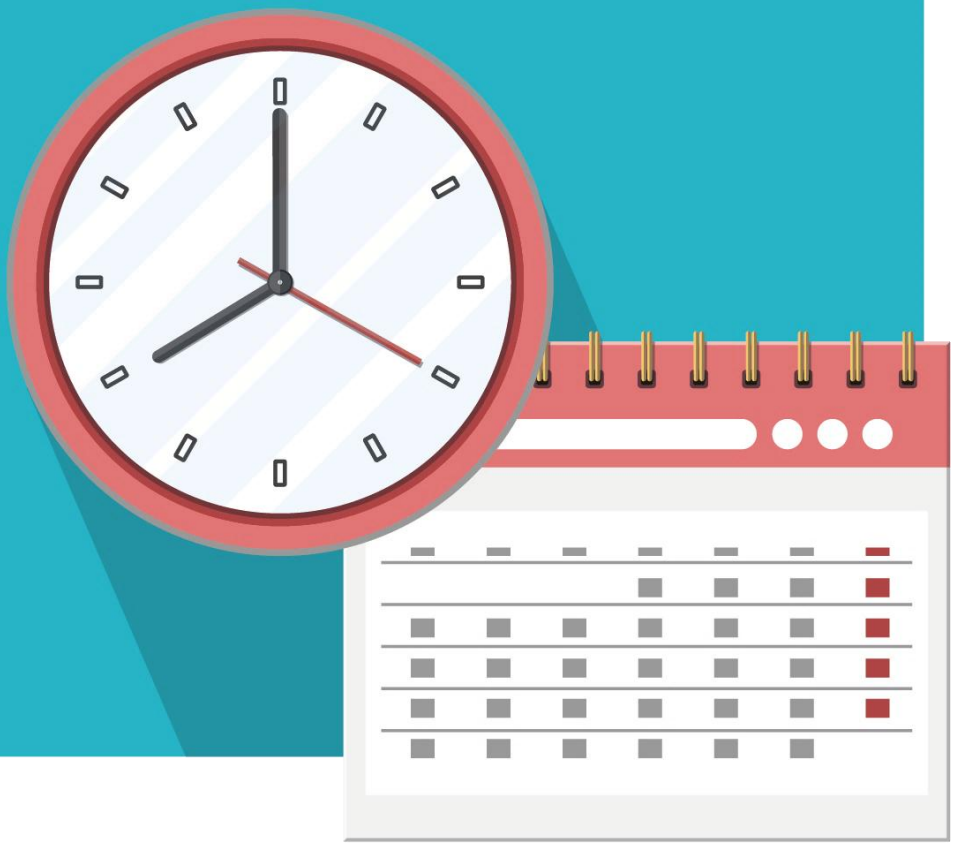
Sickness Absence Policy

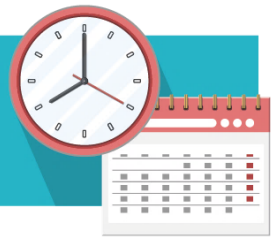
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils



South Oxfordshire District Council

Listening Learning Leading

Vale of White Horse District Council



Change Record

Change Record	
Policy Title	Sickness Absence Policy
Version Number	5
Owner(s)	People and Culture Team
Author(s)	People and Culture Team
Change details	Added guidelines from the Employment Rights Act (2026)
Approved by	People and Culture Team, UNISON & SMT
Approved Date	Oct 2026
Effective date	1 November 2026
Renewal date	31 October 2029

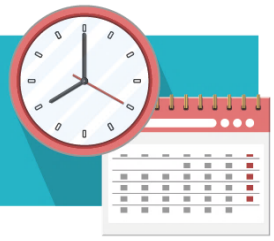
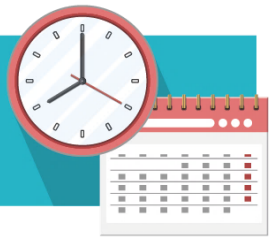


Table of Contents

Change Record 1
1 Vision and Values 3
2 Introduction 4
2.1 Purpose 4
2.2 Scope 4
2.3 Contractual Status 4
2.4 Alternative formats 5
3 Policy 6
3.1 Aim of the Policy 6
3.2 Definitions 6
4 Procedure 10
4.1 Notification, Contact and Recording of Absence 10
4.2 Returning to Work following short term absence 12
4.3 Trigger Points 12
4.4 The Bradford Factor 13
4.5 Use of the Disciplinary Policy due to absence 14
4.6 Long Term Absence 14
4.7 Returning to work after long term absence 16
4.8 Use of the Capability Policy due to absence 18
4.9 Disciplinary action whilst signed off sick 19
4.10 Sick Pay 19
4.11 Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) Eligibility 20



1 Vision and Values

Our Vision

We are customer focused and approachable. We are honest and open and are committed to providing high-quality cost-effective public services.

Our Values



Working Together

We are a committed professional team, who embrace change and help one another improve



People and Planet

We care about each other and the environment we share



Respect

We act with integrity, and champion diversity and inclusivity



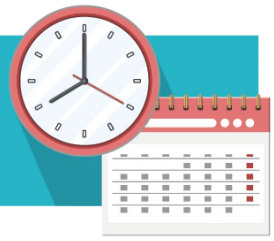
Accountability

We take ownership, do what we say, strive for clarity and welcome feedback



Approachability

We are open, honest and accessible



2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose

This document details the councils' Sickness Absence Policy & Procedure. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all employees who are absent from work due to sickness or ill health (including mental health and disability related absences) are provided with:

- clear guidance on the councils' absence reporting and management processes
- an understanding of their rights and responsibilities in relation to their absence from work
- appropriate support to enable a return to work (where possible).

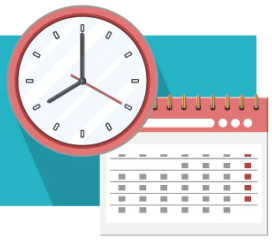
2.2 Scope

This Policy and Procedure applies to any permanent or temporary employee of the councils, excluding casual employees and contractors/agency workers, who are the employees of third parties.

This document supersedes any previously existing or alternative policies, agreements or arrangements relating to the Sickness Absence Policy at the councils. It outlines the requirements in accordance with the Employment Rights Act (2026).

2.3 Contractual Status

This policy is non-contractual. The councils are entitled to introduce minor and non-fundamental changes to this policy by notifying you of these changes in writing. The councils will consult all employees on any major changes to the policy.

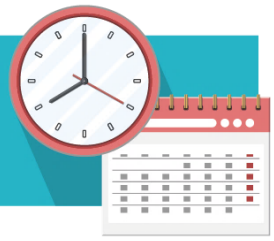


Relevant legislation

- Employment Rights Act (2025)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679 EU)
- The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974

2.4 Alternative formats

Please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Equalities Team if you would like this policy in an alternative format, via: equalties@southandvale.gov.uk.



3 Policy

3.1 Aim of the Policy

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils (the Councils) are committed to supporting, improving, and maintaining the health and wellbeing of all employees. The councils are equally committed to providing high standards of attendance, quality, and cost-effective service to their customers.

However, the councils recognise that employees may be absent from work due to sickness or ill health at some point during their employment and it is therefore important that appropriate management processes are in place to support employees during such periods.

All employee absences will be recorded, monitored, and managed in a fair, consistent, sensitive, and non-discriminatory manner.
Procedures for recording and monitoring absence are detailed in this policy along with the responsibilities of both managers and employees in managing sickness absence. In addition, this policy sets out actions in cases where sickness becomes long-term. Where it is clear at the outset that it will be long-term, earlier action will be taken as appropriate with a view to ensuring a speedy return to work.

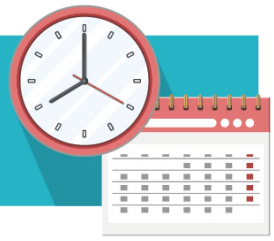
3.2 Definitions

Short-term Absence

The councils define short-term absence as any absence of 28 calendar days or less.

Long-term Absence

The councils define long-term absence as any absence over 28 calendar days in one occurrence. Repeated or irregular absences within a short period of time will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.



Self-Certification

Self-Certification is an absence from work and covers the first 7 calendar days (including weekends) of the period of absence (e.g. one working week).

Statement of Fitness to Work certificate ("Fit Note")

A Statement of Fitness to Work certificate, also referred to as a "Fit Note," is issued by a doctor should an employee's absence exceed 7 calendar days (including weekends) regardless of whether you work part time or full time. The certificate confirms the details of the sickness and provides advice on the individual's fitness for work.

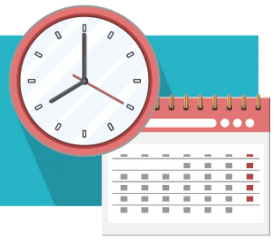
The employee is responsible for obtaining and submitting Fit Notes to cover the whole period of the absence in a timely manner. Failure to do so may result in the payment of eligible occupational sick pay being stopped.

GPs should not charge employees for a fit note if they are off sick from work for more than 7 days, but should one be required to support a work absence or work adjustment under 7 days, and a charge applies this will be covered through expenses. Please contact HR before claiming the expense so it is claimed against the correct pay element.

Ill-Health and Holiday

Sickness on holiday will be recorded as holiday (with time off deducted from annual leave entitlement). However, in exceptional circumstances such as hospitalisation or if the illness has prevented a holiday from being taken, the absence may be recorded as sickness with holiday days "lost" being given back to the employee, provided it is certified by a doctor. Please note that each case will be reviewed individually and reverting holiday to sickness will be at the discretion of the Service Director in conjunction with HR.

If an employee is unable to take some annual leave in their calendar year due to a period of sustained absence from work, the councils will consider holiday entitlement to be carried forward into the following annual leave year in addition to the 5 days that staff are allowed



to carry forward as detailed in the Annual Leave Policy. This will be based upon the holiday entitlement accrued during that period of absence.

Routine Medical Appointments

Doctors, dental, hospital outpatient, optician or other medical appointment should be arranged outside of your usual working hours where possible. If they are arranged during work time, the time off to attend them should be taken in your own time as annualised hours (where applicable) and not recorded as sickness absence. See Additional Leave Policy for more information.

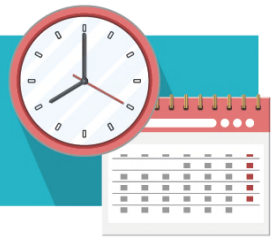
Medical Appointments for serious illness or ongoing treatment

Are those appointments required due to a long-term illness and/or disability which an employee is required to attend to receive the appropriate treatment.

It is noted that where an employee has a serious illness or disability there may be an increased number of medical appointments to undergo treatment and the councils want to support staff through this challenging time. If employees are not signed off sick during this treatment period and have the need for ongoing medical treatment, they should liaise with their line manager and strategic HR at the earliest opportunity to agree what adjustments can be agreed to support them at a challenging time. Each request will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Medical Referral (Occupational Health & GP Report)

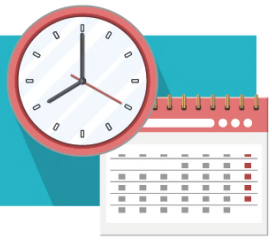
As part of managing employee absence, the councils may deem it necessary to obtain medical guidance in relation to an employee's medical condition and prognosis (including a timescale and basis for a return to work, where possible). This medical guidance may be in the form of a medical report from the employee's doctor, also known as GP reports, or through the completion of an assessment by an external occupational health provider.



Occupational Health and GP reports provide the councils with a professional opinion, enabling the councils to better understand how they can support the employee in either returning to work and/or continue supporting during work.

Employees are required to provide their written consent to any request for such medical guidance. Where an employee refuses to cooperate with a request, the councils reserve the right to withhold occupational sick pay and apply statutory sick pay. Please note that each case will be reviewed individually and the payment of occupational sick pay will be at the discretion of the Director of Corporate Services (or delegated authority) in conjunction with HR.

Employees will be fully supported and advised on what the process entails before engaging.



4 Procedure

4.1 Notification, Contact and Recording of Absence

Notification

Employees must ensure they have notified their Line Manager by telephone (call, voicemail, and/or text message) as soon as possible or by 09:30am on the first day of sickness absence, providing the reason for absence and the likely date of return. Other methods of communication, such as MS Teams messages or emails are only an acceptable method of notifying a period of absence in the event that an employee is unable to contact their manager.

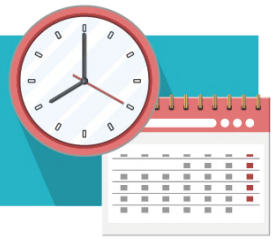
The Line Manager must be advised of the following:

- Reason(s) for the absence
- Potential duration of the absence
- Any factors which may be impacted due to the absence e.g. scheduled meetings or work
- Out of office is set (or ask the manager to sort this)

In exceptional circumstances, for example where the employee has been hospitalised, someone on behalf of the employee, such as a spouse/partner or close relative, may contact the employee's manager to notify the absence from work.

If the manager is unavailable, the employee (or person notifying of the absence) should leave a message and expect a return call from their manager to discuss their absence from work in further detail.

If the manager is on holiday or absent from work, the employee (or person notifying of the absence) should contact an appropriate alternative i.e. the next manager above or the manager identified as covering for the line manager in their absence. The notification should follow the same process as above. Should employees fail to notify the councils of their absence, the councils reserve the right to record this as unpaid leave.



Contact during absence

It is important that employees maintain regular contact with their manager throughout the period of absence. The frequency of this can be agreed between the Line Manager and employee. The councils do expect employees to update the councils if their circumstances change or are unable to return on the date initially provided.

If an employee is unable to return to work when indicated, they should repeat the above notification process and provide an update on the condition and potential timeframe for returning to work.

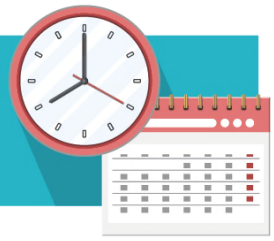
If an employee is absent due to sickness for more than 7 consecutive calendar days (including weekends/days not normally worked) they must send a fit note from their GP/medical advisor directly to the line manager copying in the HR team via email: hr@southandvale.gov.uk. The employee should also notify their manager each time a new medical certificate is issued. The employee and manager will then establish a pattern of contact, for example, a weekly telephone call. Employees are responsible for ensuring all medical certificates run consecutively to ensure that there are no days during the period of absence when there is no certification.

Please refer to 3.3 for further details as to how absence periods may be linked and absence trigger points.

Recording Absence

As soon as the manager is aware of the employee's absence, they should aim to record the absence within 24 hours on MyView, and also email hr@southandvale.gov.uk where an employee is going to be off for more than 7 calendar days.

All absences will need to be recorded. This includes sicknesses relating to maternity, disability or industrial injury, or emotional distress due to severe mental health conditions or bereavement to ensure records are accurately up to date, and the correct support is provided to the employee. Absence periods cannot overlap so ensure the correct dates are



entered. If a period of absence spans a period of leave already booked (e.g. annual leave) this will need to be deleted in order to enter the sickness period. See section 3.3 below regarding linked absences.

Please note that, if an absence is not recorded and authorised as above, then this may lead to delay, subsequent adjustment, or loss of pay.

4.2 Returning to Work following short term absence

Employees should only return to work when they are fit to do so and/or following advice from a medical professional i.e. Occupational Health/GP.

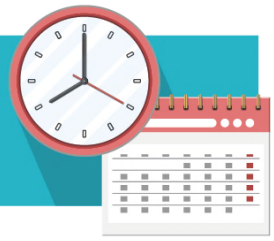
Upon returning to work, a return-to-work interview should be conducted on the first day by the line manager or an alternative manager (where task is delegated by the line manager for example) or, if this is unable to take place, at the earliest opportunity using the return-to-work form available on OurSpace. In preparation for the return-to-work interview, the manager may wish to review the employee's Bradford Factor (BF) Score which can be requested from the Strategic HRBP team. Please note there is a separate stress related absence return to work form.

Depending on the BF score, the manager may need to discuss this with the employee and advise the employee accordingly in line with the actions outlined below.

4.3 Trigger Points

The councils monitor sickness absence on a rolling 12-month basis through number of days, number of instances and patterns of absence, as well as the reasons for any absences.

Trigger levels will be used to identify employees with attendance records that are unsustainable or that give cause for concern. The aim of the process is to manage employee absence and support employees to work to their optimum capacity.



Trigger levels are currently set as:

- 3 instances of sickness in a 6-month rolling period
- 5 instances of sickness in a 12-month rolling period
- A Bradford Factor Score of more than 200
- An unacceptable pattern or theme of absence e.g. frequent Mondays, straight after annual leave etc.

Each period of sickness will be assessed individually, and the potential action as laid out below is by no means definitive. Periods of absence separated by 8 weeks (56 days or less) are linked for Statutory Sick Pay purposes. A maximum of 28 weeks SSP is paid (this could be one period of absence or a series separated by less than 56 days)

The councils reserve the right to change the trigger levels at any time.

4.4 The Bradford Factor

The Bradford Factor is a formula that helps the councils monitor individual sickness absence on an ongoing basis. It calculates a score based on the number of times an employee is absent and the number of days they are absent within a rolling 12-month period.

The formula used to calculate an employee's BF score is:

Number of times absent x number of times absent x total number of days absent = BF

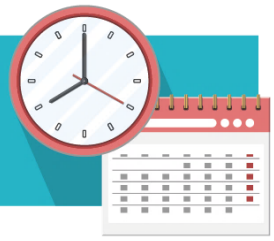
For example, in the 12-month period an employee is off on two occasions. One time for one day and the other time for two days. The score will be worked out as:

2 (no. of times they are off)

x 2 (no. of times they are off)

x 3 (total days off)

= 12 (BF score)



The same scores apply to part-time employees. For some patterns of part-time work managers will need to adjust the totals to reflect the individual's circumstances in considering how to apply the policy and HR can advise on this.

4.5 Use of the Disciplinary Policy due to absence

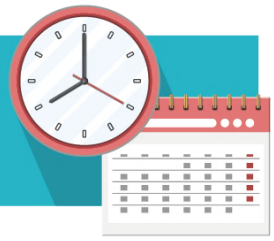
Where a trigger point has been met, the line manager and HR will ascertain whether the use of the Disciplinary Policy is appropriate by looking individually at each employee case. HR will ensure that all cases are viewed fairly and consistently regarding all the factors involved, and that this policy is applied appropriately and in line with all relevant legislation. For further information, please refer to the councils' disciplinary policy.

4.6 Long Term Absence

The councils consider a sickness absence to be long term when the sickness absence is over 28 calendar days in one occurrence. This may occur when an employee has a long-term health condition or suffers a personal tragedy where other policies are not sufficient to cover the extent of time required.

Regular contact will be maintained between the line manager and employee to ensure communication is working both ways. The line manager should ascertain the employee's expectations of when they will return to work.

Employees on long term sickness absence may be referred to the councils' occupational health advisors or further professional medical advice may be sought. Full discussions will take place with the employee before this referral and consent sought to obtain the necessary referral forms.



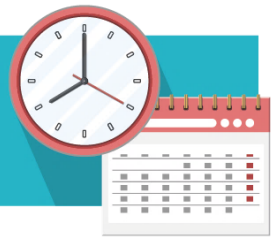
Welfare Meetings

When an employee is absent through sickness for over 28 calendar days in one occurrence, the manager will arrange to meet (in person or via video call) or visit the employee with a member of the HR team unless there are special circumstances which prevent this. The employee is entitled to be accompanied at the meeting by a work colleague or trade union official.

Generally, these meetings will be carried out as required during the period of long-term absence. However, the councils will review all cases of absence individually, taking into consideration the circumstances of the absence (i.e. the nature of and the likelihood/potential timescale for a return to work) and therefore, at its discretion, may review the point at which these meetings (and the number of) are conducted with the employee.

The purpose of the meetings is to provide both the employee and their line manager the opportunity to meet face to face and to discuss:

- the employee's condition and how they are generally feeling
- any medical guidance, results or ongoing treatment as provided by their doctor/medical team
- the employee's prognosis and potential timescale for returning to work (where possible)
- the current status of medical certification to cover the absence – the line manager should ensure that the councils have the most up to date medical certification from the employee
- status of Occupational and or Statutory Sick Pay
- any additional support or assistance that can be provided to the employee to facilitate a return to work (where possible) or for ongoing absence, including referral to the councils' external occupational health specialists



To conduct the welfare meetings, the line manager or HR will arrange the meeting which may take place online, at the employee's home, at the office, or other alternative convenient location.

Once arrangements have been made, the line manager or a member of the HR team will confirm the meeting in writing (usually via email) to the employee. At the meeting, the line manager will discuss the points above with the employee and will provide written notes to HR as a record of the meeting. Where it is possible that the absence will continue, the line manager should advise the employee that further absence welfare meetings may take place.

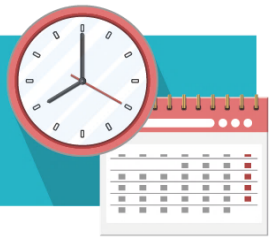
Once a minimum of two welfare meetings has taken place (no less than 2 weeks minimum in between), if there is no satisfactory indication of a return to work in the foreseeable future, consideration may then need to be given to whether the capability policy should be applied.

4.7 Returning to work after long term absence

Every employee is valued for their contribution and so the councils aim to make an employee's return to work after long term sickness as smooth as possible.

Where the employee has requested an earlier return to work date than that advised by their certifying doctor, the councils may deem it necessary to obtain further medical guidance from a doctor or an external occupational health provider to determine whether an employee's return to work, on whatever basis, is appropriate. Following the advice provided, the manager, employee and HR should meet prior to agreeing to any earlier return.

Before returning to work, HR will discuss with the employee and the manager a suitable return to work plan which is normally advised by Occupational Health or GP. This may include returning to work on reduced hours or with reduced responsibilities. Employees and their manager need to work together with HR to ensure that the return-to-work plan is



appropriate. Any issues should be discussed immediately as they arise, and the plan re-worked if required.

Phased or Amended Duty Return to Work

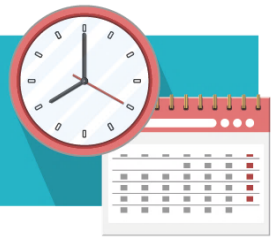
Where a doctor has recommended a return to work either on a phased basis or with a change to regular duties/responsibilities (e.g. amended or light duties), the employee must notify their line manager to discuss the recommendation(s) as soon as possible and prior to the proposed date of return (where possible).

The councils will make every effort to assess whether these changes can be accommodated. However, if they cannot be supported within the business (i.e. no light duties available) the councils are not obliged to offer any changes and the employee would therefore remain absent due to sickness. Typically, a phased return lasts 4-6 weeks and is to help the employee reintegrate and make a successful return to their role, gradually increasing their working hours.

The line manager will review the information provided and will consider if it is possible to facilitate a return to work on the basis proposed, including whether any reasonable adjustments or arrangements (where possible) can be made. To assist with this, the councils may seek additional guidance from the employee's doctor or an external occupational health specialist.

Where a phased or amended duty return to work programme has been agreed, upon returning to work, the line manager in conjunction with the HR Business Partner will conduct and document regular reviews with the employee throughout the duration of the agreed programme to monitor the employee's progress and wellbeing.

In order to support employees during an agreed phased return to work programme, the councils will pay employees full pay for a maximum duration of 6 weeks. This does not need



to be recorded on MyView as sickness absence but should be recorded on the employees' annualised hours timesheet with notes. In the event that a phased return to work programme exceeds 6 weeks, the councils may consider initiating the capability policy.

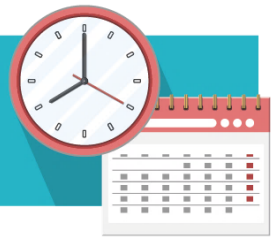
The councils will review the employee's progress on the agreed return plan and may take any actions as appropriate should the employee's health not have recovered sufficiently to enable them back to full duties at the end of the period agreed. This may include a follow up referral to Occupational Health, contacting the employee's GP to provide medical guidance or conducting a stress risk assessment.

Should the employee fail to resume full-time / duties within the rehabilitation period and then revert to being absent for the same reason / condition etc., this will be deemed the same absence period for the purposes of statutory sick pay and will not re-start the rolling twelve-month period for occupational sick pay. For example, if an employee attempts to return after a long absence, returns on half days for three days, but isn't, unfortunately, well enough and reverts to being absent, they will be paid for the days they worked, but won't be eligible to restart their full sick pay entitlement (the two periods of sickness will be considered as if it was one continuous period and the level of pay full, half or nil sick pay will continue). The calculation for the purposes of sick pay will resume from where it left off at the end of the previous absence period.

All instances will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

4.8 Use of the Capability Policy due to absence

Where an employee has had a long-term absence, the manager and HR will ascertain whether the use of the capability policy is appropriate by looking individually at each employee and will consider any mitigating circumstances. HR will ensure that all cases are viewed fairly and consistently regarding all the factors involved, and that this policy is applied appropriately and in line with all relevant legislation.



4.9 Disciplinary action whilst signed off sick

Any medical certificate or statement will not normally be accepted as a reason for refusing to attend an investigation, disciplinary, capability or grievance hearing unless a certificate or other medical evidence is provided by an appropriate specialist and states that the employee is too ill to participate in any such hearing. However, the councils will make any reasonable adjustments at the hearing for the employee if it is possible to do so.

The councils reserve the right to withhold occupational sick pay if an employee refuses to attend any of the above without providing an appropriate certificate.

4.10 Sick Pay

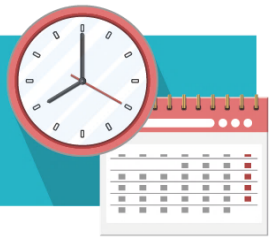
When sick, employees have a contractual entitlement (occupational sick pay) to the following which is calculated using a 12-month rolling period:

During 1st year of service	1 month's full pay and after 4 months' service an additional 2 months' half pay
During 2nd year of service	2 months' full and 2 months' half pay
During 3rd year of service	4 months' full and 4 months' half pay
During 4th and 5th year	5 months' full and 5 months' half pay
After 5 years' service	6 months' full and 6 months' half pay

In the case of full pay periods, sick pay will be an amount which, when added to statutory sick pay (SSP) and incapacity benefit receivable, will secure the equivalent of normal pay.

In the case of half pay periods, sick pay will be an amount equal to half normal earnings plus an amount equivalent to statutory sick pay.

Eligible employees are entitled to receive up to 28 weeks statutory sick pay in a period of



incapacity for work. Eligibility for SSP does not depend on length of service (see section 4.11 for SSP eligibility criteria). If applicable this will be offset against any payments made under the occupational scheme. If an employee reaches the end of their SSP entitlement they will be issued with an SSP1 (usually around week 23 of 28) which can be used to explore potential other benefits such as Employment Support Allowance or Universal Credit if eligibility criteria are met. The councils cannot advise on these alternative benefits.

4.11 Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) Eligibility

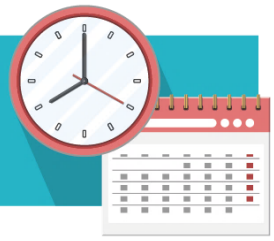
The councils pay SSP in line with government guidance. Under the Employment Rights Act (2026), statutory sick pay will be paid from day-one of sickness. All employees are eligible to statutory sick pay for up to 28 weeks that is either 80% of average weekly earnings or the statutory weekly rate depending on whichever is the lowest amount. Any period of absence that occur within 56 days of one another are treated as linked under the statutory sick pay entitlements and are counted towards the 28 weeks entitlement.

To qualify for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) employees must:

- have an employment contract
- have done some work under their contract
- have discussed their absence with their Service Manager
- give the employer the correct notice
- give the employer proof of their illness, only after 7 days off
- employees who have been paid less than 8 weeks of earnings still qualify for SSP

Employees do not qualify for SSP if they:

- have received the maximum amount of SSP (28 weeks)
- are getting Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Allowance - there are special rules for pregnant women and new mothers who do not get these payments



- are off work for a pregnancy-related illness in the 4 weeks before the week (Sunday to Saturday) that their baby is due
- were in custody or on strike on the first day of sickness (including any linked periods)
- are working outside the EU and you are not liable for their National Insurance contributions
- received Employment and Support Allowance within 12 weeks of starting or returning to work for you