



SARRATT PARISH COUNCIL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES: SICKNESS & ABSENCE

Sarratt Parish Council is committed to the care and well-being of its employees. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all members of staff have access to information relating to sickness and absence and are aware of the steps that they must follow when absent from work.

By managing sickness and absence, Sarratt Parish Council aims to provide a high quality service to the public and employees.

The Council fully recognises the need to support employees through any periods of absence and their subsequent return to work. An effective policy enables the Council to do this and to also identify any potential working practices, issues affecting employee attendance or morale and / or any underlying problems an employee may be facing.

This Policy covers:

Sickness Leave and Payments
Long Term Absence.
Unauthorised absence & lateness
Annual Leave
Compassionate Leave
Family Support / Emergency Leave
Time Off in Lieu (TOIL)
Dentist / Doctor / Hospital Appointments
Maternity / Paternity / Adoption / Parental Leave
Other Absence

SICKNESS LEAVE AND PAYMENTS

Sarratt Parish Council recognises that there will be occasions when staff are unable to attend work due to sickness, ill health or injury. For these instances, the Council provides a sick pay scheme (Occupational Sick Pay) for its employees in line with the National Joint Council (NJC) Terms and Conditions. Details of sick pay entitlements made by the Council are included in the employee's contract. This Occupational Sick Pay will be for absences due to sickness over the previous 52 weeks, and will include the employee's entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay. Payment is however conditional on the Council's procedures for notification by the employee of their absence and completion of a self-certification form on their return to work or provision of a FIT note from their GP or hospital doctor.

Statutory Sick Pay

Where an employee is ill / injured and unable to attend work, they may be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). SSP is currently paid after 4 Qualifying Days absence from work. The Qualifying Days are the employee's normal working days specified in their contract. Tax and National Insurance will be deducted from SSP and if the employee earns below the lower earnings limit, they will not qualify for SSP.

Notification of absence due to sickness

If an employee is unable to attend work due to sickness, ill health or injury, they must inform their Line Manager, or in their absence his/her deputy, giving the reason, the likely duration and expected date of return. This must be as soon as practical on the first day of absence, so that service levels can be maintained.

If an employee is unable to call personally a third party may call on their behalf.

Regular contact must be maintained with the Line Manager during a period of absence, and the employee should keep their Line Manager informed of their expected return to work date.

All sickness, ill health or injury absence will be recorded on the employee's employment record and will be monitored from time to time.

Certification of Sickness / Ill Health / Injury Absence

For absence of seven days or less (including weekends and public holidays) employees are required to complete a self-certification form which is given to the Line Manager on the employee's return to work.

For all absences which exceed a seven day period (including weekends and public holidays) a 'Fit for Work' (FIT) statement is required from the employee's GP, or a doctor who treated the employee in hospital stating the reason for the absence and expected return to work date. Thereafter the employee shall provide a consecutive FIT statement to cover any subsequent periods of absence.

All sickness absence will be recorded. Sarratt Parish Council will investigate and assess whether further action is necessary if periods of absence due to short-term self certified sickness reach unacceptable levels, or if patterns emerge.

Whilst on absence due to sickness or incapacity employees are not permitted to undertake any paid work for another employer or for any business established by the employee without express permission from the Council.

An employee will be subject to disciplinary procedures where they fail to provide good reasons for failing to comply with notification and certification requirements or make or produce any misleading or untrue statement or document concerning their fitness to work.

Long-term and Persistent Short Term Absence

Long-term absence occurs when an employee suffers from a prolonged illness, injury or disability that means that they will be away from work for an extended period. This type of absence refers to sickness over a period of more than four calendar weeks. The Council may also treat as long term absence any series of frequent, including unconnected, short term illnesses (persistent short term absence).

Whilst Sarratt Parish Council will take a sympathetic view about genuine ill health problems and will provide a supportive approach to employees in these circumstances, further investigation of the reasons for long term or persistent short term absence may be required in order to maintain the on-going operation of the Council.

In cases where an employee's absence reaches excessive levels or there is a lack of information about the circumstances of the sickness/incapacity absence, the Council may request medical information about the employee's condition from their GP. Any expenses incurred i.e. paying for a medical examination/report will be covered by the Council.

The Council also reserves the right to require an employee at any time to submit to a medical examination/report by a medical practitioner nominated by the Council, subject to the provisions of the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988 where applicable. Any costs associated with the examination/report will be met by the Council.

Employees who are frequently absent due to sickness/incapacity may require further medical investigation through a Council nominated Occupational Health Advisor to enable the Council to assist the employee's return to work, if possible.

Employees who have been absent from work due to sickness/incapacity are expected to maintain regular contact with their Line Manager.

Following a long-term absence due to sickness/incapacity Sarratt Parish Council will arrange a Return to Work Interview with the employee when they are fit to return to work. This is to ensure that Sarratt Parish Council is clear on the reasons for absence and to enable the Council to offer support to the employee and ensure adequate steps are in place to prepare for their return to work. At the discretion of the Council and dependant on the levels of staffing and operational flexibility available to the Council the following options may be considered by the Council for the employee's return to work:

- Lighter duties
- Flexible working
- Reasonable adjustments to working conditions
- Provision of specialist equipment
- Alternative work

After a period of extended absence, a phased return to work may also be considered by the Council. The Return to Work Interview will also seek to understand whether a recurrence of the illness or injury is likely following the employee's return to work.

Where ill-health means the employee is unlikely to return to work for a long period of time, the Council may need to consider bringing the employee's employment to an end. In these circumstances, the Council will:

- Review the employee's absence record to assess what action needs to be taken to address the employee's absences, which if not resolved may justify dismissal
- Consult with the employee regarding the Council's concern over the extended period of absence(s) and agree any actions
- Obtain up-to-date medical advice, and where appropriate an occupation health assessment
- Advise the employee in writing as soon as it is established that termination of employment may become a possibility
- Meet with the employee to discuss the options and consider the employee's views on continuing employment before any decisions are made, allowing the employee to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative

- Review if there are any alternative jobs that the employee could do prior to taking any decision on whether or not to dismiss
- Allow a right of appeal against any decision to dismiss the employee on grounds of long-term ill health
- Following this meeting, inform the employee of the final decision

Absence as a result of disability

Where an employee experiences sickness absence as a result of a disability it will be treated in line with the provisions contained within the Equality Act 2010 (formerly as part of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995). This will include considering whether any reasonable adjustments can be made to accommodate the disability.

UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE AND LATENESS

Unauthorised absence occurs when an employee fails to attend work and has not made a prior arrangement with their Line Manager or has not notified their Line Manager of absence due to sickness/incapacity as set out above.

Where an employee has returned from any period of unauthorised absence, a Return to Work Interview will be conducted. The employee will be expected to explain the reasons for their unauthorised absence and the Council reserves the right to deduct the unauthorised absence from their annual leave entitlement. Unauthorised absence may also result in disciplinary action.

Sarratt Parish Council recognises there may be occasions when it is unavoidable to be late for work. The employee should contact their Line Manager to explain the reason for the delay. The employee will be expected to make up any time lost at work due to lateness.

ANNUAL LEAVE

Details of annual leave are included in the employee's employment contract.

It should be noted that all requests for annual leave are at the discretion of the Line Manager with consideration to the operational requirements of Sarratt Parish Council, including staffing provision and for events in the Council calendar and Council meetings.

COMPASSIONATE LEAVE

Compassionate leave is at the overall discretion of the Parish Council. However, in order to achieve consistency, paid leave will normally be granted as follows:

- For the death of a close family relative i.e. spouse, civil partner, father, mother (or equivalent in laws) or son or daughter, up to three days paid leave will be granted.
- The Parish Council will consider the individual circumstances, including consideration to whether the individual has to organise funeral arrangements, in which case a further two days may be granted for this purpose.
- In addition, one day of paid leave will be granted for attendance at the funeral of a close family member.

FAMILY SUPPORT / EMERGENCY LEAVE

Examples of when emergency leave is appropriate are set out below:-

- To provide assistance or make arrangements for the provision of care for a dependant who is ill or injured.
- On the occasion of an unexpected disruption or termination of arrangements for the care of a dependant.
- To deal with an incident which involves a child of the employee.

Employees should be aware that for the circumstances listed above, the Council would expect employees to use their annual leave entitlement, subject to the usual approval process, to offset the need to take unpaid leave.

The Parish Council has overall discretion concerning additional leave allowance in exceptional circumstances, giving consideration to the needs of the individual member of staff at the time of the request and the ongoing operational efficiency of the Council. The right to time off for dependants is contained in s.57A of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

TIME OFF IN LIEU (TOIL)

The standard working week is defined in the employee's contract. For employees with a provision in their contract for TOIL to cover duties worked over and above the standard week, a maximum of 50% of weekly hours defined in the employee's contract may be carried over from one month to the next. Any hours in addition to this will be removed. Prior approval from the employee's Line Manager must be obtained before taking TOIL.

DENTIST/DOCTOR/HOSPITAL APPOINTMENTS

The Council recognises employees will, from time to time, need to attend medical appointments for themselves or their dependants. These should be arranged, where possible, in the employee's own time. Where this is not possible, employees will be allowed time off work for attending necessary medical appointments, and these appointments should be scheduled either early morning or late afternoon if possible, in order to minimize the disruption to the working day. The Council will allow such appointments during normal working hours, where unavoidable, but the hours taken for these appointments will be without pay. In-patient appointments or procedures taking the whole day will be treated as per sick leave.

MATERNITY / PATERNITY / ADOPTION / PARENTAL LEAVE

An employee's entitlement to maternity / paternity / adoption / parental leave is set out in their contract and/or as per the relevant legislation.

OTHER ABSENCE

An employee called for Jury Service shall inform their line manager as soon as possible. Employees will receive full pay for their period of Jury Service less any allowances, other than travel or accommodation costs paid by the court.

Any employee uncertain about any other type of absence shall seek advice from their Line Manager.

Other types of absence may be set out in an employee's contract or may be covered by alternative Council policies or procedures and or statutory rights.

DATA PROTECTION

The Council will treat personal data collected during the absence management process in accordance with its data protection policy on processing special categories of personal data. Information about how an employee's data is used and the basis for processing an employee's data will be provided in the Council's privacy notice. When relying on legitimate interests as the legal ground for processing an employee's data, the employee can object to the processing.

Further guidance can be found in the NALC Policy of Sickness and Absence. Last updated in 2019.

Reviewed and adopted: 9 January 2024