



Absence Management Policy

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Recognised by the Inland Revenue as a Scottish Charity - No. SCO 17286

Voluntary Action Shetland

ABSENCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Effective management of absence is crucial to the effective and efficient operation of Voluntary Action Shetland. High levels of sickness within the Voluntary Action Shetland may have a detrimental effect on the quality of service provided and place an added burden on employees remaining at work.

POLICY STATEMENT

Best attendance results are likely to be achieved where employees, management and board of Directors are committed to promoting the well being of all employees and occupational health, including health surveillance.

Employees are entitled to expect fair treatment; the Executive Officer and supervisors are equally entitled to take appropriate action in respect of unacceptable levels of absence and be firm in dealing with abuse of the system.

ABSENCE REPORTING/PAYMENT ENTITLEMENT

In accordance with the terms and conditions of employment, Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) will be paid for up to a maximum of 28 weeks to those who are incapable for work and who satisfy the conditions for payment.

To receive entitlement an employee must report your inability to attend work in accordance with the following procedures:

- **On the first day of sickness absence** – you must personally telephone and speak to your line manager at the earliest possible opportunity and as close to your normal start time as possible. E-mail and text message contact is unacceptable, as is contact through social media websites or using online or mobile phone instant messaging facilities. In any event, your contact must be no later than two hours after your normal start time. If you are unable to speak to your line manager personally, you should speak to the Executive Officer or Team Leader. You should confirm the broad nature of your illness and, if the illness is of a minor nature, indicate when you think that you will be fit to return to work. It is unacceptable for a third party to contact VAS on your behalf to report your sickness absence, other than in very exceptional circumstances (for example, where you have been unexpectedly admitted to hospital and you are not in a position to make the telephone call yourself).

The line manager must inform the Finance Officer on the first day of sickness absence of staff member and on their first day of return to work.

On return to work after one, two or three days sickness absence – obtain and complete a self certification form, this form is obtainable from the administration office. **On return to work after four, five, six and seven days sickness absence** – as above.

If sickness absence continues to fourth day – you must notify again as in line with the procedure continued in paragraph titled “On the first day of sickness absence”. If the fourth day is a non working day, you should notify the VAS on the next working day.

If sickness absence continues for 8 days or more – the employee must obtain a ‘Statement of Fitness for Work’ note from their doctor, this must be completed in conjunction with the self-certification form and both must be submitted to the Finance Officer. Submit further ‘Statement of Fitness for Work’ notes from your doctor to cover any continued absence. . If an employee is too ill to work the doctor will advise this, just as with the sick note. This will provide employees and employers greater flexibility in managing sickness absence. Any phased return to work, altered hours, amended duties or workplace adaptations will be discussed and implemented with the agreement of the Executive Officer.

Note:

All 7 days of the week count when calculating sickness absence including non-working days. e.g. if the first day of sickness absence is a Friday, the fourth day would be the following Monday. Sick pay is paid for the days normally worked. SSP is not paid for the first three days of sickness.

Sickness Allowance

Service at commencement of Absence from duty	Full Pay	Half Pay
Less than 26 weeks	NIL	NIL
26 weeks or more but less than 1 year	5 weeks	5 weeks
1 year but less than 2 years	9 weeks	9 weeks
2 years but less than 3 years	18 weeks	18 weeks
3 years but less than 5 years	22 weeks	22 weeks
5 years or more	26 weeks	26 weeks

SICKNESS DURING ANNUAL LEAVE

If you fall sick during a period of annual leave and submit the appropriate self-certificate or Statement of Fitness for Work from your doctor to the Finance Officer by the earliest practicable date, the period of sickness absence will be treated as sick leave and not as annual leave.

SICKNESS DURING PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

There is no entitlement to claim back days if you fall sick on a public holiday.

MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH SICK EMPLOYEES

As part of good management practice it is essential that contact be maintained with absent employees whether on short or long term sickness absence. Maintaining contact with employees away from their place of work must be handled sensitively and with due consideration for the nature of the employee’s illness. A mutual understanding of the reason for absence should be identified and, where possible, assistance offered to the individual, including referral to occupational health if appropriate or applicable.

MEASURES TO DEAL WITH FREQUENT AND PERSISTENT SICKNESS ABSENCE

As part of the general absence management mechanisms Voluntary Action Shetland will apply the following arrangements when an employee's frequent and persistent short-term absences give cause for concern:-

In any 6 month period, frequent and persistent short-term absence will normally be defined as 3 or more periods of self certificated absence or a total of 10 days absence or more.

This attendance standard is designed to be used as a trigger point that initiates a formal return to work interview. The main purposes of the return to work interview are:-

- To welcome the employee back to work and provide an update about any developments which have occurred during the absence;
- To check that employees are fully recovered and capable of performing their duties;
- To see whether VAS can provide any additional support;
- To review the employee's absence record and discuss any patterns of absence which are apparent and which cause concern.

The return to work interview should be conducted sensitively and in private by the Executive Officer/Line Manager. Where the Executive Officer or Line Manager is unavailable, a nominated Director of the Board of Management will conduct the interview.

The Executive Officer will, taking account of all relevant circumstances, discuss with the employee the acceptable level of attendance at work, the employee's level of sickness absence and the reasons for the absence. The Executive Officer should indicate clearly to the employee the improvement in attendance required and set targets accordingly to assist the employee in making a satisfactory improvement with a review date.

At each stage in the procedures the employee shall be reminded that he/she may choose to be accompanied by a Trade Union representative or colleague.

In circumstances where there is an identifiable health problem or a decision is made for the employee to be referred to the occupational health service refer to section entitled Medical Examinations.

Following the review of the absence record at the end of the monitoring period, if the employee is unable to achieve and maintain the agreed acceptable level of attendance at work, the matter may be dealt with in accordance with Voluntary Action Shetland's disciplinary procedure.

Where an employee achieves and maintains an acceptable level of attendance at work for a period of six months following this interview, normal monitoring will apply.

MEASURES TO DEAL WITH PROLONGED/LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

Long term sickness absence will normally be regarded as a continuous absence from work for at least four weeks or over.

Whenever a case of long-term absence is identified the Executive Officer must review the circumstances of the case. It is the responsibility of the Executive Officer to ensure communication is maintained with the employee and that they are contacted within four weeks of their absence. Where it is considered that the absence is likely to continue for an uncertain period of time, the Executive Officer must arrange a meeting with the employee concerned within the four-week stage. The purpose of the meeting is to consider:

- The employee's current state of health;
- The likely duration of the sickness absence;
- The employee's expectations concerning her/his future fitness to return to work;
- Any potential impediments to an early return to work.

A record should be made of the meeting and confirmed in writing to the employee by the Executive Officer. A copy will be retained on the employee's personal file.

MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

An employee may be required, as and when the Executive Officer considers it necessary or advisable, to agree to a referral to the occupational health service. In such circumstances the employee must be advised of his/her rights under the Access to Medical Reports Act, 1988.

The examination will allow management to determine, in the best interests of the employee and, having regard to the operational requirements of the service, what further course of action, if any, is considered necessary in the circumstances. Where the examination reveals an inherent medical problem, the issue should be dealt with as a capability issue as outlined in section entitled **Capability on Grounds of Ill-health**. Where no underlying health problem is identified and the employee's level of attendance gives cause for concern, the matter should be treated as an attendance issue and dealt with in accordance with sections entitled **Conduct** and **Unauthorised Absence**.

CAPABILITY ON GROUNDS OF ILL-HEALTH

Where the occupational health report confirms an underlying illness or medical complaint, an employee is entitled to sympathetic consideration by Voluntary Action Shetland. In many cases an employee who suffers such ill health will receive the medical treatment, remedial surgery etc. that will result in an acceptable rate of recovery being achieved. Where the prognosis is such that frequent or prolonged absence will be a continuing feature then the case would require to be treated in terms of the Equality Act 2010.

An employee will satisfy the definition of disabled under the act if he or she has a "physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities". At this point the matter should be fully

discussed with the individual in the presence of his/her representative where appropriate and the various options identified.

In cases where ill-health, retiral or dismissal on the grounds of capability are being considered and the occupational health professional judgement is contradictory to that of the employee's own GP then, as part of good management practice, it is expected that an independent medical examination should be carried out and a decision taken on the basis of that report.

CONDUCT

Where the occupational health report confirms no underlying health disorder or where the individual's level of attendance at work gives serious cause for concern the issue may be one of conduct, rather than capability, and should be dealt with in accordance with Voluntary Action Shetland's Disciplinary Procedure.

ABUSE OF THE SYSTEM

Abuse of the system will be regarded as misconduct. An employee is excluded from entitlement to contractual sick pay, except at the discretion of the Board Of Directors, where the absence is on account of sickness, due or attributed to:

- The employee's own misconduct or negligence; or
- Active participation in sport for payment; or
- Injury whilst working in the employee's time for private gain, or for another employer

Additionally, misconduct should be dealt with as a disciplinary matter and the disciplinary procedures invoked.

UNAUTHORISED ABSENCES

Unauthorised absences will be investigated and may be treated as misconduct and consequently dealt with in accordance with the disciplinary procedures.

ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS

Employee absences from work as a result of adverse weather conditions will be deemed to be unpaid leave. Employees may opt to take annual leave, lieu time owed, or make up lost time at a later date as an alternative to unpaid leave. Employees may work from home with prior agreement of Executive Officer.

Employees will be entitled to paid leave in addition to existing annual leave entitlement in the event that Voluntary Action Shetland is closed on the decision of the Executive Officer and/or the Board of Directors as a result of adverse weather conditions, or any other reason.