

Management of Sickness Absence

Policy Checklist

Name of Policy:	Policy on the Management of Sickness Absence
Purpose of Policy:	<p>This policy describes the Trust's approach to managing sickness absence. Its purpose is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To notify staff of their obligations when absent from work due to illness and the supports available to them when they are ill. To identify the key definitions, triggers and processes used to manage sickness absence within the Trust. To set out the rules regarding sickness absence to ensure staff are aware of the consequences to their employment of unacceptable and unsustainable attendance levels and patterns.
Directorate responsible for Policy	Human Resources and Organisational Development
Name & Title of Author:	Siobhan Hynds, Employee Relations Manager Vivienne Toal, Head of Employee Engagement and Relations
Does this meet criteria of a Policy?	Yes
Trade Union consultation?	Yes
Equality Screened by:	Siobhan Hynds, Employee Relations Manager
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Policy Approved/Rejected/Amended	Approved
Policy Implementation Plan included?	Yes
Any other comments:	
Date presented to SMT	3 rd July 2013
Director Responsible	Mr Kieran Donaghy, Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
SMT Approved/Rejected/Amended	Approved
SMT Comments	
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POLICY DOCUMENT – VERSION CONTROL SHEET	
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Originator	Name of Author: Siobhan Hynds and Vivienne Toal Title: Employee Relations Manager & Head of Employee Engagement and Relations.
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Circulation:

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- Assistant Directors
- Heads of Service for onward distribution to line managers
- Global email
- E-brief / Up2date
- Intranet/Internet



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Author	Siobhan Hynds, Employee Relations Manager Vivienne Toal, Head of Employee Engagement and Relations
Directorate responsible	Human Resources & Organisational Development
Date	July 2013
Review date	July 2014

POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

1.0 INTRODUCTION TO POLICY

- 1.1 The Southern Health and Social Care Trust, therein after referred to as ‘the Trust’, is committed to providing an effective and high quality service to patients and clients and recognises its duty to manage members of staff delivering these services in a caring and constructive manner.
- 1.2 The Trust continually faces challenging demands to deliver an efficient and effective service, therefore, all available resources must be utilised to their optimum effect. Sickness absence can have a significant impact on the availability of the resources required to maintain appropriate levels of service delivery. All staff within the Trust must play their part in ensuring that the needs of patients and clients are met.
- 1.3 This policy, therefore, develops a context for ensuring the optimum level of services is maintained whilst ensuring that staff who are absent from work as a result of sickness are managed in a consistent, fair and sensitive manner.

2.0 PURPOSE AND AIMS

2.1 The Policy aims to:

- promote attendance and encourage a culture within the Trust where staff attend work on a regular and consistent basis.
- support staff when they are sick and ensure that the health and well-being of all staff is a key focus when managing sickness absence.
- ensure that unsatisfactory or unsustainable attendance is challenged and addressed appropriately.
- provide a clear framework for the effective and consistent management of sickness absence within the Trust and to ensure all staff are managed sensitively during times of illness.
- ensure that the Trust adopts an approach of early intervention when managing all sickness absence.
- set out the rules regarding sickness absence to ensure staff are aware of the range of management actions that can be taken and potential consequences to their employment.
- ensure that accurate and timely information will be used to assist in identifying appropriate action.
- Ensure compliance with Disability Discrimination legislation.
- identify how all absences will be monitored and the absence triggers for management action.

- set out the distinction between unsatisfactory attendance and unsustainable absence/attendance and how each will be managed.

3.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 3.1 The Trust is committed to supporting staff when they are sick and ensuring that the health and well-being of all staff is a key focus when managing sickness absence.
- 3.2 Staff employed by the Trust are a major resource in meeting the needs of patients and clients and therefore have a responsibility to ensure that they attend work, to maintain the service to patients and clients, on a regular and consistent basis.
- 3.3 Sickness absence can have a considerable detrimental effect on the Trust services in terms of disruption to departments / teams, delivery of services to patients / clients and financial costs in terms of overtime and employment of temporary staff.
- 3.4 The Trust must monitor and manage sickness absence to also ensure that the requirements of internal audit are satisfied, that all necessary certification is received in a timely manner and to assess from an early stage those staff who are absent due to an unacceptable level of absence or those who are absent and have an unsustainable level of absence, to ensure appropriate case management.
- 3.5 The Trust also has a responsibility to ensure that sickness absence is not used in respect of absences arising from sick dependents or domestic crisis, in these instances staff should refer to the provisions available under the Trust's Work Life Balance Policy.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 For the purposes of this procedure, the following definitions are made:

- 4.1.1 Short Term Absence
any period of absence of less than 4 calendar weeks
- 4.1.2 Long Term Absence
any period of absence lasting 4 calendar weeks or more

4.2 Triggers

Triggers are the levels above which a review of an individual's absence record will be undertaken and which may lead to action being taken. These are:

- A. Three episodes of sickness absence of any length in any rolling twelve month period
- OR
- B. Two episodes of sickness totalling more than 2 working weeks in any rolling twelve month period

OR

- C. Any recognisable pattern of absence

4.3 Monitoring Period

The Trust will continuously monitor all absences. However for the purposes of the triggers A and B the monitoring period will be a 12 month rolling period. The monitoring period for C can be within a 12 month period or a longer period if a recognisable pattern becomes apparent.

4.4 Unsatisfactory Attendance

Unsatisfactory attendance is defined as high levels of short term absence that results in an unreliable pattern of short term absence. This type of absence incurs costs in terms of contractual sick pay, increased overtime payments, lower standards of service, disrupted workflow and lower morale. Long term absences that breach the triggers are not included in this definition.

4.5 Unsustainable Attendance

The Trust recognises that during the course of employment some staff may experience debilitating health conditions that will impact on their ability to attend work and on the activities that can be undertaken whilst at work. The Trust is committed to supporting staff wherever possible, however the extent of the assistance that can be provided will be determined primarily by the ability of the Trust to deliver an effective and efficient service.

Unsustainable attendance is:

(i) Long term absence where there is no reasonable prospect that an individual will be well enough to return to work and where no reasonable adjustments can be made to assist the individual in returning to work;

or

(ii) A series of recurring shorter term absences attributable to a specific condition and where no reasonable adjustments can be made to assist the individual to provide regular and effective attendance at work.

4.6 Screening of Unacceptable or Unsustainable Attendance

Attendance Management Panels will screen incidents of unacceptable or unsustainable attendance. The purpose is to ensure that in all instances where triggers are reached and unacceptable or unsustainable patterns of absence are identified and appropriate management action is implemented.

Cases sent to an attendance management panel will be prioritised on a monthly basis to take account of critical / essential service needs.

4.7 Attendance Management Panel

Attendance Management Panels will be responsible for undertaking screening of sickness absence in the monitoring period where triggers are reached. The panels will have the authority to impose sanctions where necessary. The Attendance Management Panels will also assess case reviews to consider appropriate management action.

5.0 SCOPE

5.1 This policy applies to ALL employees

6.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 Trust Board

The role of the Trust Board is to take corporate responsibility for ensuring the organisation is able to deliver on the implementation of this policy.

6.2 Chief Executive

The Chief Executive has responsibility for ensuring that there is an appropriate structure for the monitoring and review of arrangements to manage sickness absence.

The Chief Executive has appointed the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development as Lead Director with responsibility for establishing and monitoring the implementation of the Management of Sickness Absence Policy.

6.3 Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development

The Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development will provide strategic leadership, direction and oversight of this policy and its implementation.

6.4 Managers

The Chief Executive requires all managers within the Trust to establish and monitor the implementation of this Policy within their area of responsibility.

It is the responsibility of all managers to monitor and review all episodes of sickness absence of their staff and to take appropriate action in line with the Management of Sickness Absence Procedure.

6.5 Employees

Employees are required to familiarise themselves with this policy and comply with its provisions.

Employees are expected to attend for work regularly and consistently. Where absences occur, employees are expected to maintain regular contact with their line manager, provide regular updates about their progress and ensure an expeditious return to work.

6.6 Trade Union Side Representatives

Trade Union Side representatives have a responsibility to support and advise their members. They will support their members and encourage staff members to maintain a satisfactory level of attendance.

6.7 Occupational Health

The Occupational Health Department is responsible for supporting staff members who are ill and where possible referring staff to specialist services to assist with recovery from illness and an early return to work.

The Occupational Health Department will undertake assessments of staff who are absent from work due to illness and provide specialist advice and guidance to managers on their health status. Occupational Health will provide advice, guidance and recommendations to inform appropriate individual case management.

6.8 Human Resources

The Human Resources Department is responsible for providing advice and guidance to managers in dealing with instances of sickness absence. The Human Resources Department will take a lead role working in conjunction with the Occupational Health service and senior managers to manage each case individually.

The Human Resources Department will ensure appropriate management action is implemented in all cases through attendance management reviews and attendance management panels.

7.0 RELEVANT POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND GUIDANCE

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Management of Sickness Absence Procedure
- Staff Health & Wellbeing Policy
- Managing Stress in the Workplace Policy
- Managing Stress in the Workplace – A Toolkit for Managers and Employees
- Reasonable Adjustment Guidelines for Managers
- Policy and Procedure on Managing Substance Misuse at Work
- Work Life Balance Policy
- Disciplinary Procedure

8.0 MONITORING AND REVIEWING THE POLICY

It will be the responsibility of the Head of Employee Engagement and Relations to ensure the Policy is implemented and incidents of sickness absence properly managed under the Policy.

9.0 EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

This policy has been screened for equality implications as required by Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Using the Equality Commissions screening criteria, no significant equality implications have been identified. The policy is therefore not subject to equality impact assessment.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

This document can be made available on request in alternative formats, e.g. plain English, Braille, disc, audiocassette and in other languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English.

11.0 SOURCES OF ADVICE AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Further advice regarding this Policy and associated Procedure can be sought from the Employee Engagement and Relations Department and the Occupational Health Department.