



POLICY ON ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

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The information in this document is available in other languages or on tape/CD, in large print and also in Braille.

For details contact the Association on 0141 578 0200 or e-mail: admin@hillheadhousing.org

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admin@hillheadhousing.org

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INTRODUCTION

Hillhead Housing Association 2000 recognises that staff will on occasions be necessarily absent from work. However Hillhead Housing Association 2000 also has a duty to provide a reliable service to tenants and others and we thus need to ensure that we help staff maintain the highest possible level of attendance.

This policy is therefore designed to help all employees achieve good attendance, and to ensure that a consistent and fair approach in managing attendance is adopted throughout the Association.

This policy and the guidelines it contains work in conjunction but is not limited to other policies such as discipline & grievance, dignity at work, health & safety and managing stress. The right of any employee to raise a grievance or appeal on an appropriate issue is retained and at all stages trade union representation can be obtained.

1. AIMS OF THE POLICY

- To manage attendance in a way that reflects genuine concern for staff, and to develop a positive attitude towards attendance.
- To seek to identify the causes of absence and, wherever possible develop a programme of preventive measures – such as, reviewing working environment; nature of work etc.
- To make sure all staff are aware of Hillhead Housing Association 2000's standards in relation to attendance.
- To provide outline procedural guidelines to assist with the management of sickness absence.
- To ensure training and support is available to those involved in the process.

2. PRINCIPLES

- All staff are made aware of the importance of good attendance.
- All staff will strictly adhere to absence reporting procedures.
- Managers will conduct "return to work" interviews within the spirit of this policy.
- Managers will maintain accurate, up to date attendance records for all staff.
- Efforts will be made to identify and assess reasons for an employee's absence.
- In the first instance staff with unsatisfactory attendance records will be given time, encouragement and support to improve attendance.
- Employees will be consulted where attendance standards remain poor and will be advised of the consequences of continued poor attendance.
- Any serious disciplinary action only will only be considered following appropriate contact with relevant medical advisors, thorough investigation and the opportunity for trade union representation.

- Managers will be provided with relevant guidance and, if necessary, training on any appropriate aspects of attendance management.

3. ABSENCE MONITORING

A fundamental feature of good attendance management is the accurate and timely recording of all absences. This is essential both in terms of the requirements of the Statutory Sick Pay arrangements and the Association's Sickness Benefit scheme. Accurate information also allows patterns to be identified and can be an early indication of underlying problems. The sooner these problems are identified and acted upon – the more likely a successful conclusion for staff member and employer alike can be achieved.

Accurate recording is also an essential element in satisfying any concerns over the fairness of any actions taken by line managers. The responsibility for maintaining such records rests with the Head of Corporate Services.

Keeping good quality, up to date records also means that: -

- Concise data is available for each employee during the year
- Problems are identified at an early stage
- Staff members are treated fairly and consistently
- Trends and underlying causes can be more easily identified
- Relevant Health & Safety issues can be identified
- Departmental and Corporate attendance rates can be improved
- Managers are better able to explain decisions where continued poor attendance results in counselling and/or disciplinary action

Hillhead Housing Association 2000 monitors absence in order to help identify absenteeism trends. Monitoring can be a useful tool when trying to establish what the best interventions are to help an individual in terms of support and a successful return to work. Each individual's absence should be taken on its own merits.

Quarterly absence reports are provided to the Human Resources Sub Committee and are measured by using the "Lost Time Rate". This is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Total Absence (hours) in the period}}{\text{Total Possible working time (hours) in the period}} \times 100 = \text{lost time rate}$$

Individual cases will not be discussed as they form a confidential record of each employee.

4. ABSENCE REPORTING PROCEDURES

Reporting

An employee should call the office and speak directly to their Line Manager or, if this is not possible, another member of the Management Team to report their sickness on their first day of absence, as soon as is reasonable, and no later than one hour of the normal starting time. Wherever possible, the call should be made by the employee themselves. Messages should not be left on the answer machine or with other colleagues. The reasons for absence and the likely duration should be intimated.

The Line Manager responsible for taking the employee's sickness details should inform the Head of Corporate Services who will record absence information on the Association's attendance management system.

The Line Manager will agree to maintain regular contact with the employee. Regular contact is not only a way of the organisation being able to plan temporary cover and the employee's return to work but it can help the employee still feel part of the organisation. The latter is important especially when dealing with long-term absence, as the employee can begin to feel isolated and sometimes this can affect their confidence and willingness to return.

The employee's Line Manager, should inform the Head of Corporate Services, or in her absence, another member of the Corporate Services Team, of the sickness on the first day of absence and should pass the Sickness Notification form to her/them.

Keeping in Touch

The onus lies with the employee to keep their manager informed of the reasons and progress of all absences. If the absence is likely to last longer than two days, the line manager will agree with the employee how regularly contact should take place thereafter. Unless agreed otherwise, the employee should contact their line manager at least once every five days during their absence from work. Where employees fail to keep in touch as outlined above, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 reserves the right to initiate and maintain contact with the staff member.

Fit Notes

If you are off due to illness or injury for more than seven consecutive calendar days, you must provide a fit note as soon as possible to your line manager.

If the Doctor ticks the 'may be fit for work' box your line manager will arrange a meeting with you to discuss any adjustments suggested. Although we are not obliged to follow the doctor's advice, we will do our best to help you return to work and maintain a good attendance record. However, if we cannot agree reasonable adjustments you will remain off sick. If this situation arises please contact us for specific advice.

If we agree a phased return to work, the days you are still off sick within the agreed period will count as one period of absence.

An employee can come back to work at any time, even if this is before their fit note expires. They do not need to go back to their doctor first to be signed fit for work. If you come back to work before the expiry of your fit note, we may seek professional advice.

Failure to comply

The employee should be given the opportunity to explain why they have not submitted certificates. If the employee still fails to produce the appropriate certificate or remains on unauthorised absence, they may not be entitled to sick pay. They may also be subject to disciplinary action. Similarly any falsification or attempt to mislead on the employee's part will lead to disciplinary action. In serious and/or repeated cases, dismissal may result.

Return to Work

On returning to work from an absence, regardless of the length of the absence, the employee must complete a self-certificate/return to work form which is generated by the attendance management system. This will be authorised by their Line Manager and if necessary a follow up discussion will take place. This is conducted in order to:

- ***Welcome the employee back and to support their return to work***
- ***Ensure that the employee is fit to return to work and take up normal duties***
- ***Determine the reason for the absence***
- ***Identify whether there are any work-related factors causing or contributing to the absence***
- ***Bring the employee up to date and to agree any work priorities***

If a doctor has made suggestions for any adjustments then these will be discussed during the return to work process, along with any suggestions that the employee or Manager may have. Although employers are not bound by the doctor's suggestions, all possible efforts will be made to accommodate the employee's prompt return, if possible. If any adjustments are made, timescales and reviews will also be agreed.

Any fit notes should be passed to the Head of Corporate Services for the employee's personnel file. These forms contain confidential information and may only be viewed by authorised personnel.

5. STATUTORY SICK PAY (SSP)

Employees are entitled to SSP irrespective to their entitlement to company sick pay. SSP is reviewed by the Government every October. It is not paid for the first three days of absence and runs for 28 weeks after that. An employee who is no longer entitled to SSP may be entitled to other benefits and should be made aware of sources of information available to establish their rights.

6. ORGANISATION SICK PAY

The Conditions of Service determine an employee's rights to sickness benefit entitlement, and all employees have a copy of this in their Staff Handbook. However, as with all sickness benefit schemes entitlement will be subject to length of service and offset against the total amount of sick leave used during the 12 month period preceding their current sickness absence.

7. ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT

Hillhead Housing Association 2000 will aim to secure better attendance by way of support and encouragement to the employee concerned in the first instance. This will involve maintaining good records, ensuring return to work interviews take place and investigating and addressing any identified underlying causes of absence.

Where this fails to secure an improvement, Hillhead Housing Association 2000 may invoke the terms of the Disciplinary Procedures. Unsatisfactory attendance reviews may result in a disciplinary action, including dismissal.

If at any stage during this process it becomes apparent that an underlying health issue is involved, then the alternative procedure for dealing with Long-Term sickness will be used.

Absence periods related to pregnancy or underlying medical condition that fall within the scope of Equality Act 2010, in particular Disability Discrimination, will not be counted for the purpose of the attendance management process.

Attendance Reviews

In addition to the Return to Work Interview and where an employee has had four spells of absence, or 10 consecutive days absent within the previous three months, their line manager will arrange an Attendance Review Meeting. This meeting will also be called for in the event of patterns or frequencies of absences, or in the event that a manager has other concerns about an employee's attendance record.

The purpose of an Attendance Review meeting will be to review the employee's absence and the reasons for such absence to determine whether there are any underlying reasons for the absences and whether there is likely to be any recurrence. It also aims to provide early intervention and support to employees experiencing difficulties with their health. Both line manager and employee will consider the employee's absence level and agree any action or improvement required.

A record will be kept of Attendance Review meetings and a date set for a follow-up meeting.

Poor Time Keeping

Poor time keeping is potentially misconduct and should be dealt with under the Association's disciplinary procedures. Persistent lateness may be caused by an underlying medical condition and it is therefore important to discuss with an employee the reasons for the persistent lateness. Where ill health may be an issue, the Association might consider whether further medical information is required or whether adjustments to the employee's pattern of work might resolve the problem.

Unauthorised Time Keeping

This is failure to attend work when contractually required to do so, with no (satisfactory) explanation. The Association will always attempt to contact the employee to determine the reason for the absence. If that is unsuccessful, it will arrange for a recorded delivery letter to be sent to the employee at their last known address, making it clear that failure to respond within a defined period might result in the termination of their employment. This should be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure.

8. ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

Hillhead Housing Association 2000 and its managers will adopt a sympathetic and understanding approach to any staff member dealing with a long-term and/or chronic health problem. Staff who find themselves in such a position should be confident that their manager will react in a supportive fashion when approached.

Employees must feel they are able to discuss their absence problems with their line manager. This will allow the Line Manager to ascertain possible interventions which may contribute to a successful return to work, for example offering counselling, a phased return to work, reduced workload etc. Open communications between the employee and manager can help when absence problems are not straightforward. They will instil confidence in the employee that the organisation takes their absence seriously and will contribute to the overall management of the absence.

The following points will always be considered in relation to long term absence: -

- The nature of the illness
- Any contributing factors
- The likely duration of the employee's absence
- The nature of the employee's duties in relation to his/her health problems
- The business needs of the Association and the impact that the employee's absence is having upon these
- The employee's length of service
- The entitlement to Sickness Benefit

Throughout the duration of the employee's absence it will be expected that he/she will keep in touch and advise of progress. In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, managers may also seek to obtain medical reports and assessments at appropriate junctures during the absence and will arrange to discuss these with the staff member when received. Medical reports may also be requested where the employee may be suffering from an underlying medical condition even though he/she has not been off sick for a prolonged period. The line manager may ask the employee for consent to obtain a medical report from the employee's GP or other medical professional, and/or refer the employee to an occupational health provider for a medical assessment. Where the staff member disagrees with the nature of any medical reports, he/she will be free to seek and offer alternative medical evidence. Where the staff member refuses access to medical records or does not turn up at an independent medical assessment, the process will be managed and decisions made based on the information available at the time.

Along with considering any medical reports, the manager will keep the staff member fully appraised as to whether/for how long the absence or absences can be borne by the Association. In cases where dismissal through medical incapacity is being considered, full discussion with the employee will take place first, and he/she will be afforded the opportunity to express their views on such a course of action. During the course of discussions, the Association will also consider referral to the Disability Employment Advisor within the Job Centre. Alternatives to dismissal will always be considered where appropriate, and in line with business needs, such as reasonable adjustments and/or any current vacancies the Association may have.

Where the employee is or has become disabled, the possibility of creating a new post to enable ongoing employment will be examined in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, in particular Disability Discrimination.

In cases where staff members do leave Hillhead Housing Association due to ill health, managers will make every effort they can to help secure appropriate access to the pension scheme and/or other relevant financial benefits that may be available.

9. DISHONEST ABSENCE

If the employee is found to falsify or exaggerate their absence, this will be treated as gross misconduct. An investigation will be carried out in accordance with Hillhead Housing Association's disciplinary procedures and disciplinary action may be imposed, including dismissal or future withdrawal of any organisational sickness benefit.

10. OTHER PROVISIONS

Absence and holidays

If the employee is on annual leave and falls sick, it is possible to override the annual leave and process sick leave and pay instead. The appropriate certification must be provided in these circumstances.

Hillhead Housing Association acknowledges that a holiday may aid in the recovery of an employee who is on sick leave. Where an employee intends to go on holiday while on sickness absence, they must inform their line manager as soon as is reasonably practical. The line manager will decide, considering the employee's reason for absence, if appropriate medical advice should be sought in such circumstances. Where an employee goes on holiday without the Association's authorisation, a full investigation will be initiated and depending on the outcome, disciplinary action may be invoked.

Doctor/Hospital/Dental Appointments

Doctor and dental appointments should be arranged outwith working hours. If it is not possible, employees should request time off from their line manager. Arrangements could include using annual leave, TOIL/flexi or unpaid leave. Paid time off will be given for hospital appointments, for which proof of the appointment must be provided.

Home Visits

Where an employee is off long term sick it will usually be necessary to visit them in their own home. The visit will discuss the ongoing absence from work and what if any support can be given to facilitate a return to work. The meeting may also take place within Hillhead Housing Association's offices or another mutually agreed venue.

Conduct whilst off sick

When on sick leave, employees are still expected to adhere to the terms in their contract of employment, and are expected not to participate in activities that would be at odds with their medical condition, or their employment with Hillhead Housing Association. Any breach in respect of this will be dealt with under the Association's disciplinary procedure.

Cosmetic procedures

Absence due to cosmetic procedures (whether carried out in the UK or abroad) will not fall under the sick leave or pay. In these cases, the employee should request time off and agree with their line manager how the absence will be processed, e.g. annual leave or unpaid leave. Where cosmetic surgery is connected to an underlying health condition normal sick leave and pay procedures will apply.

In some rare cases cosmetic procedures can cause medical complications and further surgery is required on a corrective basis. In these circumstances normal sick pay and leave procedures will apply.

IVF treatment

Absences resulting from IVF treatment will not be processed as sick leave or pay. The same relates to a partner of a person that is undergoing such treatment. Instead, employees should discuss with their line manager how time off for the treatment could be accommodated, e.g. annual leave, flexi time or unpaid leave. Absences relating to IVF treatment will also not be treated as relating to pregnancy unless the employee falls pregnant.

Stress management

Stress is not an illness but a state. It can result from an illness or lead to one but it is not an illness itself. The same relates to "nervous debility". If an employee goes off sick with stress, the manager will endeavour to find out the underlying cause so that it can be determined whether conditions at work cause or contribute to the condition, and whether action can be taken to assist in a return to work. If the absence is certified by a doctor, the manager may ask the employee's doctor to clarify the underlying cause for stress.

Special Leave

Hillhead Housing Association recognise that employees may need time off to deal with situations involving their dependants including care for them when they fall ill or are injured. (such situations are described in more detail in Section A10 1.3 and 4 of the EVH Terms and Conditions of Employment) Paid leave will be granted for the first day of absence. Should the absence extend beyond 1 day, employees can use their own annual leave or flexi/toil. Alternatively, unpaid leave will be granted.

No more than 2 periods of special leave within a 12 month period will be granted in relation to the circumstances above. Further periods will be unpaid unless employees wish to use their own leave.

Data Protection

Hillhead Housing Association will treat employee personal data in line with its obligations under the current General Data Protection Regulation and its own Privacy Statement. Information regarding how employees' data will be used and the basis for processing data is provided in the employee privacy notice.