



“An Excellent Authority”

Service Instruction

Absence and Attendance Service Instruction

Document Control

Description and Purpose

This document is intended to give guidance to managers and employees regarding the process to follow if an employee is unable to attend work and the approach to be taken upon their return.

Active date	Review date	Author	Editor	Publisher
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Permanent	X	Temporary	If temporary, review date must be 3 months or less.	

Amendment History

Version	Date	Reasons for Change	Amended by
New			

Equalities Impact Assessment

Initial	Full	Date	Reviewed by	Document location
	X			

Related Documents

Doc. Type	Ref. No.	Title	Document location
SI		Capability	
SI	0624	Part Shift	
SI	0589	Other Duties	
SI	0660	Secondary Employment	
SI	0623	Health screen leave	
SI	0206	3 rd Party Claims	
SI	0782	Medical Discharge Procedure Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing instruction	

Contact

Department	Email	Telephone ext.
Professional Standards	Professional Standards	

Target audience

All MFS	X	Ops Crews	Fire safety	Community FS			
Principal officers		Senior officers	Non uniformed				

Relevant legislation (if any)

The Employees Relations Act 1999 & The Equality Act 2010

Introduction

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority (MFRA) recognises the importance that its people and their performance have on the continued success of the Organisation. As a result it places great importance on an employee's ability to undertake their role in a manner which meets the needs and expectations of the Authority.

This Service Instruction and the process contained within it, form part of and is aligned directly to the Capability Procedure. The procedure is applicable to all employees bound by the Authority's terms and conditions. With the implementation of a Capability procedure, the Authority has introduced a fair, impartial and reasonable process, to ensure that the Authorities' statutory duties are met within an agreed organisational framework.

An employee's attendance for work is a basic term of their contract of employment.

Absence is regularly monitored and measured by the organisation and can be benchmarked with other like organisations. The Authority has set specific absence targets and 'trigger points' for action for all groups of employees.

The organisation takes the view that all absence which is linked to ill health or a medical condition is genuine and in acknowledging this the organisation will take reasonable steps to support individuals back to work as expediently as possible.

The Authority recognises that not every individual who receives support under this process will be capable of sufficient improvement to meet the agreed organisational standards.

The Authority recognises that such a situation may arise through no fault of the individual or the Authority; however the Authority has a responsibility to manage each situation accordingly, on an individual basis, fairly and consistently. It will implement and follow the appropriate policy and procedure to its logical conclusion.

Improved Attendance

Improved attendance enhances the Authority's ability to meet its aims and objectives in order to provide the best possible service to the communities we serve and to respond to emergencies in a safe and effective manner.

The application of this Service Instruction will:-

- Promote improved attendance and a positive attitude towards recognising good attendance.
- Identify causes of absenteeism and take effective remedial action.

Service Instruction – Absence & Attendance

- Identify and monitor the absence levels of individuals and the impact on the performance of the Service.
- Ensure that Line Managers are implementing the Service Instruction policy and acting in accordance with their responsibilities.

Ensure employees benefit from the extensive level of support that the Service provides

Sickness/ Absence and Notification:

For every period of absence due to sickness or injury, all employees must ensure that Time and Resource Management (TRM) are contacted in order to record their absence.

DAY 1:

Employee Initial notification:

0151 296 4300

All calls to TRM are recorded for Time and Resource Management purposes as well as other Human Resource activities. In the case of an operational member of the Service/shift related MACC staff this must be done at least one hour before the duty tour concerned is due to commence. In the case of operational / MACC staff on day duties and support staff then TRM should be notified by 9.30 am on the first date of sickness absence.

Completion of Notification of Sickness Form

In all cases employees need to provide the following information in order for TRM to complete a Notification of Sickness Form.

- Name and Service number.
- Location and watch.
- Rank/Designation and Call sign (if applicable)
- Nature of Sickness. (Compulsory)
- Type – Sickness due to Service, Sickness not due to Service.
- Estimated period of sickness
- Line Manager
- Driver (Y/N) Ops Only
- Overtime (Y/N) Ops Only
- Retained (Y/N) Ops Only
- Contact telephone number

TRM will advise the individual's Line Manager and the Occupational Health Team. For operational employees TRM will forward the form via email to the relevant Manager(s) and then delete the section of symptoms presented for privacy reasons before forwarding the form to station login e.g. (station 33 Southport). This is to ensure all the appropriate managers are made aware of any personnel who are absent

DAY 4:

Employee Second Notification:

0151 296 4300

All employees are required to contact the Service on their fourth day of absence. Employees should contact TRM as per their requirements for day one.

For operational employees on the 2-2-4 duty system, this marks the end of their first full tour of duty absent. For all employees day four is the trigger for Statutory Sick Pay to commence.

DAY 8:

All employees are required to contact the Service on their eighth day of sickness. Employees should contact TRM.

For operational staff on the 2-2-4 duty system, this marks the commencement of their second absent tour of duty. For all staff from this point in their sickness absence employees are required to obtain and submit a General Practitioner (GP) Medical Certification (Fit Note). Failure to provide such certification may result in the cessation of payment of sick pay.

NB All GP Fit Notes should be sent directly to the Occupational Health Team at Service Headquarters. When sending notes to the Occupational Health Team, please do not use the internal mail system. Send either via the external post clearly marked “Confidential” or where possible bring in person to Reception at SHQ, where a member of the team will collect the note from you.

DAY 14:

Employee to Contact Occupational Health

Notification 0151 296 4336 09.30—15.30 Mon to Fri

All employees absent for two weeks are required to contact the Occupational Health Nurse, Occupational Health Medical Suite at Service Headquarters.

This contact provides the opportunity for employees to access early medical advice from a professionally qualified Occupational Health medical practitioner, and can facilitate a referral into the Occupational Health support services offered by the Service, such as physiotherapy.

All staff that have fourteen continuous days or more days absent must be declared fit to resume duties.

This must be in the form of a “GP Fit Note”, for employees who have not attended an Occupational Health Medical Appointment, or certification by Occupational Health practitioner stating that the employee is now capable of resuming work.

Employees should make every effort to attend Occupational Health appointments.

Service Instruction – Absence & Attendance

Please note that failure to attend an Occupational Health appointment without twenty four hours prior notice may result in an invoice being raised for the cost of the appointment, the Service may also withdraw payment of Occupational sick pay until a further medical appointment can be arranged.

Employees who fail to comply with the requirements of the absence procedure will have the payment of their sickness pay reviewed and the Service may cease payment of Occupational sick pay.

Service Contact with the employee:

An employee's manager must initiate contact within the first three days of their sickness absence or as soon as reasonably practical. Contact must also be made once a month by that manager if the employee is off longer than twenty eight sick days. This is the timescale after which an employee is considered long term sick. Following that contact information regarding it must be sent to the Occupational Health Welfare update mailbox.

When an employee is absent due to an injury, on or off duty, then the Occupational Health Nurse is notified by the Manager. Under the Service's early intervention procedures the Nurse shall where appropriate, contact the employee offering the provision of physiotherapy by a practice approved by the Service.

If an employee reports absent sick due to stress, anxiety, depression or a similar problem they shall be referred under the Service's positive mental health and wellbeing Service Instruction, for a medical assessment, and appropriate advice and assistance will be offered.

Non notification of Absence:

If the individual has not notified TRM before the start of their working day/shift, the Line Manager should attempt to contact the employee via telephone. Should the manager fail to make contact with the individual the Line Manager should visit (or arrange for a manager located closer) to visit the individual at their home address where this is practicable and before the end of the first day of absence.

If all attempts to contact the individual fail by the second day of unauthorised absence then the Professional Standards Manager should be advised who will consider stoppage of pay.

If employees do not comply with any stage of the notification procedure and a reasonable explanation cannot be given, the payment of occupational sick pay may be suspended and the matter dealt with under the conduct procedure.

Resumption of Duties:

Booking Fit

0151 296 4300

All employees must book fit as soon as they are aware of the date they shall be returning to work. For operational members of the Service this must be at least one hour before the duty is due to start.

If after a Medical examination by the Occupational Health Doctor, if an employee has been found unfit for any duties, they may not return to normal duties until the Occupational Health Doctor so certifies.

Where there is a difference of opinion between the Occupational Health Doctor and the employee's GP regarding the fitness for duty, the Occupational Health Doctor will take all appropriate steps to liaise with the employee's GP to resolve the differences in line with the protocol for medical divergence.

In the case of Green and Red Book employee's where there is a difference of opinion between the Occupational Health Doctor and the employee's GP, the opinion of the Occupational Health Doctor shall prevail.

Return to Work interviews

This interview must be completed on the employee's first day back at work. This is an informal discussion with a suitable line manager and the employee.

The manager will speak to the employee about their attendance and discuss any issue with the employee. They will record this as per the requirements of the Service. ([Appendix A](#)). The manager should ensure that employees are clear of the expected outcomes and the process by which they will be achieved.

Personnel who return to work on 'Other Duties' must undergo a 'Return To Work' interview at the location they report to on their immediate return following absence.

It is the employee's responsibility to notify a Line Manager to ensure that an interview takes place and the Line Manager has an obligation to conduct this interview expeditiously.

The manager should in all cases complete a Return to Work Form AM2. This form is to be emailed to the Absence Management Team mailbox and a copy given/e-mailed to the staff member. A further copy can be passed to the Station Manager/Section Manager if requested. The return to work informal meeting will be held to discuss / confirm with the employee the following:

- Manage the employee's return back to work
- Ensure that they are fit to resume duties,
- Ensure that they understand the necessity for good attendance,

- Identify if they require any additional or on-going support,
- A review of previous absence from AM1 records,
- To confirm if absence targets have been exceeded.

Copies of all the required forms are located on the portal. All relevant paperwork must be submitted to the Absence Management Team.

Longer term absences

Where an employee has been absent from work for a lengthy period it may be advisable for the Occupational Health team to facilitate a meeting prior to the employee's first day back to agree what considerations can be made to assist the employee to return to work.

Absence Targets/Triggers

Absence from work places a significant strain on the Authority both in financial and operational terms. If as a result of persistent short term or continual long-term absences, an employee is failing to attend for duty, then the Authority has a responsibility to take appropriate action.

Where an employee's sickness absence is sustained over a long term and renders the individual incapable of satisfactorily carrying out his or her duties, this may ultimately result in the Authority being unable continue to sustain their employment.

Employees with frequent or patterned absence will be managed under either the conduct or capability procedure whichever is appropriate, once the facts have been ascertained.

Personnel who trigger specific targets will be dealt with under the Authority's Capability Procedure.

The Authority has set absence targets providing 'trigger points' for action for all groups of employees, as follows: these can be any or all of the below

Sickness absence resulting in a total of 8 working days/shifts/retained cover periods in any consecutive preceding 12-month period (or pro rata for part time staff) or determined by the Improvement Notice under in line with the capability Service instruction.

3 separate instances of sickness absence, or unavailability for retained cover periods, in preceding 12 months or as determined by the Improvement notice in line with the capability Service Instruction

Where a sickness absence pattern or trend is identified. A non-exhaustive list of examples include:

- Regularity of sickness absence on a Friday or Monday;
- Pattern of taking sickness absence during school/summer holidays;
- Pattern of similar day or night shifts;

Service Instruction – Absence & Attendance

- Pattern of sickness remaining just below frequency or just below days count;
- Regularity of booking sick following refusal of public holiday leave;
- Pattern of sickness absence during sporting fixtures, major events etc.

Where patterns/trends of sickness absence are identified or sickness absence exceeds the applicable targets, then management may request the employee obtains and provides a GP Fit Note in respect of further absences on the grounds of sickness, in order that the employee may qualify for occupational sick pay in respect of such absences.

In such circumstances, the Authority shall refund the cost of a GP Fit Note. If the employee refuses to attend their GP, or fails to provide a valid Fit note, the Authority will be entitled to notify the employee that they will not be paid occupational sick pay in respect of those absences.

Similarly, the Authority may at any time require the employee to attend the Services premises for an Occupational Health appointment and if the employee fails to do so, then the Authority shall have the discretion to cease payment of Occupational sick pay.

Alternative Duty Systems/ Work Locations

Self Rostering System

Where an individual is absent through sickness within a self rostering system the following will apply over the (current) eight week reference period:

- An hourly credit will be made for all current shifts planned within the system up until the end of the eight week reference period
- For absence monitoring purpose only shifts that have been planned will be counted as duty days.

Should sickness extend into the following eight week reference period;

- Individuals will be credited with hours mirroring a 2-2-4 system i.e. the first 4 shifts of sickness (in the new eight week reference period) will count as duty days and be credited with the appropriate 12 hour amounts. The following 4 shifts will be classed as rota and therefore not credited any hourly amount. This will ensure that an individual absent over a complete eight week period will achieve their full contractual requirement of 336 hours.
- For absence monitoring purpose a system mirroring the accrual of hours detailed above will be followed i.e. the first 4 shifts of sickness (in a new eight week reference period) will count as 'duty days due to the accrual of hours. The following 4 shifts will be classed as rota as hours will not be accrued. These shifts will not be counted as 'duty days' for absence monitoring purpose.

LLAR System

A credit will be made for any planned shifts within the sickness period. For the purpose of absence monitoring only shifts that have been planned will be counted as duty days.

All personnel within the self-rostering LLAR system have the opportunity to roster unavailable for any periods of short term sickness. Personnel wishing to utilise this option should contact TRM. The ability to self-roster for periods of short term sickness is at the discretion of the staffing officer.

Please refer to SI 0650 LLAR Staffing

Out of Service Area Secondments

All staff seconded from the Service to other locations or agencies, e.g. the Fire Service College, must still follow all Service procedures for booking sick/injured and fit. This is in addition to any procedures imposed at their seconded location.

It is the responsibility of the seconded person to ensure their manager at their temporary location is aware of their responsibilities. Guidance should be taken using the aide memoire and Z cards. An AM2 must be completed for all periods of sickness and this should be completed by the seconded staff members Line Manager and sent to:
AbsenceManagementTeam@merseyfire.gov.uk

Disregard of Certain Absences

Absences due to disability (as defined under the Equality Act 2010 and advised by the Occupational Health Doctor) and pregnancy related absences will be disregarded. Employees in these circumstances will be required to provide a GP Fit Note for all such absences that states the reason for absence as being pregnancy/disability related, in order for the days not to be counted under the procedure. If applicable the Service will reimburse the cost of the certificate.

Where an employee initially attends work (or is initially available for retained cover), but subsequently goes off duty during a shift/work day then:

- If the employee has worked for more than 50% of the shift/day before going absent, then the employee will not be regarded as being absent.
- TRM should be contacted and informed of the part shift absence immediately the staff member becomes unavailable.
- If the employee remains absent the following day then they must inform TRM of on 0151 296 4300. Their absence day's count will commence from this point.

Please see service instruction 0624 Part Shift Absence for more information.

If an employee has a prearranged hospital appointment which extends over half a shift, then for certain medical conditions additional leave may be allowed. An application for Specialist Health Screening leave should be submitted for consideration, along with all supporting documentation, in advance of the appointment.

Please see service instruction 0623 Specialist Health Screening Leave for more information.

Non-Essential Surgical Procedures

Time needed by employees for elective/cosmetic surgery appointments and procedures without a medical reason, including recuperation periods must be taken from either their annual leave entitlement or as unpaid special leave.

Absences and Annual leave

Employees who are absent prior to their annual leave should contact Attendance Management for information on booking fit or submitting Fit notes to ensure that the employee receives the correct payments.

When an employee has annual leave this will be reallocated to the employee and taken at a time agreed between the employee and Attendance Management. Attendance Management may ask for evidence demonstrating that leave was pre-booked in order to support requests.

Employees who wish to book a holiday during a period of absence should inform the Occupational Health team.

An employee who becomes ill during pre-arranged annual leave can stop their annual leave by notifying Attendance Management on their first day of sickness absence, and booking fit when they are no longer ill. The remainder of their annual leave will then be taken later in agreement with Attendance Management. In order to have the leave re-allocated the request should be supported in all cases by a medical certificate either provided abroad by a medical officer or if possible on their return.

Sickness or injury relating to secondary employment

The Authority will not pay for any absence from duty or sick leave caused by outside employment. Any injury, illness or medical condition sustained during off duty employment or any exposure to hazardous substances whilst carrying out secondary employment must be reported to the Occupational Health Team as soon as possible. Failure to report such injuries, illnesses or medical conditions will be regarded as a disciplinary matter.

An employee who works for another party or on a self-employed basis whilst on sick leave will be regarded as working without permission and this will be considered under the conduct procedures as detailed in the Service instruction. Where an employee is undertaking voluntary work, this should

also be suspended unless the Service's Occupational Health Doctor specifically states that this would be beneficial to the employee's recovery.

Please see Service Instruction 0660 – Secondary Employment for more information.

Probationary Employees

Employees who have had unsatisfactory attendance and timekeeping will not be confirmed in their position. New employees who trigger 2 absences in their 6 month probation (Green Book) or 4 in 12 months (Grey Book) period may have their contracts terminated. Please see the relevant SI on Probation for details on this.

Third Party Claims

The Litigation Department must be notified of all off duty injuries caused by a third party. In accordance with the conditions of service sick pay, will be reclaimed by the Authority from any damages awarded to the employee.

Please see Service Instruction 0206 – Third party Claims on duty or off duty accidents.

Additional support

'Z'cards

The Absence Management Team issue guidance in a number of ways including the issue of a 'z-card' and an aide memoire.

A 'Z card' provides the employee a step by step guide to how to book themselves sick or fit and what number to contact. There is a list of numbers available from occupational health for further help and support (e.g. the Service Employee Assistance Programme provider, PPC). Misplaced or lost 'z card' can be replaced by contacting the Absence Team on ext. 4574

Occupational Health Management Team

0151 296 4917

The objective of the Occupational Health Team is to promote and facilitate the maintenance of the highest possible standards of health and fitness, both physical and mental, for Service employees.

The Occupational Health team shall provide advice to the Service and its employees on their capacity to work and will continually seek to provide support and assistance to ensure that employees are fit to perform their usual role.

The provision of medical services shall be provided by suitably qualified Occupational Doctors and Nurses that the Authority shall directly contract with for their professional services.

Appendix A

Appropriate levels to complete the Informal Stage: Return to Working interview

Grey Book Return to work interview

Employee		Manager
Fire-fighter		Crew/Watch Manager
Crew Manager		Watch Manager
Watch Manager		Watch Manager
Station Manager		Station Manager
Group Manager		Group Manager
Area Manager		Brigade Manager?

Green Book return to work interview

Employee		Manager
Grade 1		Grade 5 or above
Grade 2		Grade 5 or above
Grade 3		Grade 5 or above
Grade 4		Grade 5 or above
Grade 5		Grade 5 or above
Grade 6		Grade 6 or above
Grade 7		Grade 7 or above

The same applies for the rest of the roles/scales.

At Grade 5 or Watch Manager level Return to Work interview can be carried out by a colleague of the same role or above and does not need to be your line manager.

- Grey Book staff this applies to the Crew Managers and above.
- Green Book staff this applies to Grade 5 and above.

A Return to Work interview is an informal meeting to ensure the employee is well and fit for work. If further help and support is needed to improve their recovery, the Occupational Health team is there to provide support.

If you return to work on **other duties** an AM2 (Return to Work interview) must still be carried out and sent to the absence team mailbox. It is your responsibility to ensure an interview is carried out.

Managers must ensure the capability process is followed particularly in relation to staff who return to work on **other duties** as they may not be at their substantive location

Link to Capability.

Employees should be aware that unsustained attendance will be managed via the capability procedure and information regarding the process is referenced in the Capability Service Instruction.