



ANDOVER TOWN COUNCIL

Sickness and Absence Management Policy 2026

1. Purpose

Andover Town Council aims to support the health and wellbeing of its employees and to secure good attendance so that services to the community are maintained. This policy sets out how sickness absence is reported, certified, paid and managed. It reflects ACAS guidance on absence management: absence will be handled fairly, consistently, supportively and confidentially, with dismissal on grounds of ill health only ever a last resort under the Capability Policy.

The Council will support employees who suffer ill health through occupational health advice, reasonable time to recover, reasonable adjustments to work or duties (temporary or permanent), phased returns, and consideration of flexible or home working.

2. Principles

- All employees must follow this policy; failure to do so without good reason may be dealt with under the Disciplinary Policy and may affect payment of sick pay.
- Absence which gives continuing cause for concern will be managed under the Capability Policy (ill health) or, where absence is not genuine, the Disciplinary Policy.
- The Council may, with consent, refer any employee to an independent occupational health adviser or doctor, and complies with the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988, under which employees have the right to see a medical report before it is supplied.
- Sickness records are confidential and are handled as special category data under the UK GDPR.

3. Reporting Absence

An employee who is unable to attend work must telephone the Town Clerk personally, wherever possible within one hour of their normal start time, stating the reason for absence, whether they will seek medical advice, and their expected return date. The Town Clerk must notify the Chair of the HR Sub-Committee of their own absence. If the employee cannot telephone personally, someone may call on their behalf, but the employee should make direct contact as soon as possible. During continued absence the employee must keep the Town Clerk informed of progress and their likely return date.

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4. Certification

- For absences of up to seven calendar days, employees must complete a self-certification and return to work form on their return.
- For absences of more than seven calendar days, a fit note (Statement of Fitness for Work) must be provided and further fit notes must be supplied without a gap for the duration of the absence. Fit notes may be issued digitally and, since July 2022, by doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists and physiotherapists.
- Where a fit note states the employee “may be fit for work” subject to adjustments (such as a phased return, altered hours, amended duties or workplace adaptations), the Town Clerk will discuss and, where reasonably practicable, implement the advice; if the adjustments cannot be accommodated, the fit note is treated as “not fit for work”.
- The Council may require medical evidence for any absence and will meet the reasonable cost of private certificates it requests.
- Absence that is not reported and certified in accordance with this policy will be treated as unauthorised, will be unpaid, and may lead to disciplinary action.

5. Sick Pay

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

Following the Employment Rights Act 2025, from 6 April 2026 SSP is payable from the first qualifying day of sickness absence — the previous three “waiting days” have been abolished — and the lower earnings limit no longer applies, so all employees are eligible regardless of earnings. SSP is paid at the lower of the statutory weekly rate (£123.25 for 2026/27) and 80 per cent of the employee’s normal weekly earnings, for up to 28 weeks. Compliance is enforceable by the Fair Work Agency.

Contractual (occupational) sick pay

Employees are employed on NJC Green Book terms and, subject to compliance with this policy, receive occupational sick pay inclusive of SSP on the national scale: during the first year of service, one month’s full pay and (after four months’ service) two months’ half pay; during the second year, two months’ full pay and two months’ half pay; during the third year, four months’ full pay and four months’ half pay; during the fourth and fifth years, five months’ full pay and five months’ half pay; and after five years’ service, six months’ full pay and six months’ half pay. The Council may extend the period of sick pay in exceptional cases. The Town Clerk will notify an employee in writing before their entitlement reduces or expires.

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6. Return to Work Discussions

A return to work discussion will be held privately and supportively after every absence, in line with ACAS good practice. It will confirm the employee is fit to resume duties, identify any support or adjustments needed, complete the self-certification form, update the employee on developments, and, where attendance has reached the review points in section 7, explain the next steps. For home-based staff the discussion may take place by telephone or video call.

7. Managing Frequent Short-Term Absence

The following review points prompt a closer look at an employee's attendance: three or more separate absences in a rolling six-month period, or five or more in a rolling twelve-month period. Patterns of absence (for example regular Mondays or Fridays, or absences adjoining leave) may also prompt review. Reaching a review point is not misconduct: the first step is always a supportive conversation to establish whether there is an underlying cause.

Where attendance remains a concern, a formal meeting will be held, conducted by the Town Clerk with the Chair of the HR Sub-Committee, at which the employee may be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague. Outcomes may include occupational health referral, changed certification requirements, attendance standards and a review period, reasonable adjustments, flexible working, redeployment, or progression to the Capability or Disciplinary procedure. Any absence disclosed as related to mental health or to work-related stress will prompt early supportive contact and, where the cause may be work-related, a stress risk assessment using the HSE Management Standards.

8. Managing Long-Term Absence

Absence of four weeks or more is treated as long-term. The Town Clerk will keep in regular, agreed contact with the employee; the Town Clerk and the Chair of the HR Sub-Committee will review the absence periodically and may visit by appointment; and an early occupational health referral will be made to advise on prognosis, adjustments and a supported return, including a phased return. Where medical advice indicates that a return to the employee's role is unlikely, options including redeployment, ill-health retirement under the LGPS regulations, and ultimately termination on capability grounds will be considered under the Capability Policy, with up-to-date medical evidence, full consultation with the employee, and before contractual sick pay expires wherever possible.

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9. Disability and Reasonable Adjustments

Under the Equality Act 2010 (which replaced the Disability Discrimination Act referred to in earlier versions of this policy) the Council must not treat a disabled employee unfavourably because of something arising from their disability and must make reasonable adjustments to remove substantial disadvantage. Disability-related absence will be recorded separately from ordinary sickness absence and taken into account when applying the review points in section 7. Adjustments may include changes to duties, hours, equipment or premises, phased returns, and support through the government's Access to Work scheme. Occupational health advice will be sought where disability may be a factor.

10. Other Absence Provisions

- Medical, dental and similar appointments should be arranged outside working hours where possible; where not possible, time off should be agreed in advance with the Town Clerk.
- An employee who falls sick during annual leave may have the leave reinstated where the absence is reported under section 3 and supported by medical evidence. Statutory annual leave continues to accrue during sickness absence, and an employee prevented by sickness from taking statutory leave may carry forward up to four weeks into the next leave year, to be used within eighteen months, in accordance with the Working Time Regulations 1998 as amended.
- Unauthorised absence is unpaid and will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Policy.
- This policy does not apply to other forms of leave, including: time off for dependants in an emergency (Employment Rights Act 1996); Carer's Leave of up to one week's unpaid leave per year to arrange or provide care for a dependant with a long-term care need, a right from the first day of employment (Carer's Leave Act 2023); Neonatal Care Leave and Pay (from April 2025); maternity, paternity, adoption, shared parental and parental leave — noting that statutory paternity leave and unpaid parental leave became rights from the first day of employment on 6 April 2026 (Employment Rights Act 2025); jury service; and compassionate leave. These are covered by the relevant Council policies and statutory schemes.

11. Occupational Health and Confidentiality

Occupational health advisers provide impartial advice on fitness for work, adjustments, return-to-work programmes and ill-health retirement assessments under the LGPS regulations. Medical

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information held by occupational health is confidential; reports will be shared with the Town Clerk and HR Sub-Committee only with the employee's consent, except where the adviser considers there is a serious risk to the employee or others, which would be discussed with the employee first.

12. Responsibilities

Employees

- Attend work when fit, report and certify absence in accordance with this policy, keep in contact, and engage with support offered.

Town Clerk

- Applies this policy consistently, keeps accurate and confidential absence records, holds return to work discussions, makes occupational health referrals, and reports absence levels to the HR Sub-Committee at least annually.

HR Sub-Committee

- Oversees the operation of this policy, participates in formal meetings, and monitors absence levels and trends.

13. Grievances and Data Protection

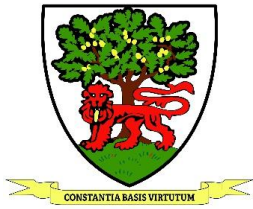
An employee aggrieved by the application of this policy should raise the matter with the Town Clerk informally and may use the Grievance Procedure. Absence records are special category data processed in accordance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, handled under the Data Protection Policy and Procedure and retained in line with the Records Retention and Disposal Policy.

Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Capability Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Grievance Procedure
- Flexible Working Policy

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- Health and Safety Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Maternity Leave and Pay Policy
- Parental Leave Policy
- Data Protection Policy and Procedure

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