

JSCC Discussion – Long Term Absence Management

Long Term absence is defined as an absence lasting more than 21 calendar days.

Our Long-Term Absence Management policy ensures that employees taking an extended period of sick absence from work for a serious illness or condition receive appropriate support from their manager and the HR team. Our sick pay scheme supports employees whilst they take time off to recover and ensures they receive fair pay and benefits.

Every effort is made to support employees in returning to work as quickly as possible. Where this is not possible, employees are fully supported through the options that may be available such as reasonable adjustments, redeployment, or ill-health retirement.

Disability is one of the protected characteristics covered by the Equalities Act which is often relevant to long-term sickness absence. It requires employers on occasions to treat disabled people more favourably than they would have treated them if they had not had a disability, such as considering any reasonable adjustments and any absences that are disability related should be clearly noted as such on the employee's absence record.

Eligibility for Occupational Sick Pay (OSP)

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

2023 Figures

In 2023, there were 49 cases of long-term sickness absence, which resulted in a loss of over 1,000 working days. 40% of cases related to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and stress, and a further 20% related to musco-skeletal issues, with the remaining 40% a wide variety of issues.

How we support and manage employees on Long Term Sickness Absence

Long-Term absence Letter

- Sent at 21 days from HR to the employee informing them of the policy and expectations whilst they remain absent, including the requirement to provide Fit notes and the importance of maintaining contact with line manager.
- The recommendation of an Occupational Health referral is included.
- Our Employee Assistance Programme is also signposted in the letter.

Occupational Health (OH) Referral

- HR recommend that a referral is made to OH within 28 days of the start of the absence, consent is requested.

- OH appointments are scheduled by our OH provider, and involves a consultation which takes place over the phone, at a time convenient for the employee
- The confidential OH report includes a summary, providing guidance from a trained medical professional.
- Advice is provided about the employee's health in relation to their job and any adjustments that are needed to support the employee return to work, including phased return, modified duties and reasonable adjustments.

The HR team provide guidance and support to the line manager throughout the process and are available to provide guidance and signpost external support to employees.

Returning to the workplace

- Occupational Health advice is used to support a phased return to work and arrangements are made ahead of employees returning to the workplace to ensure adjustments are in place and can be supported.
- Reasonable adjustments are changes an employer makes to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to someone's disability, the Council extends this beyond those absences relating to a disability and reasonable adjustments are put in place, where appropriate, for each long term absence case.
- Examples of reasonable adjustments include reduced hours, alternative working arrangements and/or modified duties. These are put in place for a maximum of 4 weeks.
- Regular reviews on the phased return to work are followed up by HR with the line manager. Ensuring that progress towards a full, sustained return to work is on track. Any concerns are highlighted and addressed.
- Where cases require more than 4 weeks then a reduction in contracted hours on a temporary or permanent basis is considered, with advice from HR.

Unable to return to the workplace (for employees in the Local Govt Pension Scheme)

For employees who are incapacitated and unable to work in the foreseeable medium to long term future, the possibility of Ill Health Retirement provision can be explored and advice sought from a qualified independent Occupational Health Physician. HR will advise on all options in line with the relevant regulations which apply to the pension scheme.

Looking forward

- Considering introducing Wellness Action Plans alongside stress risk assessments as a proactive approach in managing long-term absence which relate to mental health absences.