**Absence and Wellbeing**

**Human Resources**

Grey Book

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| Version Control | Changes Made | Author |
| Version 1  September 2018 | Revised procedure to replace previous Positive Attendance procedure and Sickness Absence procedure for School Staff. Incorporates procedures for Green Book, Burgundy Book and Grey Book conditions of service and includes generic guidance for all staff groups. | K. Anderson |
| Version 2  October 2018 | Wording added regarding AVC’s (Additional Voluntary Contributions) to your pension | People Management |
| Version 3  February 2020 | Absence and Wellbeing Procedure and Guidance documents reviewed and separated out from other Council Absence procedures | Takara Hanks - People Management |

Introduction

This document sets out the absence wellbeing procedure to be followed by managers when dealing with an employee’s attendance at work. It has been developed to promote the health and wellbeing of all employees, to improve attendance and minimise absence effectively. Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service (CFRS) values the contributions of all employees and aims to maximise employee attendance to achieve our objectives as outlined within the Council Plan. CFRS is committed to promoting healthy living for all staff and providing facilities to encourage this. Examples of this include:

* Providing a professional, confidential Occupational Health service
* Risk assessments for known health risks
* Promotion of good management/working practices
* Ergonomic assessments to ensure the working environment and equipment used is suitable
* The provision of a confidential counselling service

The aim of the absence and wellbeing procedure is to minimise absence levels across the fire service, whilst also providing reasonable support to those absent, with the aim of assisting their return to work at the earliest opportunity.

Whilst it is recognised that instances of absence often need to be considered on a case-by-case basis, this procedure also aims to ensure that all employees are treated fairly and consistently.

Scope

This procedure applies to all permanent and fixed term CFRS employees covered by the Grey book.

Principles

The fire service has a duty to manage its services in the most cost effective and efficient manner. It is committed to the aim of maintaining the health, safety and wellbeing for its employees as far as practicable, while recognising that there may be circumstances where it is necessary to manage absence to secure full attendance at work.

This procedure is based on the following principles and will:

* Maximise employee attendance and engagement at work.
* Promote employee health, safety and welfare; encouraging and supporting employees to manage their own health, safety and wellbeing and to take responsibility for their attendance at work.
* Secure effective and efficient utilisation of all staffing resources
* Explore reasons for employee absence in order to prevent or minimise the possibility of the absence reoccurring
* Address any underlying employee welfare problems
* Ensure appropriate occupational health and medical advice is obtained
* Sustain harmonious employee relations
* Comply with good employment practice and adhere to the law
* Never ignore sickness absence
* Ensure that short term absences do not go unnoticed
* Ensure prompt action is taken if the absence is work-related
* Keep accurate and up to date employee attendance records
* Develop/maintain an atmosphere that encourages people to come to work
* Deal with each person as an individual – getting to know them will assist in exercising managerial judgement
* Handle attendance problems promptly and sensitively, in a supportive manner
* Treat all staff fairly and consistently
* Reduce the impact on other employees and teams in terms of increased workloads
* Reduce agency costs and the need to use Externally provided workers

For statutory entitlements and discretionary time off see the time off booklet for guidance.

Process

It is essential that the fire service deals with absence promptly, fairly and consistently to demonstrate to all employees that it regards absence as a serious matter. If there is no acceptable reason for the absence, the matter should be treated as a conduct issue and dealt with as a disciplinary matter. It is appropriate to use the formal process where an informal approach has failed to achieve the desired improvements in attendance, or where informal action is deemed not to be appropriate in the circumstances of the case.

It should be noted that sickness absence issues are often complex and unique. Whilst it is important that issues are dealt with in fair way, the specific interventions used and the timing of those interventions may differ from case to case.

Once an absence trigger is reached, usually 3 occasions or 8 calendar days of absence within the last 12 months or a single absence over 28 calendar days, an informal support meeting should be held to discuss the reasons for absence and any support to be provided by the manager and any action or targets for the employee to follow. Triggers should be reset upon a return to work. Following the informal stage, both short and long-term absence should be managed via the formal 3-stage process, the triggers set in response to each individual absence should appropriately reflect the medical circumstances of the particular absence, and action plan put in place where necessary. It may be appropriate to hold regular review meetings in between the formal stages and managers should maintain in regular appropriate contact with the employee.

Where an employee reaches an acceptable level of attendance following one of the formal stages but the level of absence becomes unacceptable again, the fire service reserves the right to re-enter the formal process at the point it ended previously.

Further detailed guidance for managing absence is set out in the Grey Book Absence and Wellbeing Guidance and Generic Guidance documents.

**February 2020**