

Sickness Absence Policy

Contents

1. Introduction, Purpose and Scope	2
2. Principles	2
3. Procedures	2
3.1 Absence Reporting	2
3.2 Certification	3
3.3 Return to Work Meetings	3
3.4 Leaving Work Due to Ill Health.....	4
3.5 Medical, Dental, and Other Appointments	4
3.6 Use of Annual Leave, TOIL and Working from Home	4
4. Sickness Pay	5
5. Managing Long-Term and Frequent Short-Term Absence	5
6. Confidentiality and Data Protection	6

Document History

Adopted by Council – 7 November 2023
Reviewed & Adopted – 11 February 2026
Reviewed & Adopted –

1. Introduction, Purpose and Scope

Gainsborough Town Council is committed to maintaining the health, well-being and attendance of its employees while ensuring the effective and efficient delivery of services.

Regular and punctual attendance is an implied term of every employee's contract of employment. The Council recognises, however, that from time to time employees may be unable to attend work due to illness or injury and aims to support employees during such periods in a fair, consistent and supportive manner.

This policy:

- Sets out the procedures for reporting and managing sickness absence;
- Provides guidance and support to employees during periods of ill health;
- Ensures that sickness absence is managed consistently and in line with employment legislation and good practice.

This policy applies to all employees of the Council.

The policy will be applied in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, the Employment Rights Act 1996, the Statutory Sick Pay Regulations, data protection legislation, and relevant health and safety legislation. The Council will give full consideration to its duty to make reasonable adjustments for employees with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

This policy is non-contractual and may be amended by the Council at any time.

2. Principles

The Council's approach to sickness absence is based on the following principles:

- Employees will be treated with dignity, respect and confidentiality;
- Sickness absence will be managed fairly, consistently and sensitively;
- Employees have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their health and to follow absence reporting procedures;
- The Council will provide appropriate sick pay in accordance with contracts of employment and statutory requirements;
- Early support and intervention will be used to help employees return to work as soon as reasonably possible.

3. Procedures

3.1 Absence Reporting

Employees must notify their line manager by telephone as early as possible and no later than one hour after they are due to start work on the first day of absence. Text messages, emails or messages passed via colleagues are not normally acceptable unless agreed in advance or where illness prevents telephone contact.

If the line manager is unavailable, the employee should contact the Town Council switchboard.

Employees should provide:

- The reason for the absence;
- The expected duration of the absence (if known);
- Details of any urgent work matters requiring attention.

Employees must maintain reasonable contact with their line manager throughout their absence and notify them of any change in circumstances or anticipated return date.

If the Town Clerk is absent, they must notify the Chair of the Personnel Committee or the Leader of the Council (or their deputy).

3.2 Certification

For sickness absence of **up to and including 7 calendar days**, employees must complete a self-certification form on their return to work.

For sickness absence of **more than 7 calendar days**, employees must provide a Statement of Fitness for Work (fit note) from a GP or other authorised medical practitioner. Consecutive fit notes must be provided to cover the full period of absence.

Where a fit note indicates that an employee *may be fit for work* subject to adjustments, the Council will consider whether reasonable adjustments can be made.

Employees are responsible for keeping their line manager informed of:

- Their medical position;
- Likely return-to-work date;
- Any treatment or appointments relevant to the absence.

Where sickness absence arises from voluntary medical procedures (e.g. cosmetic surgery), entitlement to sickness absence and pay will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Employees are strongly advised to discuss such matters confidentially with the Town Clerk in advance.

The Council may arrange a welfare visit during a period of sickness absence, with reasonable notice, to provide support and maintain contact.

3.3 Return to Work Meetings

A return-to-work meeting will take place between the employee and their line manager following **every period of sickness absence**, regardless of duration.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Confirm the employee is fit to return to work;
- Identify any ongoing health concerns;
- Consider reasonable adjustments or a phased return (where appropriate);
- Update the employee on work matters;
- Help prevent further absence.

Return-to-work meetings are supportive and informal and do not form part of the disciplinary process.

For the Town Clerk, the return-to-work meeting will be conducted with the Chair of the Personnel Committee and/or the Leader of the Council.

3.4 Leaving Work Due to Ill Health

If an employee becomes unwell during the working day and needs to leave work, they must inform their line manager before leaving and discuss any urgent work matters.

3.5 Medical, Dental, and Other Appointments

Where possible, employees should arrange routine medical, dental, hearing and optician appointments outside of normal working hours. Where this is not reasonably practicable, appointments should be arranged to minimise disruption to the working day, for example at the beginning or end of the day.

The Council recognises the importance of supporting employee health and wellbeing and, in limited circumstances, may allow **reasonable paid time off** to attend medical appointments where there is no practical alternative.

Paid time off for medical appointments will normally be granted where:

- The appointment cannot reasonably be arranged outside working hours; and
- The appointment is necessary for the employee's health or ongoing treatment; and
- Prior approval has been obtained from the line manager.

Such paid time off will:

- Normally be limited to the actual time required to attend the appointment and travel;
- Be monitored to ensure it is used appropriately and consistently;
- Not be unreasonably refused but may be declined where operational requirements cannot be met.

Where paid time off is not approved, employees may be required, by agreement with their line manager, to:

- Make up the time;
- Take the time as unpaid leave; or
- Use annual leave or TOIL.

Where attendance at a medical or hospital appointment necessitates a full day's absence due to illness or recovery, this will normally be treated as sickness absence and the relevant reporting and certification procedures must be followed.

Reasonable paid time off will be granted for:

- Antenatal appointments in line with the Council's Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Leave Policy;
- Disability-related medical appointments, in line with the Equality Act 2010 and the Council's duty to make reasonable adjustments.

The Council reserves the right to request confirmation of appointments where appropriate.

3.6 Use of Annual Leave, TOIL and Working from Home

The Council recognises that some employees may wish to choose to take annual leave or allocate time off in lieu (TOIL) on days or periods where they are ill. This must be discussed with the employee's line manager, who will consider the request. The use of annual leave instead of sick leave is however discouraged, as it may mask any underlying health problems and is not the most beneficial use of an employee's annual

leave which is intended to ensure employees take adequate rest periods from work throughout the year.

There may be occasions where it is possible for an employee to work from home despite not being fit enough to attend work, an example may be post-operation/ injury recovery or in the circumstances of contagious illnesses, that physically means they cannot attend the workplace but may still be able to carry out work functions from home. The employee's line manager will be able to discuss with the employee whether or not working from home will be possible and arrangements for this.

The principle consideration when making this decision will be the employee's wellbeing.

Employees may request to use annual leave or TOIL during periods of illness. Such requests must be agreed with the line manager. The Council discourages the use of annual leave instead of sick leave, as this may mask underlying health issues.

In exceptional circumstances, and where it supports the employee's wellbeing, an employee may agree with their line manager to work from home while recovering from illness or injury. Such arrangements will:

- Be temporary;
- Be reviewed regularly;
- Be confirmed in writing;
- Not replace appropriate sickness absence where the employee is unfit for work.

4. Sickness Pay

Sick pay will be paid in accordance with the employee's contract of employment and length of service.

Statutory Sick Pay. (SSP) will be paid where applicable and in line with statutory requirements

The Council reserves the right, where appropriate, to request that an employee undergo a medical examination by a medical practitioner nominated by the Council. Any such request will be made with the employee's written consent and in accordance with the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988. Any associated costs will be met by the Council.

During periods of sickness absence, employees must not undertake paid or voluntary work for another employer or for any business established by the employee without prior written permission. For the Town Clerk, permission must be sought from the Leader of the Council and Chair of the Personnel Committee.

5. Managing Long-Term and Frequent Short-Term Absence

5.1 Definitions

- **Long-term absence:** Continuous sickness absence of **four weeks or more**.
- **Frequent short-term absence:** Repeated periods of sickness absence which give cause for concern, normally defined as:
 - Three or more episodes of sickness absence in a rolling six-month period; or
 - A pattern of absence which causes operational concern.

5.2 Absence Trigger Points

The following trigger points will normally prompt a sickness absence review meeting:

- 3 or more sickness absences in 6 months;
- 10 or more working days' sickness absence in a 12-month period;
- Any single period of absence lasting 4 weeks or more;
- Any recognisable pattern of absence.

Reaching a trigger point does not automatically lead to formal action but enables concerns to be discussed and support to be considered.

5.3 Managing Long-Term Absence

In cases of long-term absence, the Council will:

- Maintain regular, supportive contact;
- Obtain medical advice where appropriate (e.g. occupational health);
- Consider reasonable adjustments or alternative duties;
- Explore phased return-to-work options.

Where an employee is unable to return to work despite reasonable adjustments and support, the Council may consider formal capability procedures.

5.4 Managing Frequent Short-Term Absence

Where frequent short-term absence occurs, the Council will meet with the employee to:

- Discuss attendance concerns;
- Identify underlying causes;
- Consider reasonable adjustments or support measures;
- Set improvement targets and review periods.

Where attendance does not improve, the matter may be managed under the Council's capability or disciplinary procedures, as appropriate.

6. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All information relating to sickness absence and medical conditions will be treated as confidential and handled in accordance with data protection legislation.