismissed on the grounds of incapacity have rights to paid notice and rights of appeal as set out in the Disciplinary Procedure.

GENERAL PROCEDURE FOR NOTIFICATION OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 1 On the first day of sickness absence the member of staff should contact their supervisor, or if unavailable, another supervisor/manager, informing them of their sickness. This should be done as early as possible. Some indication as to the likely length of absence should be given at this stage.
- 2 For continuing absence it is not necessary to contact the office every day but contact should be maintained and the supervisor/manager may make courtesy calls to the member of staff to find out how things are going, to offer support etc.
- 3 On return from sickness, the member of staff should report to their supervisor who will conduct a return to work interview as set out in the sickness absence policy and procedure document.
- 4 A medical certificate is not required for the first seven days of absence (including weekends) but a self certification of sickness form should be completed.
- 5 If sickness absence continues for longer than seven days (including weekends) then a medical certificate is required and should be sent to the Town Clerk. Medical certificates should cover ALL periods of absence following the first seven days. If not the absence will be classified as unauthorised and the appropriate action taken.

SELF CERTIFICATION OF SICKNESS

This form should be completed on your first day back at work and returned to the Town Clerk.

Name

Date you first became unfit for work

Date returned to work

Number of days absent through sickness

Please give details of your sickness

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Did you consult a Doctor?

If you did consult a Doctor, was a medical certificate issued (if yes please attach)?

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I hereby certify that I was absent from work due to sickness as detailed above:-

Signed..... Date.....