

Guidance for Head Teachers on the use of the Maximising Attendance Policy in Relation to Teaching Staff

1. Introduction

- 1.1** This document sets out the procedure approved by West Dunbartonshire Council when managing the attendance of employees following periods of absence. These procedures are in line with the Council's Maximising Attendance policy. The full policy is attached.

2. Statement

- 2.1** It is the policy of West Dunbartonshire Council that all managers have a responsibility to monitor and encourage maximum attendance in line with the standards set by Council.

3. Rationale

- 3.1** It is recognised that managing absence is a top priority on the Council's agenda to improve Council performance, provide cost effective services and to support employees with health concerns.
- 3.2** It is the responsibility of Educational Services to ensure that Line Managers follow the corporate procedures when managing the attendance of teaching staff. However where clarity or amendments are appropriate this has been captured in this departmental summary.
- 3.3** For the purposes of maximising attendance all return to work interviews and review meetings will be conducted by the following personnel:

For teaching staff in a secondary school	- Principal Teacher
For teaching staff in a primary school	- Depute Head Teacher
In a primary school with no DHT	- Head Teacher

The responsibility for conducting these interviews / meetings can be positioned and escalated as appropriate through discussion with the individual, taking account of individual circumstances.

4. Process - Informal Review

- 4.1** All employees should have an attendance record which is updated with any absences from work. For teaching staff the SEEMIS management information system is used to record this information along with manual records.
- 4.2** Employees should inform the school / establishment of their absence as early as possible before their day commences. The corporate policy states that this

should be within one hour of the shift commencing. This is not operationally appropriate since schools require to be made aware of cover requirements as early as possible.

- 4.3** Employees should inform the school / establishment of their absence on the 1st, 4th and every 8th working day of absence. In line with this, during periods of long term absence, managers should be in regular contact with employees.

The department would deem “regular” as being once a week or at least once a fortnight. Method and responsibility for contact should be agreed between the absent employee and their line manager.

- 4.4** Employees are asked to provide as much information as possible about their absence, including

- the reason for absence;
- likely duration of absence and any other relevant information, e.g. any action they are taking such as a GP appointment.

The employee is not obliged to disclose the detail of their ailment / condition. However he/she should provide detail of impact on fitness for work and likely duration to assist the planning of cover.

- 4.4** Following an absence of any kind, the manager / supervisor will meet with the returning teacher to discuss the reasons for his/her absence, ensure he/she is fit to return to work, offer any help where appropriate and pass on information regarding workload, etc before countersigning the self certified sick slip / return to work form.

Any action to be taken or assistance offered should also be noted on this certificate / form. This document should be retained in the employee’s personal record within the establishment.

- 4.5** In addition to the return to work interviews, Attendance Review Meetings will be arranged for employees whose absence record falls into one of the following categories:

- 3 periods of absence, whether self certificated or medically certificated or a total of 6 working days absence within 6 months;
- 5 periods of absence, whether self certificated or medically certificated or a total of 20 working days absence (4 weeks) within 12 months;
- Any period of unauthorised absence;
- Any patterns or frequencies of absence.

The purpose of this meeting is to convey management’s concern and to provide early intervention and support to employees experiencing difficulties with their health.

Note that these meetings should be arranged when one or more of these triggers have been reached. It is not necessary for a meeting to be arranged

for every individual standard if an employee has already had a meeting and concerns are already being addressed.

This meeting may be linked into a return to work interview if appropriate and if the teacher is in agreement. However if the employee requests an additional meeting this can be arranged for a future date. This is not a formal meeting at this stage.

- 4.6** At the Attendance Review Meeting the manager may decide to monitor an employee's attendance for a period of time and set a review date to discuss the employee's progress. This review date should be set for no later than 3 months from the date of the original meeting. The meeting can also be brought forward in the event of subsequent absence to enable the provision of timely support.

5 Occupational Health

- 5.1** Occupational Health should be utilised to provide medical information regarding any medical conditions. This then allows the manager to provide support, make adjustments and make informed decisions.
- 5.2** In the case of short term absence an employee should be referred to Occupational Health when the identified review points are reached.
- 5.3** In the case of long term sickness employees should be referred to Occupational Health when their absence exceeds 20 days or as soon as the manager knows that the employee is going to be absent for 20 days or more.
- 5.4** Any cases of stress should be referred to Occupational Health and work place stress should be addressed using the stress in the workplace policy and the 'notification of work place stress' form. Managers should seek advice from Occupational Health as appropriate.
- 5.5** Once managers have decided to refer an employee to Occupational Health they must complete the referral form. The more information that is contained in the form the more feedback that Occupational Health can provide the manager. The referral form can be found on the intranet in the Personnel Department page, A to Z, Occupational Health, "Request for Assessment of Employee".
- 5.6** The completed form should be sent to the department's Human Resources Team, who will then forward the referral to Occupational Health. This allows Human Resources to provide assistance in case management as appropriate.
- 5.7** Occupational Health reports can provide a facility for the organisation of regular meetings. The initial review can be scheduled for the anticipated receipt of the initial report and subsequent reviews can be scheduled in line with any review reports.

- 5.8** At a review meeting a record should be kept of the content and actions from the meeting, clearly detailing the expectations of all parties and improvements in attendance anticipated and any review date.
- 5.9** At the follow up meeting, when an acceptable level of attendance has been achieved employees should be encouraged to maintain these levels, and further meetings will not be necessary.
- 5.10** Following the Attendance Review Process where no improvement in attendance has been achieved a formal interview will then be arranged.

6 Formal Review

- 6.1** The formal interview is an opportunity for employee and Line Manager to share information regarding the employee's attendance record. The employee will be informed in writing of the date and time of the interview and will have the right to be accompanied by a colleague, trade union representative or any other person of their choice.

At this meeting the manager will outline the need for improvement, assess the support already provided to date, explore further assistance and confirm a plan of action. The main issues considered at this interview are:

- The teacher's attendance record and its effect on the operation of the establishment;
 - factors which may be affecting the individual's health and attendance levels: an identified underlying health problem is not treated as a matter for disciplinary action;
 - any appropriate assistance which the Educational Services Department and West Dunbartonshire Council can offer. Assistance can include consultation with Personnel, or referral to the Welfare Officer or the Occupational Health Service;
 - potential consequences of failure to improve attendance levels. Future management in line with a disciplinary or ill health framework.
- 6.2** Staff should be aware that where an underlying health problem has been identified and is confirmed by the Occupational Health Service the absences will not be treated as a disciplinary matter. Where prolonged absence or absences are likely because of an underlying health problem, then the employee attendance will be dealt with as one of capability and various options will be discussed with the employee. These options may include:
- redeployment to alternative duties / lighter work;
 - part time employment / job sharing / phased return to work;
 - allocating some duties to another member of staff;
 - additional training or retraining;
 - ill health retirement.
- 6.3** The discussions at the Attendance Review Meeting / formal interview will be documented confirming the content of the discussions and any actions

agreed. This may take the form of a letter summarising the meeting or alternatively a document signed by both parties. One copy of this documentation will be issued to the teacher and the other copy will be kept in his/her file at the school.

The follow up meetings are designed to review the teacher's progress in improving his/her attendance and the same procedures will be followed as are used for the formal interview. These meetings will highlight improvements in attendance, any further assistance required or the consequences of failure to improve attendance.

Failure to improve absence levels may result in a disciplinary hearing which will be conducted in line with the Council's Discipline Procedures. The decision to proceed to a disciplinary hearing may be made for any of the following reasons:

- an employee's absence record is deemed to be unacceptable;
- a particular pattern of absence can be identified;
- no sustained improvement has taken place;
- no mitigating reason is offered for the absences;
- there is no identifiable underlying health problem.

6.4 Before progressing either discipline or ill health considerations Human Resources should be consulted for further advice.

This guidance has been developed as a procedural summary of the corporate policy. For further information the corporate policy should be consulted in the first instance and the Educational Services Human Resources team will also provide guidance if necessary.