

**Sickness Absence Policy Summary
For Employees at
Bromsgrove District Council**

January 2007

Sickness Absence Procedure - Summary

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document is a summary of the Bromsgrove District Council Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure, and is intended to outline the main principles of the policy, specifically in relation to the notification of sickness. The full policy is available on the Council's intranet site and should be read in conjunction with this summary document.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 The policy and procedure applies to all employees of Bromsgrove District Council up to and including the Chief Executive.

3.0 Sickness Notification and Certification Procedures

- 3.1 Where an employee is absent from work because of illness, the procedure below must be followed:-

3.2 First Day of Absence

Employees reporting sick must do so personally by telephone and not through a third person subject to genuine and exceptional practical constraints (e.g. if the employee is hospitalised, or unable to access a telephone.) Further advice regarding what constitutes 'exceptional' circumstances can be sought from Human Resources. Unless specific local arrangements apply, employees must notify their line manager/supervisor of sickness within one hour of their normal start time. If the immediate line manager/supervisor is not available, the absence should be reported to an equivalent or senior line manager within the Division. E-mails and text messages are not appropriate and messages must not be left with colleagues. Where contact with their line manager/supervisor or equivalent manager is not possible, employees should contact their Departmental Sickness Absence Administrator to report their sickness. If all other attempts to report absence have been exhausted, employees should leave a voicemail message on their line manager's answerphone stating their name, time, date and specific information as detailed in 3.3.

- 3.3 When reporting sick, employees must state the reason for their absence, their anticipated length of absence and where possible, work commitments (if any) that may need rearranging. Where the employee feels unable to disclose the reason for their absence to their immediate line manager/supervisor due to this being of a sensitive nature, the employee should contact Human Resources directly.
- 3.4 The first seven calendar days' absence (which includes working and nonworking days) will be covered by the Self-Certification Form which the employee will complete upon return to work in conjunction with the line manager/supervisor.
- 3.5 If contact is not made by the employee as required during a period of sickness absence and any absence is unexplained, the manager will take reasonable steps to contact the employee, i.e., by telephone or by making a home visit.
- 3.6 Where an employee starts work and then leaves early on account of sickness, there will be a requirement for the line manager/supervisor to record the absence and notify the departmental sickness absence administrator. For example, if the employee works less than 50% of the contracted hours for that day, then half a day's sickness absence will be recorded. If, however, the

employee works more than 50% of their contracted hours, no sickness absence will be recorded for that day.

3.7 Second and Third Day of Absence

No action is required unless the employee has given an indication of an expected return on the second or third day. If the employee is unable to return as indicated, they should again contact their manager to keep them informed of progress.

3.8 Fourth Day of Absence

Unless an alternative contact timescale has been agreed with the line manager, the employee wherever practicable should make further contact with their manager to provide an update on their absence. If possible, depending on the nature of the absence, they should indicate an expected date of return. Non-working days, such as rostered days off, weekends and bank holidays *are* included in calculating the 4th day of absence. Should the 4th day fall upon an individual's non-working day when the Council offices are closed, contact should be made on the next available working day.

3.9 Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Day of Absence

No action is required unless the employee has given an indication of an expected return on the 5th, 6th or 7th day. If the employee is unable to return as indicated, they should again contact their manager to keep them informed of progress.

3.10 Eighth Day of Absence

The employee must consult a doctor and obtain a medical certificate for all absences from the eighth day onwards until they return to work. The employee will contact their line manager/supervisor to inform of the reason and period for refraining from work as indicated on the medical certificate. The certificate should then be sent to the line manager/supervisor as soon as possible.

3.11 Continuing Sickness Absence

Where there is continuing sickness absence, the employee must submit consecutive medical certificates as soon as possible for each consecutive period of sickness to their manager to ensure that the whole period of absence is covered. The line manager/supervisor must also ensure that appropriate and timely certificates are received from the employee and that the departmental sickness absence administrator is notified.

3.12 On receipt of the certificate, the employee must notify the line manager/supervisor of the date given by the doctor for a return to work. If an employee is required to return to their GP at the expiry of their medical certificate, a medical certificate or statement of fitness to resume work must be obtained before the employee returns to work. Upon their return to work, the medical certificate or statement of fitness to resume work must be submitted to the line manager/supervisor at the Return to Work Discussion.

3.13 Return to work prior to expiry of Medical Certificate

In some circumstances, an employee may feel well enough to return to work prior to the expiry of the medical certificate. In such circumstances, the employee must obtain a medical certificate from their doctor before they start work stating that they are fit for work and proceed as indicated in section 3.12.

3.14 Sickness during a period of Annual Leave

If an employee becomes ill whilst on annual leave, the absence can only be recorded as sickness absence after a medical certificate has been provided.

The date of commencement of sick leave will be the date provided by the doctor on the medical certificate.

3.15 Absence related to work place injury

If the employee believes their absence may have been caused by something that happened at work they should inform the line manager/supervisor of this and the line manager should arrange for an Incident Report Form to be completed, where possible, the same day. The line manager/supervisor should ensure that the 'Report of an injury or dangerous occurrence' form is issued to the Health and Safety Adviser as soon as possible and payroll notified accordingly. For further information regarding sick pay for periods of absence related to work place injury, please refer to the full policy document.

3.16 Removal of right to self-certification

In exceptional circumstances and following discussion with the employee regarding their sickness absence levels, if the manager remains concerned at the frequency of an employee's absence, or their account for their reasons of absence, the employee may be required to submit doctor's medical certificates, rather than self-certificates, from their first day of absence. In such cases, the Council will meet the cost of any fee charged. This arrangement will be confirmed in writing to the employee.

3.17 Unauthorised Absence

If an employee is absent from work without authorisation and provides no reasonable explanation, written notice may be given to stop pay for the period of absence. Unauthorised absence may be treated as misconduct, which could result in disciplinary action. In particular, the following situations may be identified as unauthorised absences which require investigation:-

- An employee's request for leave of absence was refused, but the employee has reported in sick. In this circumstance, a GP's certificate should be requested.
- The employee has not followed the notification procedure for sickness absence for example the employee fails to submit a medical certificate to cover absence beyond the self-certification period.

4.0 Maintaining Contact

4.1 Where an employee is absent from work due to sickness, the line manager/supervisor should ensure that the employee does not feel isolated, vulnerable or out of touch. It is vital therefore that contact is maintained between the manager and employee. The line manager/supervisor also needs to ensure that work is reallocated and service delivery is maintained.

4.2 Home Visits

During the early stages of sickness absence, contact will normally be by the line manager/supervisor by telephone. However, home visits are usually preferable to telephone conversations in relation to long-term sickness absence, particularly for employees finding it difficult to leave the house, not only as a welfare check and to offer any assistance but also as a means of keeping employees informed of news within the Council. Preferably, home visits should be conducted by officers known to the employee.

4.3 The employee should be advised that they may be accompanied by a friend, relative or a Trade Union representative during a home visit. Home visits will only be undertaken with the consent of the employee other than in exceptional circumstances, e.g., where reasonable attempts to contact the employee have failed or where there are concerns for the safety of an employee who lives alone. In exceptional circumstances where no prior

consent has been given for a home visit, line managers/supervisors should not make unaccompanied visits to the homes of employees. Before making a home visit, line managers/supervisors should seek advice from Human Resources. Home visits are not to be used as a tool to aid discipline, but to act as a positive support to the employee.

4.4 Follow up meetings and regularity of contact

Other appropriate meeting venues may be agreed and, at certain stages of recovery, site-based meetings can assist employees in preparing for a return to work. The manager should seek agreement with the employee as to the means and the timing of contact, but it must be regular, e.g., weekly or fortnightly, or as appropriate to the individual case.

- 4.5 If the employee wishes for a point of contact other than their line manager/supervisor, then an alternative manager, or a Human Resources Advisor, will be nominated. If an employee expresses a wish not to be contacted, or if attempts to make contact fail, the manager or Human Resources Advisor should write to him/her setting out the actions they intend to take and any options available to the employee. This will take account of all the 'known' circumstances relating to the case. Where possible, the trade union representative should normally be informed in advance of the letter being sent.

5.0 Medical Appointments

- 5.1 Routine appointments, *initiated by the employee*, to the optician, dentist or GP should be made outside of normal working time. Where this is not possible, appointments should be made at the beginning or end of the working day, or near to a lunch period to minimise disruption and the period of time away from the workplace. Employees will be required to make up the time lost. Where employees enjoy the benefits of the Flexi Time Scheme, appointments should be made outside of core hours. Appointments, that are not possible except in core time for unavoidable reasons, will normally be debited against the time record and thus be treated as debit hours.
- 5.2 Medical appointments with consultants *following a referral by the GP, hospital, dentist or opticians* to deal with health problems for diagnosis and/or treatment and/or prevention (e.g., screening) of physical or psychological health problems, should also be made *where possible* outside of normal working hours/core time (if subject to the flexi scheme). However, in exceptional circumstances where this is not practical, subject to the approving line manager/supervisor giving prior authorisation, reasonable leave with pay to attend such appointments will be granted. The employee should give their manager reasonable notice of the appointment and if requested provide evidence of each appointment.

6.0 Return to Work Discussions

- 6.1 Following every period of absence, a return to work discussion will be carried out by the line manager/supervisor on a one to one basis regardless of the nature and length of absence.
- 6.2 The interview should take place on the day the employee returns to work. However, it is acknowledged that for some categories of employee this may not be possible, e.g., certain shift workers. In such cases, the interview should be conducted at the earliest opportunity.
- 6.3 The salient points of the interview will be recorded on the Return to Work Discussion form, a copy of which will be retained by the employee. The return to work discussion and record will become a component of the employee's health record and will be retained on his/her personnel file.

- 6.4 Where a line manager/supervisor is concerned about an employee's sickness absence levels, or, where a trigger point has been reached, a separate Informal Meeting may be held in addition to a Return to Work Discussion.

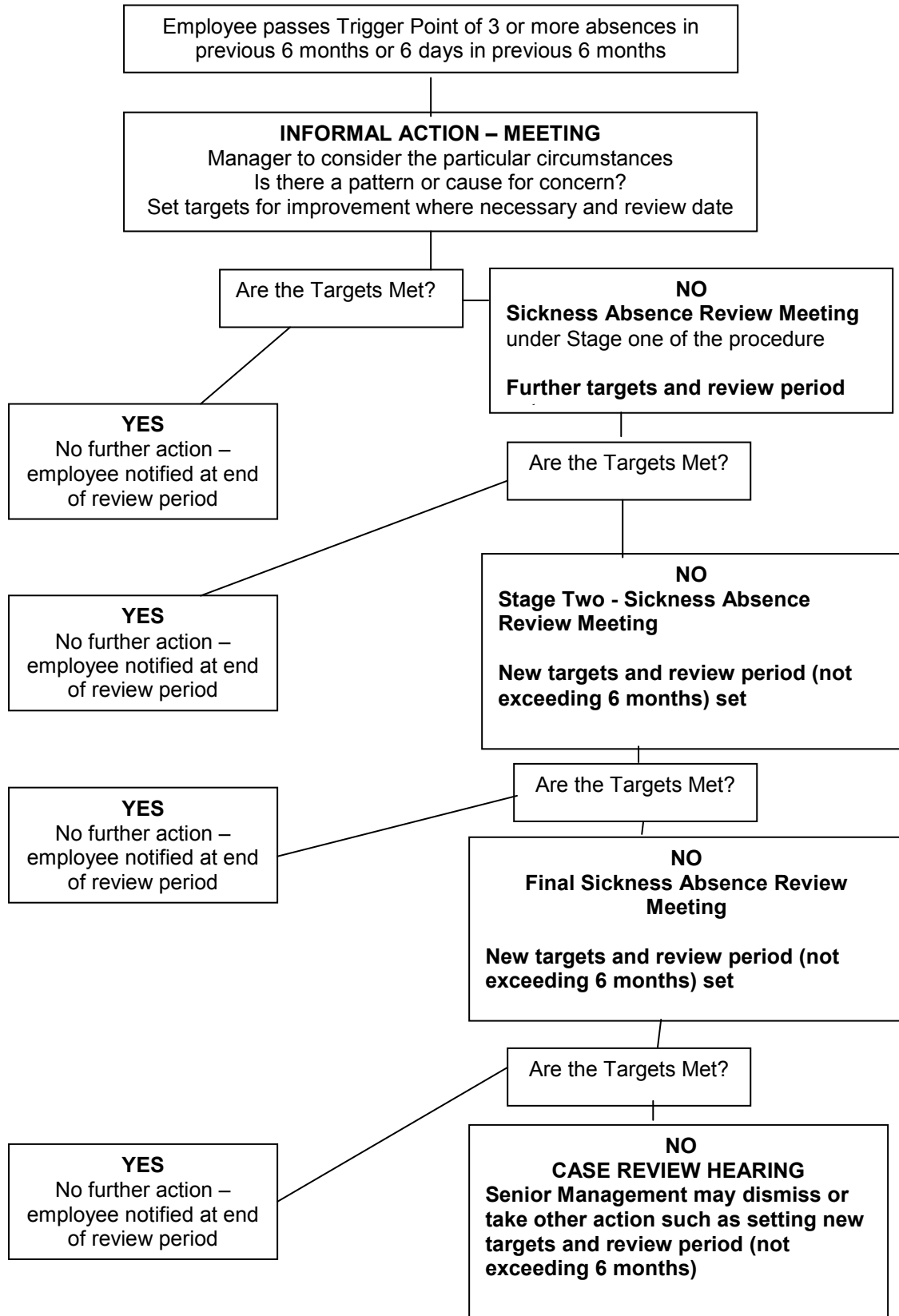
7.0 Trigger Points

- 7.1 Trigger points have been identified which highlight to managers those employees whose attendance records require further consideration. As a guide, line managers/supervisors are asked to consider the following triggers and potential follow up actions in the circumstances outlined below:
- 7.1.1 **Persistent short-term absence (includes both self-certificated and GP certificated absence):** where an employee has **three or more periods of absence in any 6 month rolling period**, or if the total absence (whether reckoned in a single absence or by adding together a number of separate absences) extends to **6 working days or more in any 6 month rolling period**, an informal meeting should take place. This meeting is separate to a Return to Work Discussion.
- 7.1.2 In addition, certain **patterns of absence**, e.g., absences immediately before or immediately after annual leave, the weekend or a bank holiday may also trigger the need for informal action meetings.
- 7.2 Trigger points are intended as guidance only and are neither exclusive nor exhaustive and any record giving rise to concern should be reviewed. Each case will be considered on its own merits by the line manager in consultation with Human Resources.
- 7.3 It is important that the circumstances of each case are taken into account, as there may be cases where action should be taken before a trigger point is reached, or no action is taken despite a trigger point being reached.
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Notes On Flowchart On Following Page:

- This is a simplified representation of the Process, for full details refer to the full Policy Document
- Line Managers must ensure that the departmental sickness absence administrator is informed of the employee's absence on the first day of sickness
- A Return to Work Discussion must take place following every period of absence.
- In coming to a decision the Manager must consider all the information supplied and options available.
- There is a right of Appeal at all formal stages – to the Chief Executive for Dismissal or to the Head of Service for action less than dismissal.
- Employees have the right to representation at all formal stages
- Records of all decisions made must be kept at each stage

SHORT TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE – FLOWCHART



8.0 Informal Action

- 8.1 Where a trigger point has been reached, or where an employee's record of attendance is giving cause for concern, informal action should be taken and a meeting held. This is an informal part of the sickness management process and the main purpose of the meeting is to help improve attendance by reiterating the Council's policy on sickness attendance and to remind the employee of their individual absence record.
- 8.2 This meeting should seek to explore any possible underlying medical or work-related reasons for the level of sickness absence, including any relation to a disability and any assistance that may be required. Any patterns of absence, which might be evident, will be discussed. The meeting is not designed to challenge whether the sickness absence is genuine or not but to focus on the level of sickness absence.
- 8.3 The meeting should conclude with an explanation as to the future procedure, where appropriate, if there is no improvement in the sickness absence and a review date will be set.

For further information on informal action, please refer to the full policy document.

9.0 Formal Sickness Absence Review Meetings (Stages One, Two & Three)

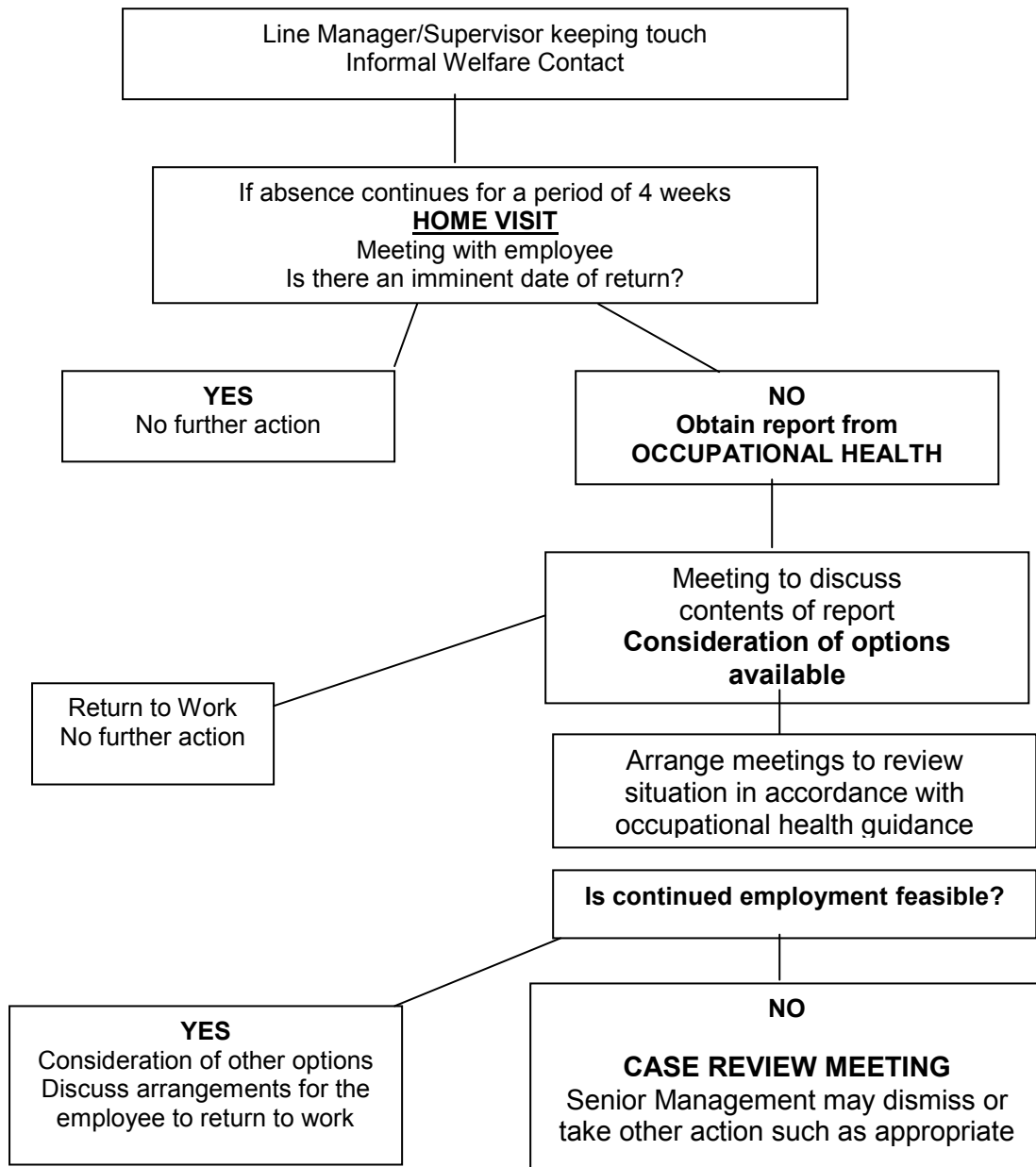
- 9.1 Where there are continuing management concerns relating to persistent and/or intermittent sickness absences and informal mechanisms for dealing with the problem have proved unsatisfactory or have been exhausted, formal Sickness Absence Review Meetings will be conducted over three stages.
- 9.2 The employee will be advised of their right to be accompanied/represented by a Trade Union representative or a work colleague.
- 9.3 These review meetings will consider the levels of absence and/or the pattern of the individual and the reasons given for absence. The reasons will be discussed in an attempt to identify any underlying causes. The employee will be advised that level of attendance is considered to be unsatisfactory and that improvement is needed over a relevant and reasonable review period.
- 9.4 The outcomes of all review meetings held will be confirmed in writing.
- 9.5 If monitoring during the review period shows that the employee's attendance is no longer a cause for concern, the employee will be notified of this *in writing* at the end of the review period.
- 9.6 If at any stage within the review period, there has been insufficient improvement in the employee's attendance and there are no exceptional circumstances meriting extensions to the review periods, the matter will be referred to the next stage of the procedure, until the third and final sickness review meeting.
- 9.7 At this third stage meeting, if there is no sustained improvement, then a possible recommendation to dismiss on grounds of capability could be made to the Head of Service and a Case Review Hearing convened.

The full Sickness Absence Policy outlines in more detail the procedure for the Review meetings with further help, advice and guidance available from Human Resources in relation to the application of the policy.

10.0 Long-term Sickness Cases

10.1 Continuous absence for more than 4 weeks (28 days) is classified as long-term and will be managed accordingly.

LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE – FLOWCHART



Notes on Flow Chart:

- This is a simplified representation of the Process, for full details refer to the full Policy Document
- Line Managers must ensure that the departmental sickness absence administrator is informed of the employee's absence on the first day of sickness
- Contact must be maintained with the employee during the absence.
- In coming to a decision the Manager must consider all the information supplied and options available.
- There is a right of Appeal at all formal stages – to the Chief Executive Officer for Dismissal or to the Head of Service for action less than dismissal.
- Employees have the right to representation at all formal stages
- Records of all decisions made must be kept at each stage

- 10.2 Where an employee is absent for 4 continuous weeks or more, the line manager/supervisor will meet with the employee *normally* at home to discuss the absence and the prospect of a return to work. This meeting will facilitate consideration of the following points:-
- What progress the employee is making in terms of becoming well enough to return to work. In some circumstances, where it is clearly evident that the employee will not return to work in the near future, the discussion may focus on the general well-being of the employee; progress to date, sick pay benefits and medical evidence.
 - Whether the absence is influenced by working conditions or arrangements, together with an examination of whether any changes can take place which might help the employee return to work. This will be particularly relevant where absences are related to disability;
 - Whether the Council can in any way assist with or influence any external contributors to the employee's absence.
 - In the event that the employee does not return to work in the next two weeks, i.e., after 6 weeks' absence, the likelihood of a referral to the Council's Occupational Health Adviser who will, in turn, advise the Council accordingly.
- 10.3 The line manager/supervisor will maintain regular contact with an employee who is absent due to long-term sickness. The frequency and form of this contact e.g., telephone calls; home visits will depend on the circumstances and the health requirements of the individual and may vary from case to case.
- 10.4 A home visit will normally be carried out before a referral to the Occupational Health Adviser is recommended. Depending on the circumstances, however, this may not always be practicable, and in some cases referral to Occupational Health may be recommended earlier or later.
- 10.5 Any action taken regarding a long-term absent employee will be with due regard to the advice from Occupational Health and Human Resources and will depend on the individual circumstances of the case.
- 10.6 Even where absence is clearly genuine, long-term absence cannot be sustained indefinitely and where there is no reasonable prospect of a return to work in the foreseeable future; if after following the procedure and all available options for the employee to return to work have been exhausted, the manager will usually need to recommend a Case Review Hearing to consider termination of employment.
- 10.7 Where decisions are made to terminate employment under this procedure the employee has the right of appeal to the Council's Appeal Panel. Further details can be found in the full policy document.

11.0 The Role of Occupational Health

- 11.1 The Council has an occupational health contract with Performance Through Health Group Limited (PTH). Appointments with the OH Nurse are normally held at Banham Court, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, B60 4JZ. Generally, referrals to Occupational Health have a dual purpose:-
- To support the employee by providing specialist medical advice with regard to protecting their health in relation to their job (rather than the more general role of a GP)

- To provide managers with information to enable decision-making with regard to what action and support is required or reasonable adjustments

11.2 Referrals to Occupational Health will normally occur when one of the following applies:

- Where an employee is indicating that they are having particular problems affecting their job, which are related to a medical condition, *referrals can be made immediately*. The employee may not necessarily have had any sickness absence and this referral will be proactive;
- Where an employee is on long-term absence, *a referral will normally take place after 4-6 weeks' continuous absence*. However, if the absences are related to major surgery, serious fracture, etc., and the expected absence exceeds 4 weeks, a referral at 4 weeks would be unlikely to provide any useful information. It may be appropriate to make the referral at a later date or if the employee does not return to work after the expected recovery period.
- Where it is indicated that an employee may not be able to resume normal work activities due to a period of illness or medical treatment, *a referral should be made*.
- Where there is a problem of persistent short-term absence and the employee or manager knows or suspects that an underlying medical problem is a contributory factor, then *a referral is likely to follow one of the meetings held under the procedure for return to work discussions or the management of short-term sickness absence*.

11.3 The question of whether a referral takes place depends on the circumstances of the individual case and will be discussed with the employee prior to the referral being made.

12.0 Acting on Medical Advice

12.1 Some of the key potential outcomes in relation to acting on medical advice can be found in the full policy document. These include:

- Rehabilitation to work within the current role – general
- Phased Return to work
- Reasonable adjustments to the post
- Redeployment to alternative work within the Council
- Permanent Ill-health

13.0 Summary of Key Responsibilities

13.1 Employees

Employees are expected to:-

- Attend work unless unfit to do so.
- Raise concerns with their manager or HR Advisor if they believe that their job is making them ill or contributing to illness.
- Report sickness absences promptly, in accordance with the sickness notification procedure.
- Ensure that the appropriate certifications are completed, in accordance with the procedure.
- Accept contact with their manager during periods of sickness absence.
- Cooperate fully with the Council when medical advice is required from the Occupational Health
- Ensure that medical advice and treatment is received as quickly as possible in order to facilitate a return to work

- In the case of long-term sickness absence, receive a visit at home or at a neutral venue from their line manager/supervisor or an alternative line manager/supervisor if it is not possible to come to work.

13.2 Line manager/supervisors

It is a line manager/supervisor's responsibility to actively manage attendance and to address absences. If absence is not addressed early then it may become a problem. The key responsibilities are summarised below:-

- **Maintain accurate records:** sickness reports for a manager to work from can only be produced if records are accurate. Managers must ensure that procedures are in place to record and report to Human Resources each occasion of absence. Ensuring that departmental sickness absence administrators are notified.
- **Maintain contact:** When an employee is absent from work due to sickness, it is important that regular contact is maintained between the manager and the employee.
- **Regular monitoring:** Monitoring sickness absence levels is an integral part of the line management process
- **Undertake return to work discussions** with employees after every incident of sickness absence
- **Communicate** to employees the existence of the sickness absence management policy and procedure
- **Encourage** a positive attitude to attendance at work
- **Seek help, guidance and support from the HR service** in interpreting sickness figures and finding solutions, which are consistent and fair while allowing for flexibility to individually tailor responses.

13.3 Heads of Service

- Provide clear leadership for the reduction of sickness absence levels and ensure this policy is implemented within the service
- Encourage the production of action plans to deal with areas of high sickness absence and support managers in achieving defined standards
- Receive regular information on sickness absence levels and understand its cost implications.

13.4 Human Resources

The Human Resources Division is responsible for:

- Reviewing the overall effectiveness of this policy and procedure
- Promoting health awareness
- Providing advice and support on all procedural aspects of sickness absence
- Managing the process of occupational health referrals
- Providing regular sickness absence reports