Short-Term Sickness Absence Process – Manager Guide

The process for managing short-term absence aims to balance helping you to manage and support the individuals in your team whilst taking steps to maintain effective staffing levels. This guide is to support you when conducting the formal short-term sickness absence process meetings, to ensure meetings are carried out fairly, consistently and in line with the Supporting Attendance Policy. It provides advice and guidance about carrying out first / second formal absence review meetings and the end of formal stage meeting in terms of:

- preparing for the meeting
- conducting the meeting
- what to do after the meeting

You can use the principles for carrying out formal meetings at the informal meetings as well.

The guide should be used alongside the:

- Supporting Attendance Policy
- action card for managing short-term sickness

There are a number of template letters available for you to use at the various stages of the process:

- Invite to Review of Stage – this is to be used to invite the employee to the meeting to review the stage of the process at the end of the period it is in place. It can be used for the end-of-period review meeting at any stage of the process
- Setting Informal Stage
- Invite to First Formal Stage
- Setting First Formal Stage
- Review of First Formal stage
- Review of Second Formal stage (no HRM present)

Carrying out a formal absence review meeting

In most cases you will conduct a first formal absence review meeting following the outcome of the informal absence review stage and progress someone to the second formal absence review stage as the outcome of the first formal stage. If you are considering starting the process directly at the first / second formal absence review stage (i.e. without an informal / first formal stage immediately beforehand) you need to seek advice from your HR manager first.

The meeting will be between you, as the manager, and the employee. As it is a formal meeting the employee has a right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or a colleague who is an employee of the Trust. There is no need for HR to attend the meeting, unless it is an end of second formal stage meeting and you are considering progressing someone to the third formal stage (which is a capability hearing).

Step 1 – Preparation	
Gather relevant information	• Before the meeting gather all the relevant information you think you might need, e.g. sickness absence records, patterns of absences information, return to work interview

	records, relevant self/medical certificates, Working Well reports, etc.
Arrange an appropriate date, time and venue	• Arrange to meet with the employee as soon as possible. • Ensure the venue allows for privacy and not being interrupted.
Invite the employee	• Use the template letter available to advise the employee of the meeting. • Make sure you give at least 7 calendar days' notice of the meeting.
Step 2 – At the meeting	
Introductions	• Make any introductions if they are needed. • Explain the purpose of the meeting. • Inform the employee the meeting is being held in accordance with the Trust's Supporting Attendance Policy.

Cover the following as appropriate	• Check if employee is okay to continue if they attend unaccompanied.
	• The dates of the absence(s) which have resulted in them progressing to this meeting, including if there is a pattern of absence.
	• The reasons for the absence(s).
	• Any underlying health issues.
	• If the absences are:
	  ○ related to pregnancy or a disability – if the absence is pregnancy-related it does not count towards trigger points
	  ○ the result of a capability issue
	  ○ related to work incidents or situations where some further action may be needed.
	• If there is a likelihood of future absences.
	• If there is any ongoing treatment which will require future planned absence.
	• The Working Well report if there is a recent one and if any reasonable adjustments need to be considered.
	• If there is a need for Working Well referral now.
	• Any support you or the Trust is able to provide – ensure employee is aware of the Staff Health & Wellbeing pages on the Trust intranet and knows how to access them.
	• Any impact working extra hours, bank, overtime or secondary employment may be having on their health and attendance.
	• Any personal issues that may be contributing to their health and wellbeing.
	• The impact the sickness absence is having on the service.

Discuss support and actions	• Determine what actions need to be taken following the meeting and/or ongoing support required after the meeting. • Once discussed recap what has been agreed to ensure you capture everything.

Inform employee of outcome	• Inform the employee they are being placed on the first or second formal stage of the process for managing short-term sickness, in line with the Trust's Supporting Attendance Policy.
	• Explain:
	  ○ this means their attendance will be monitored for 6 months
	  ○ you may meet after the first 3 months for an interim / midpoint review, depending on their absence levels during that period, if new Working Well advice is received or to check reasonable adjustments agreed are in place
	  ○ you will meet again at the end of the 6 months to review their level of attendance during the first/second formal stage – you might want to plan the date for the meeting
	  ○ if further episodes of absence occur at any point during the next 6 months, it may result in them progressing to a second form absence review / final absence review hearing.
	• Remind them of what the triggers for monitoring attendance are.

Check is there is anything to discuss	Ask employee if there is anything else they want to discuss and/or they have any questions.
End meeting	• Thank employee for attending. • Advise you will confirm the main points discussed in a letter.
Step 3 – After the meeting	
Write to employee	• Use the template letter to confirm the main points discussed at the meeting. • You need to do this within 7 calendar days of the meeting taking place. • Ensure a copy of the letter is placed on the employee's personal file.
Follow-up actions	• Complete any documentation and/or actions as required.
Monitor progress/review date(s)	• Keep an eye on how the employee is, their attendance levels and the impact of any reasonable adjustments or support agreed. • Make sure you meet with the employee at the agreed interim and final review dates, giving them at least 7 calendar days' notice of each meeting, and confirm the main points discussed in writing afterward.

Carrying out an end of formal review stage meeting

The meeting at the end of a formal review stage will be between you, as the line manager, and the employee. As it is a formal meeting the employee has a right to be represented or accompanied by a trade union representative or a colleague who is an employee of the Trust. There is no need for HR to attend the meeting, unless you are considering progressing to the third formal stage.

There are three options as the outcome of a formal review stage:

a. The formal process ends as there has been substantial improvement in attendance and the employee is within trigger points.
b. You extend current stage as there has been some improvement in attendance but you still have some concerns about the level of attendance.
c. You proceed to the next formal stage as attendance has not improved as required.

Step 1 – Preparation	
Gather relevant information	• Before the meeting gather all the relevant information you think you might need, e.g. sickness absence records in the 6 months of the formal stage, return to work interview records, relevant self/medical certificates, Working Well reports, information on reasonable adjustments agreed at the beginning or during of the formal review stage, etc.
Arrange an appropriate date, time and venue	• Arrange to meet with the employee as soon as possible. • Ensure the venue allows for privacy and not being interrupted.
Invite the employee	• Use the template letter available to advise the employee of the meeting. • Make sure you give at least 7 calendar days' notice of the meeting.
Get HR advice if you need it	• If you are unsure whether to end the stage, extend it or move to the next stage seek advice from your HR manager in advance.
Step 2 – At the meeting	
Introductions	• Make any introductions if they are needed. • Explain the purpose of the meeting. • Inform the employee the meeting is being held in accordance with the Trust's Supporting Attendance Policy.

Cover the following as appropriate	• Check if employee is okay to continue if they attend unaccompanied.
	• The dates of any absence(s) they have had during the 6 months of the formal review, including if there is a pattern of absence, and the reasons for the absence(s).
	• The reasons for the absence(s).
	• Any underlying health issues.
	• If the absences are:
	  ○ related to pregnancy or a disability – if the absence is pregnancy-related it does not count towards trigger points
	  ○ the result of a capability issue
	  ○ related to work incidents or situations where some further action may be needed.
	• If there is a likelihood of future absences.
	• If there is any ongoing treatment which will require future planned absence.
	• The Working Well report if there is a recent one.
	• Any reasonable adjustments that have been in place during the stage and if they have helped.
	• If any reasonable adjustments need to be considered.

	• If there is a need for Working Well referral now. • Any support you or the Trust is able to provide – ensure employee is aware of the Staff Health & Wellbeing pages on the Trust intranet and knows how to access them. • Any impact working extra hours, bank, overtime or secondary employment may be having on their health and attendance. • Any personal issues that may be contributing to their health and wellbeing. • The impact any ongoing sickness absences are having on the service.
Inform the employee of the outcome	If outcome is ending the formal process: • Acknowledge the improvement and that no further action is required. • Make them aware that if any further absences occur within 6 months of this review meeting the formal review stage will be re-invoked. Although if you have concerns about the frequency, trends or patterns of any future absences it is also possible you will invoke the next formal stage (rather than re-invoking this formal review stage).
	If outcome is extending the current formal stage: • Acknowledge there has been some improvement in their attendance but you still have some concerns about their level of attendance. • Explain you are extending the current formal stage for a further 6 months. • Explore if there are any considerations / reasonable adjustments that may help improve their attendance (if not already discussed). • Advise if there is not an improvement in attendance during the extension the next formal review stage may be invoked.

	If outcome is proceeding to next formal stage:
	• Explain their attendance has not improved as required therefore you are proceeding to next formal review stage.
	• If proceeding to second formal stage:
	  ○ explain this will be in place for 6 months.
	  ○ explore if there are any considerations that may help improve their attendance (if not already discussed).
	  ○ advise if there is not an improvement in attendance during second formal extension the next formal review stage may be invoked, which is a final formal absence review hearing.
	• If proceeding to final formal stage HR must attend the meeting and they will advise in advance what should be covered at this point.

Discuss support and actions	• Determine what actions, if any, need to be taken following the meeting and/or ongoing support required after the meeting and summarise these.

Check is there is anything to discuss	• Ask employee if there is anything else they want to discuss and/or they have any questions.
Step 3 – After the meeting	
Write to employee	• Use the template letter to confirm the main points discussed at the meeting. • You need to do this within 7 calendar days of the meeting taking place. • Ensure a copy of the letter is placed on the employee's personal file.
Follow-up actions	• Complete any documentation and/or actions as required.
Monitor progress/review date(s)	• Keep an eye on how the employee is, their attendance levels and the impact of any reasonable adjustments or support agreed. • If you have extended the current stage or progressed to the next formal stage make sure you meet with the employee at the agreed interim and final review dates, giving them at least 7 calendar days' notice of each meeting, and confirm the main points discussed in writing afterward.

Tips

- Be mindful of timescales and stick to them.
- Ensure meetings take place as soon as possible after the absence that caused the trigger breach, not a month or two later – carrying out the meeting too long after the absence could lead to the process being challenged. Also the situation around the reason for the absence may have changed by this point in time (sometimes significantly).
- Make sure you give 7 calendar days of notice of the meeting and send the outcome letter within 7 days of the meeting – failing to follow timescales set out in the policy could lead to the process being challenged.
- At the meeting ensure the discussion is open and sympathetic, giving the employee plenty of opportunity to discuss any concerns they have that may prevent them for attending work on a regular basis. Although you are following a process, for the employee it will feel personal and they struggle to be open about / deal with any health issues they have.
- Make sure any agreed adjustments and/or support is put in place in a timely fashion and monitor to understand if it is helping make a positive difference.
- Make sure you manage all your team's absences consistently – every case of sickness absence is different due to the nature, duration or frequency of the illness or absences, underlying health conditions, etc., which is why it is important to ensure you are consistent in how you treat staff.
- Seek HR advice if you need it. Remember your HR manager is able to review letters prior to them being sent.