



REPORT TO: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 2 JULY 2009

HEAD OF SERVICE: HEAD OF ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
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SUBJECT: SICKNESS ABSENCE/ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT
POLICY

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with information regarding sickness absence/attendance management policies to inform their review of Ryedale District Council's sickness absence.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members are asked to:

- receive the report
- make recommendations on the current sickness absence policy

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 At the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 April 2009, it was resolved that a review of sickness procedures be undertaken as part of the Committee's work programme, and the review commence with the Sickness Policy, before moving onto the other suggested areas.

4.0 INTRODUCTION

4.1 Ryedale District Council's current sickness absence policy was revised and implemented in June 2004 (Annex A). Progress is being made to review the associated procedures, with the intention of providing both managers and staff with a greater level of detail to help them understand what is expected of them in the event of absence associated with ill health.

4.2.1 Heads of Service, Service Unit Managers and UNISON have been consulted on revisions. A meeting has been held with UNISON and comments are due shortly.

4.2.2 In preparation of this report, consideration is given to Ryedale District Council's current sickness absence policy, the recommendations of organisations such as the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), whose Codes of Conduct Employment Tribunals expect employers to comply with; the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and other local authorities, in particular, Hambleton District Council whose absence rates between 2005-2008 varied between 6.7-7.6 average days lost per person per annum.

5.0 REPORT

What is a Policy?

6.1 A policy is a plan of action, based on certain principles, decided on by a body or individual.¹

6.2 Human resource policies are systems of codified decisions, established by an organisation, to support administrative personnel functions, performance management, employee relations and resource planning.

6.3 HR policies allow an the authority to be clear with employees on:

- The nature of the authority
- What they should expect from the authority
- What the authority expects of them
- How policies and procedures work at your authority
- What is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour
- The consequences of unacceptable behaviour

6.4 The establishment of policies can help an organisation demonstrate, both internally and externally, that it meets requirements for diversity, ethics and training as well as its commitments in relation to regulation and corporate governance.²

6.5 The purpose of an absence policy is to outline the expectations of managers and employees.

What should be included in a policy?

6.6 ACAS produce a number of advisory booklets including 'Health, Work and Wellbeing' <http://www.acas.org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=854&p=0> 'Managing Attendance and Employee Turnover' <http://www.acas.org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=241&p=0> and a self help guide 'Attendance Management' <http://www.acas.org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=637&p=0>. These booklets are available to download free of charge from the ACAS website, but range from 17-44 pages and consequently have not been attached in their entirety as annexes to this report. However, pertinent sections are referred to and reproduced.

6.7 The ACAS advisory booklet Managing Attendance and Employee Turnover incorporates a sample absence management policy (seen Annex B) as does the Self Help Guide – Attendance Management (see Annex C).

¹ Chambers Dictionary

² Wikipedia

- 6.8 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) have also produced a booklet – Absence Management: How do you develop an absence strategy <http://www.cipd.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/37DB8AC7-BD6F-4BB0-9D78-2CDD7BD1D13F/0/absmanpractool2.pdf> in conjunction with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and ACAS. This also provides an example absence policy (Annex D).
- 6.9 The CIPD also have a factsheet ‘Absence Measurement and Management’ <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/hrpract/absence/absncman.htm?IsSrchRes=1> which contains guidance on what to include in a policy (see Annex E). The HSE also provide guidance (see Annex F).
- 6.10 These guidance booklets all recommend the following key elements should be contained within a sickness absence/attendance management policy:-
- A commitment to improving health, wellbeing and attendance.
 - A statement valuing the contribution employees make & impact of absence;
 - Purpose of the policy;
 - Outline of roles and responsibilities;
 - Actions that will be taken to reduce absence levels and if appropriate the target or standard that has been set;
 - A statement relating to consultation;
 - A statement relating to fair and consistent management of absence cases;
- Key principles being:-
- Right to sick pay;
 - Obligation for staff to achieve and maintain good attendance;
 - Support mechanisms, for example special needs policies, counselling services, occupational health;
 - Referral to disciplinary procedures in the event that policies/procedures are not complied with;
 - Treatment of sickness if it occurs during annual leave;
 - Right to confidentiality;
 - Actions that will be taken if targets are not achieved (or if triggers are used, what action will be taken if triggers are reached);
 - Absence reporting/recording requirements (including provision of evidence of incapacity);
 - Provision of return to work interviews;
 - Affect of disability/maternity related absences;
 - Reasonable adjustments;

What does Ryedale District Council policy include?

- 6.11 The current policy and procedural requirements provide for minimal operational management of attendance within team and departmental functions. Lack of employee and management responsibilities in detail, give way to minimum contact between employee and line manager. In essence, what this has proven, is lack of timely and efficient proactive monitoring and management of absences across the Council.

What gaps are there between Ryedale District Council policy and recommended content?

- 6.12 The main gaps essentially are communication, support and management information reporting. The proposed changes to the procedural requirements allow for greater

contact between the employee and their line manager. Managers are being provided with a more developed and user friendly toolkit within the procedural documentation of the policy, which allows for step by step guides on managing particular types of sickness absence i.e. length, reason, support, HR, etc., FAQs have been included for employees and line managers with consideration to legislative compliance and best practice across other organisations, whose sickness absence levels are more akin to acceptable national averages, as benchmarks for Ryedale to set themselves against. More information is provided within the proposed procedures to ensure all parties, understand the Council's requirements, their responsibilities and how best to manage their own absences and how management will seek to support individuals who take sickness absence.

- 6.13 The amended procedures give way to better understanding for all staff of Ryedale Council and what is expected of them. The draft procedures are transparent, consistent and fair considering equality and diversity measures expected of a public sector organisation. Employees within the amended documentation, will have in essence, a more familiarised understanding of the procedures through FAQs and transparent processes and in particular, their responsibilities. Line Managers shall be provided with better tools, including; standard letters, clearer procedures, toolkits and FAQs and step by step guides at managing individual cases, whilst always being provided access to the HR team for further guidance on specific cases. A number of issues raised historically, have been with respect to lack of contact and indeed, no contact at all. New measures within the draft proposal, include for managing AWOL (Absence without leave) so that management teams, can recognise, identify and manage effectively and proactively all manners of absence, not just sickness. The existing triggers set within the current policy, lend themselves to scrutiny and whether they are easily understood, capable of being managed satisfactorily and whether we as a Council are equipped systematically, to effectively report on where employees are reaching, let alone have reached trigger points set within the policy.

What aspects of the procedure are key to effective absence/attendance management?

- 6.14 More aligned procedures for staff and management to follow and understand are vital for a successful procedure. Better toolkits, standard letters, procedures to deal with capability, absence without authorisation, user friendly return to work interviews, informal procedures, how to move to formal procedures, when all other mechanisms have failed etc. are all key to a successful attendance management system

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The legal implications are that we must ensure our procedures always follow not only best practice, but legislative guidelines. The draft amendments, take consideration of the Equality Act, all forms of Discrimination Acts, Code of Practice (amendment April 2009) for disciplinary matters and our responsibilities to provide for care and attention to individual needs whilst supporting the commercial focus of the organisation.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The issues with respect to ongoing problematic management restrictions lend themselves to allowing sickness absence levels to continue to rise, as proven historically. Line managers need mechanisms in place to effectively and fairly manage individual cases, without fear of retribution from senior managers, individual claims or trade union conflict. Individuals also need to be clear on how the Council will support every individual case, fairly, confidentially and with respect, but whilst maintaining a clear purpose of what their responsibilities are and what the

consequences may be, if individuals do not follow the requirements of the procedures. More often, we have found that our geographic neighbours and other local government and public sector organisations are examining every opportunity to reduce sickness absence across their organisation. It is, one of the highest burdens on the finances of our Council at this time. We need to remain and improve our effectiveness, competitiveness, whilst maintaining our reputation as being a fair, reputable District Council and somewhere people from our community are proud to work.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Annex A:- Ryedale District Council current sickness absence policy
- Annex B:- ACAS advisory booklet Managing Attendance and Employee Turnover
- Annex C:- ACAS advisory booklet – Self Help Guide
- Annex D:- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) - Absence Management: How do you develop an absence strategy
- Annex E:- CIPD - Absence Measurement and Management
- Annex F:- HSE guidance

OFFICER CONTACT:

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