



LONG TERM ABSENCE POLICY

We will provide this policy on request at no cost, in large print, in Braille, on tape or in another non written format.

Long Term Absence

In all cases of sickness absence, the aim of the Group is to be as supportive as possible of employees, whilst still taking into account the need to maintain high standards of service to tenants and the wider public, and the carrying out of all activities within the required timescales.

Reporting Absence

If an employee is unable to attend work they must contact their Line Manager (or agreed alternative) at least one hour (Hostel employees at least two hours if on an early shift and four hours if on back or night shift) before the normal start time, on the first day of absence, giving full medical reasons for non-attendance, the anticipated date of return (if known) and any deadlines or work issues which might be affected by their absence.

Contact should be made in person by telephone, only if it is impossible to make contact personally a message be passed on by a relative or friend. Texting, voicemails, emailing or any other method is not acceptable.

The Line Manager should record the absence when an employee phones in to report that he/she is unable to come to work due to sickness. This includes recording when the call was made, the stated reason for the absence and how long the employee expects to be absent.

Maintaining Contact

The employee must keep their Line Manager advised if their absence continues. In the case of an expected long term absence the employee must agree a time to contact their Line Manager to provide an update.

If the employee fails to keep in touch, the Group reserves the right to initiate and maintain contact with them.

Certificates

For absences of up to seven consecutive days (including rest days) the employee will complete the Organisation's Self Certification Form with their Line Manager. This will be completed on their return to work or at the first meeting.

If the illness lasts eight or more consecutive days, the employee will need to obtain a Statement of Fitness for Work Certificate (or Fit Note) from their GP or Hospital Medical Certificate (as appropriate) and pass to the Line Manager immediately upon receipt and not retained until they return to work. This also applies to subsequent certificates that may be issued. The Statement of Fitness for Work must cover the whole period of absence.

The "Fit Note" allows the doctor to advise if the employee is 'unfit for work' or 'may be fit for some work'. GPs now have to advise on fitness for work in general rather than fitness for the employee's specific job.

Keeping in touch

After approximately four continuous weeks' absence covered by medical certificates, the Line Manager and a manager colleague will arrange to meet the employee, who may choose to be accompanied.

The purpose of these visits are to keep in regular contact with the employee about their absence, be clear about their sick pay, communicate any updates or other important workplace changes. In some circumstances it might be best just to keep in touch and give them the time they need to get better

There may be an occasion when the Line Manager may need to ask the employee for permission to contact their GP, or arrange for the employee to attend an appointment with the Group's Occupational Health Advisors, to assess :

- When a return to work will be possible
- Will there be a full recovery and is a return to the same work advisable?
- Should it be phased - may be part-time or flexible hours to begin with?
- Whether the employee is disabled - if so, reasonable adjustments must be made so they can return to work
- Whether a return to lighter, less stressful, work would be advisable.

Subsequent meetings may be arranged should the employee continue to be absent from work in order to facilitate a return to work. It is also expected that an acceptable level of contact is maintained between the Line Manager and the employee.

The Line Manager will ensure that brief notes of each meeting are produced, with a copy being given to the employee, a copy to the Line Manager, and a copy placed in the employee's personnel file.

Employees who receive allowances relating to their role that may be affected by periods of long term absence; may have their allowance payments reviewed depending on qualification criteria for such allowances taking into account whether remuneration or not.

Medical Advice

Seek medical advice, if appropriate, to determine whether there is any underlying medical cause for the employee's frequent absences.

Contact the Employee Relations team for advice and guidance to obtain consent to access medical records to authorise the release of any medical report from the doctor to the Group or to arrange an Occupational Health examination. The Group will meet all costs associated with any such examination and/or medical reports.

Return to Work

An employee should not return to work before the day advised by their GP/Hospital. If an employee feels able to return to work earlier than advised, they can only return to work if their Doctor issues a new medical certification or letter stating the new date they can return. This must be passed to the Line Manager.

If a Doctor's assessment of an employee is that they "may be fit for work taking account of the following advice" this means the employee's condition does not stop/prevent them from returning to work. The employee should contact their Line Manager immediately to discuss any additional measures that might be required following the Doctor's advice. If it is not possible for the Group to provide the support recommended by the Doctor then employee will remain on sick leave and it will be reviewed again at a later date.

The recommendations may include return to work on a phased return basis. This requires a medical recommendation (GP or occupational health) of a phased return and also self-certificate forms to be completed for the contracted hours not worked during the phased return period. The employees will be paid as per their entitlement to OSP & SSP.

Employees must give their Line Manager as much notice as possible regarding their intention to return to work and if required, any restrictions/adjustments they require in order to carry out their normal working duties.

If the employee is disabled or becomes disabled, you are legally required to make reasonable adjustments to enable the employee to continue working. If absence is related to disability, keep the record separate from other sickness absence.

The Line Manager will inform the Health & Safety Advisor if there is the need for a workplace assessment and/or there are any adjustments recommended from a medical professional.

Return to Work Interview

Employees will attend a "Return to Work Interview" after all absences with their Line Manager on the first day of their return to work.

Use the return-to-work interview forms:

- to welcome the employee back, check they are well enough to resume duties, focus on their value to your business and update them on any changes.
- if there is a 'Fit Note' or an Occupational Report with recommendations, for example it might say 'may be fit for some work' or 'return on a phased basis', you will need to discuss the new working arrangements.
- to get a better understanding of their problem and what support or adjustments they may require.
- If still required, ask the employee to complete and sign a self-certification form at the meeting.
- to complete the RTW interview form

Contact the Employee Relations team for advice and guidance at any stage of the process.