



SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY FOR EMPLOYEES

Document history

Notes of changes	Version No.	Date of approval and adoption
Sickness absence policy in original format	1.0	24 April 2021
Reviewed with slight amendments	2.0	01 June 2023
Revised Sickness Absence Policy	3.0	14 February 2024
Revised – no changes		05 April 2025
Revised – changed to reflect Employment Rights Act 2025 - no earnings threshold for Statutory sick pay and no waiting period.	4.0	11 April 2026

**THIS SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY FOR EMPLOYEES IS PUBLISHED AS APPROVED
BY CUMBRIA ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS IN APRIL 2026**



Scope

The policy applies to all employees of Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC).

Introduction

This policy sets out Cumbria Association of Local Councils approach to managing absence including short term sickness absence and ongoing long-term sickness absence.

The absence reporting procedure applies to all forms of sickness absence and all employees including the Chief Officer. When the Chief Officer is absent, the Chair of CALC will manage their sickness absence in line with the procedures outlined in this policy.

In some cases the disciplinary policy may apply rather than, or as well as, the Sickness Absence Policy, such as:

- If an employee doesn't follow the absence reporting procedure
- If CALC have reasonable grounds to believe that the sickness absence isn't genuine
- If inaccurate or misleading information about the sickness absence is provided.

Absence Reporting Procedure

If an employee can't come to work for any reason, they must call or email the Chief Officer, if the Chief Officer isn't available then they should call or email the Deputy Chief Officer as soon as reasonably possible. A message from another person is acceptable if the employee is unable to make the call themselves for example following an admittance to hospital.

When contacting the Chief Officer make them aware of

- The reason and likely duration of the absence
- Details of any urgent or outstanding work that needs picking up.

It's really important that employees follow the absence reporting procedure for all sickness absence. If they don't, this will be viewed as unauthorised absence which is a serious matter and could result in pay being stopped and disciplinary action being taken against the employee up to and including dismissal.

Keeping in contact

It's important to stay in contact with the Chief Officer in addition to providing Fit Notes and attending any absence review meetings. As a minimum, the employee



should always call the Chief Officer the day before the Fit Note expires, to let them know whether or not you'll be returning to work.

If an employee feels that the reason for their absence is work related, please talk to the Chief Officer about this as soon as possible.

The Chief Officer might call an employee from time to time if there's anything they need to speak to the employee about, or just to keep in touch.

Sickness certification

Employees should self-certify sickness up to and including seven calendar days using a Self-Certification Form but if the sickness absence lasts for over seven days the employee must obtain a Fit Note from one of the following approved Healthcare Professionals - doctor, nurse, occupational therapist, pharmacist or physiotherapist in order to cover the absence from the eighth day onwards.

Remember, any period of sickness absence which isn't covered by self-certification or a Fit Note is classed as unauthorised absence.

Sick pay

Employees will receive the following company sick pay in a twelve month rolling period.

During year 1 and 2 of service – one month full pay and one month half pay

During years 3, 4 and 5 of service – 2 months full pay and 2 months half pay

After 5 years of service – 3 months full pay and 3 months half pay

Once this sick pay has been exhausted employees will be entitled to statutory sick pay. There is no earnings threshold for statutory sick pay and no three day waiting period.

Occupational health

If an employee is off sick, CALC may refer them to an external Occupational Health adviser to get more information about the absence. Once an appointment is booked, it's important that the employee attends. If the employee does not attend CALC will manage the sickness absence using existing information.

Return to work meeting

The Chief Officer will meet with the employee after every absence to talk about how the employee is feeling and if there are any adjustments suggested on the Fit Note.



This meeting must take place on the day the employee returns to work or as soon as possible thereafter.

In the meeting, the Chief Officer will talk about the reason for the absence and about any concerns the employee may have. It is important for the employee to state if there are any underlying reasons for the absence, or if the absence was for a work-related reason.

Sickness and holidays

If an employee is off sick and have pre-booked holiday that they are too unwell to take, the employee can ask for the holiday to be cancelled so they can take it another time.

Instead of using holiday, the employee will be recorded as sick and get any sick pay they are eligible for. But the employee must follow the absence reporting procedure - otherwise they won't be able to change their holidays to sickness. Just so it's clear, if the employee's holidays are changed to sickness, this absence will count towards any absence triggers.

If an employee hasn't been able to take their holidays during the holiday year because they have been off sick for a prolonged period, they can carry forward up to four weeks holiday into the next holiday year, pro-rata for part-time employees.

If an employee is off sick for a prolonged period, they can choose to take holidays during their absence to extend their pay after contractual sick pay has run out.

Disability-related absence

If an employee thinks they have a disability, they should talk to the chief Officer about it and discuss any adjustments the employee may need.

If an employee is off sick due to a disability-related illness, the Chief Officer will try to support the employee to return to work. The employee may be referred to an external Occupational Health Adviser to find out more about the employee's condition, how it may affect them at work and whether there are any adjustments CALC could make to help.

These absences might count towards the absence triggers in some circumstances. But it might be a reasonable adjustment to agree a revised absence trigger with the employee for absences related to a disability or to not include them when calculating absences triggers.



Phased return

If an employee is coming back to work after an extended absence, the employee might need a phased return. This means that the employee will return to work gradually, helping them get back up to speed and to check that any adjustments CALC have made are working.

Phased returns can include returning on reduced hours or doing amended duties. They usually last for 4-6 weeks but may be extended if required.

Just so you know, if an employee is working reduced hours during a phased return, they will normally get paid for the actual hours they work. Talk to the Chief Officer about options such as using holidays or any remaining sick pay for the hours that you're not working.

Confidentiality and medical information

If an employee is off sick, CALC will keep the reason for this as confidential as possible. But there may be times when the Chief Officer needs to discuss the employee's medical condition with other people and they'll agree this with the employee before sharing their information.

SHORT TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

1. Absence triggers

CALC have a system of absence triggers in place to help manage short-term periods of absence. These triggers are:

- Three periods of absence in a 12 month rolling period (two if you're within your probationary period)
- 20 or more days of absence in a 12-month rolling period
- Where there's a pattern of absence – (such as the Tuesday after a bank holiday weekend or the day after a big social or sporting event)

2. First absence review meeting

If an employee has reached an absence trigger, they will be invited to an absence meeting, giving at least 48 hours' notice.

If the employee wants to be accompanied to the meeting by a trade union rep or another colleague, they should arrange this and let the manager know before the meeting.

At the meeting: -



- the Chief Officer will discuss whether there are any concerns about the employee's level of absence and if there are any factors contributing to them – such as a workplace issue or an ongoing or underlying medical condition. If needed the Chief Officer may ask the employee to agree to a referral to an Occupational Health Adviser. If appropriate, any possible work adjustments that may help will be discussed and recorded.
- the Chief Officer will be accompanied by a colleague to take detailed notes of what was discussed.
- At the end of the meeting, everyone will be asked to read and sign the notes to make sure they are an accurate reflection of what was discussed.

The Chief Officer will then adjourn the meeting to decide whether or not to issue a First Absence Warning. This will not happen for pregnancy-related absences. If a First Absence Warning is issued it must be confirmed in writing within 14 calendar days of the meeting. The letter will include a copy of the notes from the meeting and what the employee needs to do to improve their absence levels. The warning will be live for six months.

If the Chief Officer decides that no further action should be taken a letter will be sent to the employee explaining that the matter is now closed and thanking them for their co-operation.

It should be noted that Absence warnings are different to, and separate from, any disciplinary warnings an employee may get.

3. Second absence review meeting

If the employee has a further period of absence while the first warning is live, a second absence review meeting will be held following the same process as the first absence review meeting.

If the employee's absence level has not improved, the Chief Officer may decide to issue a Second Absence Warning, which will be live for nine months.

If the Chief Officer decides that no further action should be taken, then they'll send the employee a letter explaining that the matter is now closed and thanking them for their co-operation.

4. Third absence review meeting

If the employee is absent again while the second warning is live, they will be invited to a third absence review meeting following the same process as the second absence review meeting.

If the employee's absence level has not improved, the outcome of this meeting may be a Third Absence Warning, which will be live for twelve months.



If the Chief Officer decides that no further action should be taken, then they'll send the employee a letter to explain that the matter is now closed and thank them for their co-operation.

5. Final absence meeting

If the employee is absent again while the third warning is live, they will be invited to attend a final absence review meeting. The letter will tell them that an outcome of this meeting could be dismissal.

After the meeting, the Chief Officer will confirm the decision in writing and the letter will include the details of how to appeal.

Again, if the Chief Officer decides that no further action should be taken, then they'll confirm this to the employee.

6. Appeal

The employee can appeal against an absence warning in writing within 7 calendar days of receiving the outcome letter. The employee should give the grounds for their appeal as either;

- new information or evidence is available that wasn't considered before
- the process wasn't followed correctly, or
- they feel the outcome wasn't fair and reasonable.

7. Appeal Meeting

The appeal meeting will be with an independent CALC Director of the Board who's had nothing to do with the original decision. They will invite the employee to an appeal meeting giving them at least 48 hours' notice within 14 calendar days of getting the appeal letter.

If the employee wants to be accompanied to the appeal meeting by a trade union rep or another colleague, they should arrange this and let the appeal Director know before the meeting.

At the appeal meeting, the employee will be asked to explain the reasons for their appeal and why they feel that the original outcome wasn't appropriate. The Director will adjourn the meeting if necessary to get further evidence or interview witnesses. If there is any further evidence, we'll make sure the employee is given a copy or provided access to it is and give them the opportunity to respond to it.

The appeal Director will take a colleague to the meeting with them to take notes and at the end of the meeting everyone will be asked to check and sign the notes. The appeal Director will then adjourn the meeting while they make their decision.



8. Appeal outcomes

Once the appeal Director has reached their decision, they should confirm it to the employee in writing. This will be within 14 calendar days.

The appeal manager may decide to:

- Reject the appeal – so the original decision is upheld
- Uphold the appeal – and remove the Absence Warning
- Uphold the appeal – and overturn the dismissal)

This ends the appeals process.

ONGOING SICKNESS ABSENCE PROCESS

This process sets out the steps CALC will follow to deal with any ongoing periods of sickness absence of more than 28 days.

As well as following the process below, the Chief Officer can contact the employee from time to time while they're absent, to find out how they are and to give them any updates.

1. Terminal illness

If the employee has been told they have a terminal illness, this will be a very distressing time and they'll have lots to think about besides work.

CALC will always keep terminally ill employees employed, where they want this, even if they're no longer getting sick pay and there's little chance of them returning to work. This can be for financial reasons as well as offering the employee hope and a support network for them and their family during this difficult time.

Employees should still provide Fit Notes for this period, which may be issued for longer periods than usual.

2. Fit Notes for on-going sickness absence

Employees should continue to provide Fit Notes throughout any prolonged period of absence. If at any time an employee stops sending in Fit Notes, the Chief Officer will contact them as soon as possible.

3. Arranging the first health review meeting

If an employee has been off sick for longer than 28 days and their Fit Note suggests that they may be off work for a while, we'll invite them to a health review meeting.



The health review is to understand more about the reasons for the employee's absence, whether they're waiting for any medical appointments or test results and to talk about when they think they'll be likely to return to work.

The Chief Officer will send the employee a letter inviting them to this meeting giving them at least 72 hours notice.

The location of the meeting will be agreed between the Chief Officer and the employee and can be either virtual or face to face. The Chief Officer will bring a note taker with them should they visit the employee at home and the employee can have either a work colleague or a trade union rep with them to any health review meeting. And if it's appropriate, the Chief Officer may agree for a friend or family member to be present them for support.

4. At the first health review meeting

This meeting is for the employee and the chief Officer to talk about:

- the reasons for the absence and how they're progressing towards recovery
- how long the absence is likely to last
- any medical information, including any appointments they have scheduled or test results they've received
- any adjustments which can be made to enable them to return to their role
- whether it's likely that they'll be able to return to, or remain in, their role.

5. Occupational Health

At the meeting the Chief Officer may ask the employee to agree to be referred to and external Occupational Health Adviser, if they feel it's appropriate at this stage. This is so CALC can understand more about the reasons for their absence and if there's anything CALC can do to support their return to work.

6. Further health review meetings

If the employee continues to be off sick, CALC will hold further health review meetings with them, as well as keeping in regular contact by phone. If an Occupational Health referral hasn't already been made, then this should be done as the employee's absence progresses.

There are no specific timescales for these meetings or set number of meetings that CALC will hold - it depends on the circumstances and the medical condition. But the Chief Officer should arrange to meet with the employee at appropriate times as their absence progresses – for example, after receiving an Occupational Health report or after the employee has met with their GP or specialist.



CALC will send a letter inviting the employee to any health review meetings giving them at least 72 hours' notice. These meetings are for the employee and the Chief Officer to talk about:

- the reasons for the absence and how they're progressing towards recovery
- how long the absence is likely to last
- any medical information, including any appointments they have scheduled or test results they've received, as well as information gained from Occupational Health
- any adjustments which can be made to enable them to return to their role
- whether it's likely that they'll be able to return to, or remain in, their role

At these meetings, the Chief Officer will discuss and agree next steps with the employee, including timescales for them returning to work or for holding a further review meeting.

Outcomes from the review meetings may include occupational health adviser referrals, phased returns or reasonable adjustments. The employee will also be made aware that continued absence may lead to their termination of employment.

7. Final health review meeting

If the employee has been off sick for a prolonged period and it looks unlikely that they'll be able to return to work in a reasonable timeframe, CALC will invite them to a final absence review meeting. This will only be done if absolutely necessary and when CALC have;

- gathered all relevant medical information;
- considered reasonable adjustments or phased return

At the meeting the Chief Officer will consider ending the employee's employment on the grounds of capability. The Chief Officer will have already mentioned to the employee that this could be a possibility at previous absence review meetings, so it shouldn't come as a shock. CALC will also inform the employee of this possible outcome in the letter sent to invite them to attend the final absence review meeting.

8. Outcome of final health review meeting

If the Chief Officer considers all of the information and decides that the employee is unlikely to return to work in the foreseeable future, then they may decide to dismiss them on the grounds of capability due to ill-health.

If the employee is dismissed this will be with contractual notice, or pay in lieu of notice, even if they've run out of sick pay. They'll also get pay in lieu of any accrued but untaken holidays during the previous holiday year.



This information will be confirmed in a letter to the employee.

9. Appeals

The employee can appeal against the decision to dismiss them in writing. The employee should give the grounds for their appeal as either;

- new information or evidence is available that wasn't considered before
- the process wasn't followed correctly, or
- they feel the outcome wasn't fair and reasonable

Employees should send their appeal within seven calendar days of receiving the outcome letter.

10. Appeal meeting

The appeal meeting will be with an independent Director of the CALC Board who's had nothing to do with the original decision.

The appeal Director will invite the employee to an appeal meeting giving them at least 48 hours' notice within 14 calendar days of getting the appeal letter.

If the employee wants to be accompanied to the appeal meeting by a trade union rep or another colleague, they should arrange this and let the appeal Director know before the meeting.

At the appeal meeting, the employee will be asked to explain the reasons for their appeal and why they feel that the original outcome wasn't appropriate. The appeal Director will adjourn the meeting if necessary to get further evidence. If there is any further evidence, CALC will make sure the employee is given a copy or provided access to it is and give them the opportunity to respond to it.

The appeal Director will take a colleague to the meeting with them to take notes and at the end of the meeting everyone will be asked to check and sign the notes. The appeal Director will then adjourn the meeting while they make their decision.

If the employee doesn't turn up for the appeal meeting without telling CALC in advance, CALC will rearrange it and write to confirm the new details. If they don't turn up for the rearranged meeting, CALC will consider the matter closed and write to confirm this.

11. Appeal outcomes

Once the appeal Director has reached their decision, they should confirm it to the employee in writing. This will normally be within 14 calendar days. The appeal Director may decide to:



- reject the appeal so the original dismissal decision is upheld
- uphold the appeal and overturn the dismissal

This ends the appeals process.