

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIC FORUM**DISCUSSION TOPIC: LONG TERM SICK ABSENCE CASE MANAGEMENT**

Absence from work due a serious illness or condition or for an operation or accident is likely to affect most employees at times during their working life.

The Councils Long Term Absence Management procedure and practices are aimed at ensuring that during times when employees need to take an extended period of sick absence from work for a serious illness or condition, they will receive considerate support and all efforts will be made to get employees recovered and back to work as quickly as possible.

How have we been doing in terms of long term absence over the last few years?

2012 - 4.42 days per FTE

2013 - 1.42 days per FTE

2014 - 1.11 days per FTE (March to July)

The HR team have been actively involved in managing our long term absence case load this year. The number of long-term sick cases has been higher. Of the 5 cases we had in June, 2 employees have made a successful return to work and we are taking steps to help resolve the other 3 cases. Regrettably there has been another 5 cases since June, of which 3 are currently on a phased return to work.

An overview of case management

- A long term sick absence is an absence of 21 days and over.
- After 21 days or a medical certificate that shows the absence will extend beyond that period, an occupational health (OH) referral is made.
- The council has a contract for (OH) and holds regular clinics to see people who are on long term sick leave.
- HR adds the employee to a list of Long Term sick cases to manage the case to its final conclusion.
- A specific HR Advisor is assigned to each case to work with the manager and OH to resolve the case.

What is the manager's role?

Managers are advised by HR throughout the case duration and the most important part is it is essential that managers remain in contact with employees that are on long term sick leave to minimise any feelings of isolation and being cut off from the work place which can commonly lead to depression.

It allows a manager to hear first hand how the illness and ultimately recovery are progressing.

How cases are resolved

The HR team act on occupational health advice, feedback from the manager and knowledge of LT sick case management. Clearly the best outcome for all involved is for the employee to quickly make a full recovery and return to work. However long term absence can be routine, not serious but protracted, serious or sadly even terminal and how the case is managed will depend on the individual circumstances of the case.

The following ways are the typical ways in which a case is concluded

- The employee returns to work on full hours/duties.
- The employee is rehabilitated to the work place by a gradual return to full hours and duties.
- The employ is redeployed into a post more suited to their health possibly temporarily, this is usually in the case of disability where an adjustment is made and would depend on suitable alternatives being available.
- Ill Health Retirement, providing the employee is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme; they might be assessed by Occupational Health as a case for Ill Health Retirement.
- Early Severance on compassionate grounds, providing the employee is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme and aged over 55 and are suffering from ill health which could not be classified as 'permanent ill health' but which is a recurring problem, which has caused a reduction in the job performance or made the ability to work difficult.
- Where the employee is not in the pension scheme and there is no reasonable prospect for a return to work within a reasonable time. Consideration will be given to dismissing them on grounds of capability, following a fair dismissal process supported by HR.
- Occasionally we sadly get employees die in service these cases are managed with the utmost sensitivity and managers are given close support from the HR Service