



Godalming
Town Council
ABSENCE POLICY

Policy Statement

Godalming Town Council is committed to maintaining the health, well-being and attendance of all employees. We value the contribution our employees make to the delivery of quality services to our community. So, when any employee is unable to be at work for any reason, we miss that contribution. This absence policy explains what we expect from managers and employees when handling absence.

This policy has been developed in consultation with employees and we welcome the continued involvement of employees in implementing this policy.

Key Principles

The organisation's absence policy is based on the following principles:

1. As a responsible employer we undertake to provide payments to employees who are unable to attend work due to sickness. (See the Godalming Town Council Terms & Conditions of Employment).
2. Regular, punctual attendance is an implied term of every employee's contract of employment – we ask each employee to take responsibility for achieving and maintaining good attendance.
3. Open communication between managers and employees is encouraged.
4. We will support employees who have genuine grounds for absence for whatever reason. This support includes:
 - a. 'special leave' for necessary absences not caused by sickness
 - b. a flexible approach to the taking of annual leave
 - c. access to counsellors where necessary
 - d. rehabilitation programmes in cases of long-term sickness absence.
5. We will consider any advice given by the employee's GP on the 'Statement of Fitness for Work'. If the GP advises that an employee 'may be fit for work' we will discuss with the employee how we can help them get back to work – for example, on flexible hours, or altered duties.
6. We will use an occupational health adviser, where appropriate, to:
 - a. help identify the nature of an employee's illness
 - b. advise the employee and their manager on the best way to improve the employee's health and well-being.

and employees will be expected to attend referral meetings with an occupational health adviser if asked to do so.

7. The Town Council's disciplinary procedures will be used if an explanation for absence is not forthcoming or is not thought to be satisfactory.
8. We respect the confidentiality of all information relating to an employee's sickness. This policy will be implemented in line with all data protection legislation and the Access to Medical Records Act 1988.

Notification of Absence

If an employee is going to be absent from work they should speak to their manager or deputy within an hour of their normal start time. They should also:

- Give a clear indication of the reason for absence (and the nature of the illness if applicable) and
- A likely return date.

The manager will check with the employee if there is any information they need about their current work. If the employee does not contact their manager by the required time the manager will attempt to contact the employee at home.

An employee may not always feel able to discuss their medical problems with their line manager. Managers will be sensitive to individual concerns and make alternative arrangements, where appropriate. For example, an employee may prefer to discuss health problems with a person of the same gender.

Evidence of Incapacity

Employees can self-certify for the first seven days sickness absence. Thereafter a 'Statement of Fitness for Work' is required to cover every subsequent day. In appropriate cases sick pay will be terminated or suspended where certification requirements are not met. A 'Statement of Fitness for Work' will be required for any sickness absence which occurs while the employee is on annual leave (and where the employee wishes to substitute sick leave for the annual leave).

If absence is likely to be protracted, ie more than four weeks continuously, there is a shared responsibility for the Town Council and the employee to maintain contact at agreed intervals.

Exceptionally, if the employer is concerned at the frequency of an employee's absence, or their account of their reasons for absence, the employee may be required to submit a 'Statement of Fitness for Work', rather than self-certificates, from their first day of absence. In such cases the Council will meet the cost of any fee charged.

'May be fit for some work'

If the GP advises on the Statement of Fitness for Work that an employee 'may be fit for work' we will discuss with the employee ways of helping them get back to work. This might mean talking about a phased return to work or amended duties. This discussion will take place as an informal meeting between the manager and the employee (although, depending on the circumstances, the manager may need to seek advice and/or make an occupational health referral).

If it is not possible to provide the support an employee needs to return to work – for example, by making the necessary workplace adjustments – or an employee feels unable to return then the Statement will be used in the same way as if the GP advised that the employee was 'not fit for work'.

Return to Work Discussions

Managers will discuss absences with employees when they return to work to establish:

- The reason for, and cause of absence
- Anything the manager or the council can do to help
- That the employee is fit to return to work.

If an employee's GP has advised that they 'may be fit for work' the return to work discussion can also be used to agree in detail how their return to work might work best in practice.

A More Formal Review will be Triggered by:

- Frequent short-term absences;
- Long-term absence; or
- Any other pattern of absence that causes the manager concern.

This review will look at any further action required to improve the employee's attendance and well-being and will be conducted as a formal meeting (with the employee having the right to be accompanied). A written record of the review will be kept.