



Dunbritton Housing Association Limited

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Responsible Officer	Corporate Services Manager
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Dunbritton Housing Association is committed to managing attendance and absence at work to ensure that we:
- Support staff with health concerns
 - Deliver reliable and cost-effective services to customers
 - Continuously improve the Association's performance.
- 1.2 We recognise that staff may on occasion be necessarily absent from work and this policy is designed to ensure that a consistent and fair approach in managing attendance and absence at work is adopted throughout the Association.

2. Principles

- 2.1.1 The Association recognises its responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of its employees. We strive therefore to provide employees with a safe working environment, treat all employees consistently and fairly. We encourage the highest standards of attendance and aim to identify, reduce and prevent any causes of workplace ill health.
- 2.1.2 This policy aims to set out standards, provide outline procedural guidelines and ensure that managers receive appropriate training for managing attendance and absence at work. It is the responsibility of managers to monitor and encourage maximum attendance from all employees and ensure all employees are made aware of the terms of this policy.
- 2.1.3 All employees will be treated in a fair and consistent manner and will be encouraged to seek help with any health issues they are experiencing which are resulting in non-attendance at work. Employees seeking assistance with health concerns should speak to their line manager in the first instance, or if they prefer, to the Corporate Services Manager.
- 2.2 When an employee is off sick managers will:
- Adopt a flexible approach to encouraging and enabling them to return to work
 - Offer assistance and deal immediately with any identified work-related cause of absence Maintain reasonable contact during the course of the absence
 - Consider and discuss all reasonable adjustments that may enable the employee to return to work

Absence Reporting Procedures

- 2.1 Employees reporting absence are required to phone the office as soon as practicable and within 2 hours of the normal starting time. Employees must always speak to their line manager or another manager if he/she is not available. Employees must give the reason for the absence, expected duration of the absence, expected date of return, and confirm their contact details.

2.2 The onus lies with the employee to keep their manager informed of the reasons.

and progress of all absences. During the first week of absence, the employee should make daily contact with their line manager unless exceptional circumstances prevent the employee from doing so. Thereafter, there should be at least weekly contact between the employee and their line manager. Where employees fail to keep in touch as outlined above, Dunbritton Housing Association reserves the right to initiate and maintain contact with the employee.

2.3 Self-Certification will be required for absence of up to 7 days, and thereafter Doctor's Certificates – Statement of fitness for work or "Fit note" will be needed.

2.4 Where the employee does not follow reporting, certification, or agreed keeping-in- touch arrangements, Dunbritton Housing Association may withhold Sickness Benefit payments. Refusal to comply with these requirements may also lead to disciplinary action being considered. Similarly any falsification or attempt to mislead on the employee's part will lead to disciplinary action. In serious and/or repeated cases, dismissal may result.

3. Absence Monitoring

3.1 A fundamental feature of good attendance and absence management is the accurate and timely recording of all absences. This is essential both in terms of the requirements of the Statutory Sick Pay arrangement and the Association Sickness Benefit scheme. Good information also allows patterns to be identified and can be an early indication of underlying problems. The sooner these problems are identified and acted upon – the more likely a successful conclusion for employee and employer alike can be achieved.

3.2 Keeping good quality, up to date records also means that:

- Concise data is available for each employee during the year
- Problems are identified at an early stage
- Employees are treated fairly and consistently
- Trends and underlying causes can be more easily identified
- Relevant Health & Safety issues can be identified
- Attendance rates may be improved
- Managers are better able to explain decisions where continued poor attendance results in counselling and/or disciplinary action
- Board are kept aware of attendance levels

3.3 Managers must notify the Corporate Services Department by e-mail to record any absence, they will update the employee's attendance record for the purposes of statistical recording.

4.4 Managers will receive absence information for their staff on a regular basis to assist in the overall absence and attendance management.

3.4 On every occasion when an employee returns to work after an absence of any kind, their Manager will meet the employee to discuss the reasons for

the absence and offer help where appropriate before countersigning the Return to Work Interview Form. This document should be retained in the employee's personnel file and a copy sent to the Corporate Services Assistant.

4. Management / Employee Options

4.1 At Return to Work discussions or during Attendance Review Meetings the Manager will attempt to establish reasons for the absences, identify underlying trends and seek to offer any assistance to the employee with a view to improving their attendance record. In circumstances where an employee has been referred to a support agency a further meeting should be arranged as soon as the relevant report has been received.

4.2 In normal circumstances in the case of long-term absences, medical advice should always be sought from the employee's GP and/or the Occupational Health Service. The 'Fit Note' introduced in April 2010 allows for GPs to sign an employee as either "unfit to work" or "may be fit to work". Where the GP has signed the employee as "may be fit for work" the line manager should discuss this with the employee and consider any reasonable adjustments to the workplace/workload that may enable the employee to return to work. Whilst the GP comments/recommendations are not binding on employers we will, where possible, make the suggested adjustments. Where this is simply not possible/viable then the employee will remain on sick leave.

4.3 In the case of short-term intermittent absence, whilst it is not always necessary to obtain a medical report it may be advisable to do so in some circumstances, if only to establish that there is no underlying health problem. The purposes of obtaining a medical report will be to establish the nature of the health issue and its likely duration, whether the employee is likely to make a full recovery and if not, what work he or she is capable of and when and what steps management can take to facilitate a return to work. This information is necessary to enable the manager to make informed decisions on improving the employee's attendance within the terms of this policy. In normal circumstances the content of any medical report should be discussed with the employee as part of the monitoring process.

4.4 Where all efforts to improve attendance fail, it will be necessary for the employer to demonstrate that the procedures employed were fair. The circumstances of each case will have to be examined in their own right, but the following outline tests, as a minimum, should be satisfied:

- That at all stages in the procedure the employee has been dealt with in a fair and consistent manner.
- That medical advice in relation to the employee's ability to continue in employment has been received and that this has been discussed with the employee and that his/her views have been considered.
- That all appropriate stages in the Disciplinary Procedure have been followed and that formal warnings are clear and explicit and that the opportunity for improvement has been afforded throughout.
- That the scope of employment provisions contained in the Equalities Act 2010 has been considered in relation to the employee's circumstances.
- Those alternatives to dismissal have to be considered. Any

alternative to dismissal should be discussed and agreed with the employee concerned.

5. Short Term Absences

- 5.1 A short-term absence can be defined as any single period of absence, including industrial injury, to a maximum of 19 working days.
- 5.2 Dunbritton Housing Association will aim to secure better attendance by way of support and encouragement to the employee concerned in the first instance. This will involve maintaining good records, ensuring return to work interviews, and helping investigate and address any identified underlying causes of absence.
- 5.3 Where short term intermittent absences are identified, a distinction should be made between absences with an identifiable underlying health condition and short-term intermittent absences for a variety of reasons which have no identifiable underlying health condition.
- 5.4 Short term intermittent absences where there is no identifiable underlying health problem, should be treated as a performance issue. There is a role for discipline to encourage an improvement. However, such procedures should only be implemented after the opportunity to improve has been explored through the formal Attendance Review Meeting process.
- 5.5 Sickness/absence interviews will be arranged with employees whose absence record identifies three occasions of short-term sickness absence within a rolling six-month period or where there has been an authorised absence.
- 5.6 This formal meeting shall be held by their line manager and the Corporate Services Manager.
- 5.7 Prior to any meeting, the Corporate Services Manager shall ensure that consideration has been made with regards to disability and equalities legislation. Where it is identified that the issue is one of incapability, this should be dealt with under clause 9 below.
- 5.8 The staff member shall be allowed to bring a representative, either a colleague or a Trade Union representative.
- 5.9 This meeting shall consider:
- The reason for and the impact of the absences,
 - Any patterns to the absences.
 - The likelihood of further absences.
 - Whether medical advice was obtained and whether further support is required.
 - Any measures which may improve attendance

- Actions and review periods to be agreed and set.

6.10 The following guidelines shall be considered where the absence management is not improved upon. Discretion shall be exercised considering the unique nature of each absence. At each absence interview, the staff member shall be advised of the next step in the absence procedure and the potential outcome.

Stage	Trigger	Potential Outcome
	All absences	Return to work will be carried out
1	3 periods of absence within a six month period	Informal Action
2	A further 3 periods of absence within a 6 month period from when the last action was taken	Written Warning
3	A further 3 periods of absence within a 6 month period from when the last action was taken	Final Written Warning
4	A further 2 periods of absence after the last action was taken.	Dismissal

6. Long Term Absences

- 6.1 Long term absence is defined as any single period of absence amounting to 20 or more working days (or 4 weeks).
- 6.2 The Association will adopt a sympathetic and understanding approach to any employee with a long-term and/or chronic health problem. Staff who find themselves in such a position should be confident that their manager will react in a supportive fashion when approached.
- 6.3 After a period of four weeks absence, the manager will contact the employee to arrange a meeting, which can be held in either the workplace, at the employee's home or at some other mutually agreed location. The main purpose of this meeting is to discuss the absence, the employee's general health and/or any underlying problems they may have. Where possible the Association will offer assistance in the form of professional counselling. If the likely duration of the employee's absence is still unclear, the employee's permission to contact their GP will be sought.
- 6.4 The following points will always be considered in relation to long term absence:
- The nature of the illness
 - Any contributing factors
 - The nature of the employee's duties in relation to his/her health problems
 - Any comments or suggestions made by the GP on the "Fit note"
 - The Association's business needs and the impact that the employee's absence is having upon these
 - The employee's length of service
 - The entitlement to Sickness Benefit
- 6.5 The Manager will continue to monitor the effects of long term absences on their Service and recommend appropriate action to cover and protect service delivery.
- 6.6 Where a member of staff is on sick leave for a period of 3 months or more, annual leave entitlement may be abated by two days per month e.g. if an employee is off sick for 4 months, their annual leave entitlement is reduced by 8 days, 6 months by 12 days etc. It will be necessary, however, to ensure that all employees still receive the minimum entitlement of 28 leave days/public holidays as set out by the Working Time Regulations. In such cases where we are considering the abatement of leave, this will be discussed with the relevant Trade Union prior to being implemented.
- 6.7 Throughout the duration of the employee's absence it will be expected that he/she will keep in touch at least once per week and keep the line manager advised of progress. Managers will also seek to obtain medical reports and/or 2nd opinions at appropriate junctures during the absence and will arrange to discuss these with employees when received. Where the employee disagrees with the nature of any medical reports, he/she will be free to seek and offer alternative medical evidence. Where the prognosis is such that a prolonged absence is likely then the case must be regarded as one of capability. Full discussions with the employee will take place and he/she will be afforded the opportunity to express views on such a course

of action.

- 6.8 Having established and maintained contact with the employee, the manager will discuss options to support an early return. These will include

Redeployment, phased return / limiting the range of activities undertaken for a set period. Where a phased return to work is agreed the Association will pay the employee for the hours/days worked and will continue to apply the occupational sick pay scheme and the statutory sick pay scheme as per the individual employee's eligibility for the hours/days they remain off sick.

- 6.9 In cases where employees do leave the Association due to ill health, managers will make every effort to help secure appropriate access to pension scheme and/or other relevant financial benefit that may be available.
- 6.10 In some instances, Managers will have to deal with employees who during the course of their absence have exhausted their sickness allowance. Prior to the expiry of sickness allowance, the manager must discuss with the employee, usually through the Formal Attendance Interview whether an application for a period of unpaid leave of absence is appropriate / available. The employee must request unpaid leave of absence along with a letter of support from their GP which must indicate a likely return to work date.
- 6.11 Unpaid leave of absence is normally granted for a period up to 13 weeks (the actual period can alter in accordance with individual circumstances). The unpaid leave will be reviewed prior to the expiry of the period granted and if appropriate a further application for unpaid leave of absence can be made.

8. Health Retirement

- 8.1 As part of the Formal Attendance Interview with employees, consideration should be given to the option of ill health retirement. This is appropriate where:
- The employee is considered permanently unfit due to their medical condition
 - Every other option for return to work has been considered, and
 - The employee is a member of the Pension Scheme.

If ill health retirement is to be pursued the employee should submit a letter requesting to be considered for retirement on the grounds of ill health. This letter should be supported by a letter from the employee's G.P.

Once the request has been received arrangements will be made to progress the application, which may include a medical examination.

- 8.2 If ill health retirement is agreed by the Occupational Health Service the necessary steps will be taken to agree the retirement date etc. The manager will be kept advised at each stage of the process.

9. Incapability

- 9.1 As part of the ongoing dialogue between the manager and employee, Review Meetings will explore options of a phased return, or a return to alternative duties, or where possible a redeployed post. In addition, the manager may, with the employee, also consider the options of ill health retirement and termination on the grounds of incapability.

Termination on the grounds of incapability may be considered where:

- The employee is not a member of the pension scheme
- An application for ill health retirement has not been approved, and
- All other options have been explored but have not been successful and termination on the grounds of incapability will be the only course of action available.

In such circumstances there will always be a right of appeal against any decision to dismiss an employee on the grounds of incapability. Any appeal must be made in writing to the Chief Executive Officer within 4 days of receipt of written confirmation of the decision.

9.2 If termination is a possible course of action the manager must have discussed this option with the employee at an earlier stage and confirmed this to the employee in the letter(s) issued after the Formal Attendance Interview.

9.3 Where an employee indicates that a return to work is possible but requires more time to complete their recovery, the manager must advise the employee regarding the opportunity for unpaid leave of absence, if appropriate. This option should be considered prior to a decision being made to terminate employment on the grounds of incapability.

10. Dishonest Absence

10.1 If a staff member is found to have acted dishonestly with regards to an absence from work, this may be considered as gross misconduct and may be addressed as such through our disciplinary procedure.

11. Good Attendance Reward

11.1 Dunbritton Housing Association will apply a fair and consistent approach in managing attendance. All employees, depending on length of service or hours of work, can benefit from the Association's Sickness Benefit Scheme. The Association also recognises that positive measures should be put in place for those employees with good attendance. Employees who have had no absences at all in a 12 month period, will be rewarded with 1 additional days off (The Full Attendance Award).

N.B. Account will be taken of exceptional diagnosed conditions that require time off to ensure that employees who find themselves in this position are not discriminated against.

11.2 The EVH Terms & Conditions of Employment will be amended to take account of this local variation.

12. Equality & Diversity

12.1 As a service provider and employer we recognise the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, oppose any form of discrimination, and will treat all customers, internal and external, with dignity and respect. We recognise diversity and will ensure that all of our actions ensure accessibility and reduce barriers to employment and the services we provide.