

Strategic HR Forum – Discussion 22nd June 2011 Management of Long term Sick leave

What is regarded as a long term absence?

A long-term absence is defined as a period of over 21 calendar days' absence from work.

How long is a Long Term sick case tolerated?

From time to time people may suffer a serious illness or injury or require hospital treatment. As a reasonable employer we recognise this and aim to support our staff through this, but also aim to resolve a case as quickly as possible. Generally the main factor in determining how long an absence can be maintained is what job the employee is absent from. Typically professional posts in small teams cannot be covered as well as an administrative post with generic skills that can be easily back filled.

The other factor is what the employee is doing to cooperate with the employer to manage the case so they can return as soon as possible.

What is the council's sick pay entitlement?

During 1 st year of service	1 month's full pay and (after completing 4 months' service) 2 months' half pay.
During 2 nd year of service	2 months' full pay and 2 months' half pay
During 3 rd year of service	4 months' full pay and 4 months' half pay
During 4 th & 5 th year of service	5 months full pay and 5 months half pay
After 5 th years' service	6 months full pay and 6 months half pay

What is the role of the Manager ?

When employees need to take an extended period of sick absence from work for a serious illness or condition they should receive considerate help and support from their manager in order to aid getting employees back to work as quickly as possible. The ways of doing this are to:-

- Keep in touch and show concern
- Make sure they are getting information and communications such as Team talk and NHDC News.
- Seek HR advice and arrange an Occupational Health (OH) referral

A common problem with LT sick leave is employees become isolated and this often extends the absence period. Ideally staff on LT sick, if well enough, should be popping into the office to see colleagues so they stay in touch with colleagues and the workplace and it is the managers job to try and bring this about.

What is the role of HR?

HR aim to assist managers to get employees back to work as quickly as possible or where this is not possible ensure that employees are fully supported through the termination of their employment.

HR maintain a list of staff on LT sick and arrange a monthly case conference meeting with OH and if necessary the line manager, at which, each case is discussed and action agreed on what needs to be done.

HR provide advice to managers on making a referral to Occupational Health (OH) and aim to encourage managers to make a referral within one month of the start of the absence.

HR also take steps to ensure that the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is considered. When an employee is on long term sick leave they may be covered by the DDA and as such we must consider any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary to get them back to work or take this into account in managing their LT absence.

HR train and coach managers on managing absence.

There are a range of solutions to resolve cases that include:-

- A normal return to work.
- A rehabilitation programme including a phased return to work.
- Partial working (the new fit note is intended to support opportunities for people to work in some capacity, if they are deemed fit enough)
- Potential temporary or permanent redeployment.
- Ill health retirement - if an employee is either permanently incapacitated for work or will be unable to work in the near future and they are a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme, they may be eligible for ill health retirement.
- Capability Dismissal

In 2010/11 the council lost 2.63 days per employee to long term sick leave. LT absence was lower than the short term absence rate and 2010/11 was our best year of absence performance since records began.