# Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service HR Guidance

## Absent Without Leave: AWOL

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Introduction

This document sets out the Absent Without Leave (AWOL) guidance to be followed by managers when dealing with an employee’s unauthorised absence from work. The aim of the AWOL guidance is to maximise attendance levels across the service, whilst also providing reasonable support to those absent. In addition it is to provide guidance to managers with the aim of assisting their employees to return to work at the earliest opportunity.

Scope

This guidance applies to all employees of Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service for whom there is no other specific guidance laid down in national or local conditions of service.

It applies if an employee:

* fails to comply with the sickness absence reporting guidance (or provide the required evidence within the required time period)
* fails to attend work
* fails to return from holiday or
* is absent from work for any other reason without approval.

If an employee is absent from work without good cause and/or fails to properly and effectively notify their manager of the absence, this may be treated as a serious disciplinary offence.

Principles

An employee will be considered as AWOL when they are absent from work and have not contacted their manager or any other nominated person to advise of the absence from work.

Employees have a contractual duty to attend work in accordance with agreed working practices, unless authorisation has been given for absence. The absence management/Time off Work guidance, including notification requirements, must be adhered to. Failure to attend work and/or to report absence may be treated as a matter of gross misconduct within the disciplinary guidance.

Managers will treat each case individually and be mindful of the need for consistency in their approach. Consideration should be given to the service’s duty of care to employees, exploring reasons for absence in order to prevent or minimise any absences reoccurring. Also the employee’s past history should be taken into account, including whether similar events have happened before and whether there may be any known issues which could have triggered the event.

An employee will be considered as AWOL when they are absent from work without having acquired the relevant authorisation or adhered to the required notification process.

Process

Where an employee appears to be AWOL the following guidance should be applied. It should only be applied after the manager has made initial attempts to contact the employee.

The application of this guidance could result in formal action being taken against the employee, including the termination of the employee’s contract. Therefore, the manager must contact HR prior to implementing this guidance and issuing any correspondence for advice.

Timeline/Actions

**Day 1 of absence**

If an employee has failed to attend work without authorisation the manager should try to make telephone contact with the employee. This should be documented on the **absence management contact sheet** contained within the Absence and Wellbeing guidance, stating the date, time, message left and response received (if any). The manager should ensure that they offer any appropriate support to employees who are having difficulties in attending work. In extreme situations it may be appropriate for the manager to undertake a home visit or contact the Police.

However, if the manager has been unable to contact the employee by the afternoon of the first day of unauthorised absence, efforts will be made to contact the employee’s next of kin/emergency contact. The next of kin/emergency contact should be asked to contact the manager in the event that the employee is located and unable to make contact themselves.

**Day 2 of absence**

The manager will try to make telephone contact with the employee again, and keep a record as stated above. If unable to make contact, the manager will send a letter inviting the employee to an informal meeting to discuss the situation. The letter should be sent by recorded delivery and also by personal email if their email address is known.

The letter will remind the employee of the absence reporting guidance, ask them to make contact and remind them of the support available. It will also notify the employee that no salary will be paid for the unauthorised days of absence unless medically certified.

**Day 4 of absence**

If no contact has been made, the manager will try to make telephone contact with the employee again and keep a record as stated above.

Managers must ensure that prompt action is taken where it is necessary to ensure that the unauthorised absence is recorded and employees pay is suspended for any unauthorised days via the Service Centre.

**Day 7 of absence**

The manager will try to make telephone contact with the employee again, keeping a record of all communication. If contact is not made, the manager will send a second letter by recorded delivery and email (if applicable). The letter will state the dates of the unauthorised absence and explain the actions taken so far to contact the employee.

The letter will invite the employee to a formal meeting to discuss their absence (providing 10 calendar days’ notice of the meeting) and clarify that if they do not attend or provide a reason for their continued unauthorised absence, the meeting will proceed in their absence.

The letter will advise the employee of their right to be accompanied by either a TU representative or work colleague at the meeting.

**After Day 14 of absence**

The formal meeting for unauthorised absence will be held, the meeting will be chaired by the manager.

Should the colleague fail to attend or communicate a second letter will be sent inviting them to attend another formal meeting for unauthorised absence. This letter will state that failure to attend the meeting will result in termination of employment.

In all steps of this guidance the manager may delegate responsibility to a nominated manager to undertake the attempts at contact on their behalf. Where a personal email address is known for an employee this may be used as an additional method of communication.

Next Steps

Where the employee does not attend the formal meetings or provide any explanation for their continued absence, after the meeting is concluded a letter will be sent to the employee. The letter will state that as no contact has been made it is assumed that they no longer wish to work for Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service and have therefore resigned, as such their employment will be

terminated (from the date of the last meeting). The letter will also include a request for the return of any CFRS equipment or property within 2 weeks.

Following the termination, the manager is responsible for advising the Service Centre/payroll of the termination date, that the employee has resigned and advise of any outstanding leave to be paid.

Considerations

If the employee makes contact and returns to work or agrees a return to work at any stage of this guidance the manager must arrange a meeting with the employee to discuss the absence, offer support and identify why no contact was made.

This conversation should be held in accordance with the fact-finding guidance (disciplinary) and will inform whether further formal action is required.

If pay was suspended during the unauthorised absence, the manager must contact the Service Centre/Payroll if the employee returns and submits a fit note to ensure that pay resumes. Where the absence was not certified or there is no satisfactory reason for the employee not seeking authorisation for the absence, pay deducted for the days the employee was AWOL will not be reinstated.

Should an employee fail to provide an up-to-date fit note managers are required to contact the employee, if contact is not made a letter should be sent requesting the employee contact as soon as possible.