

## Sickness Absence Management Policy

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External References	ACAS Code of Practice HSE Guidance Equality Act 2010
Comments: This document should be used by managers in conjunction with the Managing Sickness Absence Guide which provides practical information about the use of this policy	

## **Sickness Absence Management Policy**

### **1. POLICY STATEMENT**

- 1.1 Blackwood considers the contribution of its employees to be paramount in delivering value and quality to all its customers. As employees are the major resource of the organisation, its Business Plan can not be met without the full participation and contribution of all staff.
- 1.2 Blackwood are committed to minimising the absence of employees through improving their health and well-being and managing attendance.
- 1.2.1 Blackwood accepts that employees will, on occasion, be absent because of ill-health and will provide reasonable support to those absent for legitimate reasons with the aim of encouraging their return to work at the earliest opportunity through a supportive and sympathetic process.

### **2. SCOPE, PURPOSE AND AIMS**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all Blackwood employees.
- 2.2 The purpose of the Absence Management Policy is to assist employees and managers to achieve and maintain an optimum level of attendance at work, to ensure that attendance is managed effectively, whilst ensuring that employees with genuine absence are treated sensitively and that support is provided for a return to work.
- 2.3 The aims of the Absence Management Policy are:
  - To minimise the disruption of service provision and costs caused by sickness absence.
  - To work with employees to take a wellbeing approach to attendance and any sickness absence.
  - To ensure that non-attendance due to ill-health is managed responsibly, consistently and fairly in a proactive manner.
  - To communicate clear procedures to record, report, monitor and control sickness absence.
  - To ensure that all employees are aware of the need to maintain acceptable levels of attendance.
  - To provide a framework for the management of different types of absence.
  - Early identification of health issues where possible.
  - To facilitate the return to work for employees following an absence.



### **3. KEY OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Definition and Types of Sickness Absence**

3.2 Sickness absence occurs where an employee is unable to attend their place of work because of their own ill health.

3.3 Sickness Absence can be defined into the following groups:

- Casual Absence - absence of a short duration lasting a part of a day to three days.
- Short-Term Absence - is defined as absences of short duration lasting four days to four weeks.
- Long Term Absence – a certified absence of four weeks or more.

3.4 This policy relates solely to absence due to the ill health of the employee themselves. Other forms of absence are covered in other policies such as Holiday and Other Leave Policy, Compaaionate Leave Policy.

3.5 It should be specifically noted that absence due to the ill health of children or other dependents is not classed as sickness absence Employees who are unable to attend work due to caring responsibilities must not report that they themselves are unwell. Provision for leave in these circumstances is detailed in the Parental Leave Policy and the Emergency Time Off for Dependants Policy.

3.6 All the policies mentioned above can be found on the Loop.

### **4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **4.1 Employees' Responsibilities**

4.1.1 Employees have a contractual obligation to come to work when they are fit to do so and should take measures to keep absence through ill health to a minimum. If an employee cannot come to work because they are sick, they should follow the formal notification and certification procedures to keep management informed. Employees should adhere to all parts of this policy, including maintaining contact during absences and participating in contact meetings where required. Where an employee is absent due to an accident at work it is their responsibly to ensure that the accident is reported using the Blackwood Accident Reporting Procedure.

#### **4.2 Management Responsibilities**

4.2.1 Managers have the principal responsibility for absence management. It is manager's role to maintain accurate absence records and to monitor absence. Managers should also manage each absence occurrence individually and appropriately in line with this Policy and associated guidance, in order to ensure consistency. Managers are also responsible for the operational efficiency of their teams and should, ensure that the absence of an employee is communicated and that appropriate measures are taken to cover for absence in order to minimise the impact on the service and the team.

4.2.2 Managers must ensure that where an accident at work leads to an absence of 7 days that the Health & Safety Advisor is informed by no later than the 7<sup>th</sup> day of absence to ensure that RIDDOR reporting takes place.

#### **4.3 Human Resources Responsibilities**

The Human Resources team provides support to management and employees in ensuring consistency in dealing with absence and related issues, and where appropriate in advising on how individual absence issues should be handled. The Human Resources team is also responsible for ensuring the Absence Management Policy is reviewed regularly and that organisational absence figures are collated, analysed and monitored.

## **5. HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE (Medical Mandate)**

- 5.1 New employees will complete an employment health questionnaire as part of the pre-employment checks process. New employees will be asked to complete this questionnaire once a conditional offer of employment has been made. This will normally be at the same time references and PVG applications are made. The information supplied in the questionnaire is used to assess fitness for the job offered, supporting the health and wellbeing of the workforce and satisfying the Care Inspectorate requirements about the health, safety and welfare of the workforce.
- 5.2 Where issues arise, the relevant manager will discuss the matter with Human Resources. In order to ensure that appropriate support is provided, risk assessments carried out and subsequent reasonable adjustments recommended. In some cases this may involve a referral to Blackwood's Occupational Health partner for appropriate guidance.

## **6. NOTIFICATION AND CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES**

### **6.1 Notification Procedures**

- 6.1.1 It is the employee's responsibility to contact their manager by telephone as soon as is practicably possible, to notify them of their absence either on or before their first day of absence. Employees should report their absence as follows:
- For Care Home employees - contact the Duty Manager or a senior team member. This should be done as far in advance of the shift as possible (e.g. evening before) but as a minimum at least 2 hours prior to the shift commencing.
  - For Housing Support and Care at Home employees - contact the Team Leader or a senior team member as far in advance of the shift as possible (e.g. evening before) but as a minimum at least 2 hours prior to the shift commencing.
  - For Head Office or Regional Office based employees - contact the appropriate manager no later than 1 hour after normal working time has begun. If the manager is unavailable then the Human Resources Team should be contacted directly.
- 6.1.2 If the relevant manager is not available, the employee should leave a message with the most senior team member available giving details of their absence and a contact telephone number for the manager to call them back.
- 6.1.3 The employee should not leave a voicemail message, send a text message or email but must speak to the most senior team member directly to notify them of their absence.
- 6.1.4 Managers may call employees at home if they require any further information in regard to the absence.

- 6.1.5 Employees should provide details of the nature of their sickness, when symptoms began, any medical advice that has been received, or whether medical advice is to be sought, the expected date of return and contact details.
- 6.1.6 In exceptional circumstances, if the employee is unable to phone in person, they can arrange for someone else to telephone on their behalf following the same procedure. The employee must make direct contact with their manager as soon as they are physically able to.
- 6.1.7 The manager will make arrangements with the employee to maintain contact during the absence. The frequency of this contact can be agreed dependent on the reason for the absence and the anticipated timescale for the recovery. It remains the principal responsibility of the employee, however, to keep the organisation updated with any new information, including if the absence is likely to continue beyond a seventh day or the previously advised date of return, if symptoms have changed, or if new medical advice has been received.

## 6.2 **Certification Requirements**

- 6.2.1 For a period of absence of less than 7 calendar days, employees are required to complete and sign a self-certification form as part of the return to work process.
- 6.2.2 A period of absence longer than 7 calendar days (i.e. including rest days and weekends even where weekends are not normally worked) employees are required to submit a valid Fit Note from their GP. The full period of absence must be accounted for and it will be necessary for employees to obtain sequential Fit Notes in the case of a longer absence. There should not be any gaps in the dates of Fit Notes.
- 6.2.3 Employees should not return to work before the day advised by their doctor as they are still certified as being unfit unless the GP has completed the fit note to include advice on what the employee is fit to do or what adjustments would allow their return.
- 6.2.4 Blackwood will make every effort to accommodate advice from a GP regarding adjustments to work, such as light duties. However, where these adjustments cannot be operationally accommodated, the employee will continue on sickness absence.
- 6.2.5 Should an employee wish to return to work before the date a GP has stated (and the GP has not provided advice on what the employee is fit to do) then they should consult their doctor in order to obtain an amended certificate.
- 6.2.6 Blackwood reserves the right to require an employee to obtain a fit note for absences of less than 7 days where it deems this to be appropriate. The reasons for this would be discussed with the employee where necessary.
- 6.2.7 In cases where an employee is a hospital inpatient, the hospital will normally provide the relevant Fit Note.

## 6.3 **Failure to Adhere to Notification and Certification Requirements**

- 6.3.1 It is important that employees follow the above procedures as all breaches can lead to the loss of statutory sick pay and/or occupational sick pay and disciplinary action may be taken. Employees may be considered to be absent without leave if they do not attend work and do not follow the formal notification procedures and this may be deemed to be a breach of the Code of Conduct.

## 7. **ABSENCE DUE TO ACCIDENTS AT WORK**

7.1 Where an employee is absent from work due to an accident at work, it is very important that the correct accident reporting is undertaken and that the Human Resources team and the Health and Safety Advisor are notified of this. This notification must take place as soon as possible, but certainly no later than the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the absence resulting from the accident to ensure that RIDDOR reporting regulations are complied with.

7.2 For further guidance please refer to the Safety Management System or contact the Health and Safety Advisor.

## **8. CONTACT DURING PERIODS OF SICK ABSENCE**

8.1 The manager and the employee are expected to maintain contact as agreed at the notification stage of the absence. This may include regular updates from the employee about their expectations of returning to work or about developments with their health. The employee should submit medical certificates to their manager as soon as they are received and before the expiry of the previous fit note is applicable. All periods of absence must be accounted for.

8.2 Managers may, within reason, contact employees at any time during normal working hours whilst the employee is absent to discuss their absence, offer support and assistance and also to ensure contact is adequately maintained.

## **9. MEDICAL ADVICE**

### **9.1 Fit Notes (Statement of Fitness for Work)**

9.1.2 Fit Notes are issued by a GP when employees are absent due to sickness for over 7 calendar days. GPs can advise that the employee is either:

- Not fit for work, or
- May be fit for work taking into account the 'following advice'

9.1.3 The focus is on what employees can do, rather than what they cannot do. An employee may have some health problems but this does not necessarily prevent them from working. The aim of the fit note is to give employers and employee's greater flexibility in managing sickness absence. The GP should try to suggest ways of helping the employee back to work, outlining on the note the work that the employee can do in spite of their illness or condition. The GP will give advice about the effects of the health condition and some suggestions about the types of adjustment the employer could consider helping the employee back to work.

9.1.4 The employee's manager should consider the advice and then discuss with the employee any appropriate adjustments such as a phased return to work, altered hours, flexible hours, amended duties or workplace adaptations. The GP will provide advice on how long the advice will be valid for.

9.1.5 This should prove helpful in relation to assisting the earlier return to work of employees. It is important to note that we are not bound to follow the GPs advice and if it is not possible for us to follow their advice and the employee can remain on sick leave.

### **9.2 Requesting Medical Advice**

9.2.1 There may be a need to obtain medical advice from a GP or Occupational Health Physician as part of the management of an employee's sickness absence. Management may ask for permission to contact the employee's GP or refer employees for an Occupational Health assessment for a variety of reasons, such as:

- Excessive levels of absence.
- Unacceptable levels of short term unrelated absences in order to determine if there is an underlying medical reason.
- In situations of long term absence to support and inform the individual and management and provide guidance on returning to work.
- Where medical advice is required to assess the individuals capability to carry out their role.

9.2.2 In particular, there may be a need to seek advice regarding:

- The impact of a health problem on the employee's ability to work and their future attendance.
- Timescales for expected improvement.
- Temporary or permanent adjustments to the work place or tasks that would assist in maintaining health and reducing the effects of the health problem on attendance and performance.
- An opinion on the implications of the Equality Act 2010.
- An opinion on suitability for redeployment.
- Proposals for a rehabilitation programme where appropriate.

9.2.3 The employee will be asked to agree that any medical report produced may be disclosed to Blackwood and that the contents of the report may be discussed with the specialist and with Blackwood's advisers. All medical reports will be kept confidential. If an employee does not attend their Occupational Health appointment arranged through the management referral process, a further appointment will be made. If an appointment is missed for a second time, the manager will arrange a review meeting with the employee at which a representative of the Human Resources team may be present. Any decisions made at this meeting regarding the on-going management of the employee's absence will be based on the information available at that time and in the absence of advice that would have been available had the employee attended the Occupational Health appointment as requested. The same approach will be taken where an employee refuses permission for the organisation to obtain a medical report from their GP.

## **10. RETURN TO WORK MEETING**

10.1 A return to work meeting will be conducted by the appropriate manager after any period of absence. The meeting will be arranged at a suitable time on the first day of return to work after absence, or as soon as possible thereafter but within 5 working days, to discuss the following:

- the employee's fitness and readiness to return to work
- that all documentation relating to the absence has been provided
- notification procedures have been followed

- whether any reasonable adjustments are required to accommodate/support their return
- inform them of any organisational updates or news
- current work issues and focus
- general discussions around the employee's absence record including if a trigger point has been reached
- the impact of absence on the team
- decision whether occupational or statutory sick pay will be paid
- identifying whether any further medical advice or information is required, e.g. Occupational Health or a GP report
- any requirement to have a separate more formal meeting to review the overall absence record

10.1.1 Due to geographical constraints it may not be possible for the appropriate manager to meet a returning employee on their first day back at work. In these circumstances, the manager should speak to the employee by telephone and make the necessary arrangements for the Return to Work Interview to take place as soon as possible .

10.1.2 The Return to Work Interview Form should be used to provide a structure for all Return to Work Interviews. It should be completed in full for every absence.

## **11. MONITORING LEVELS OF ABSENCE**

11.1 The responsibility for monitoring levels of absence within the organisation lies with managers and the Human Resources team. Fit Notes and Self Certificates should be scanned and forwarded by email to the H.R. Absence mailbox as soon as they are received . Managers must also send an email to the HR Absence mailbox to notify the Human Resources and Payroll teams that the employee has returned to work. Failure to follow procedures could result in a loss of pay, as payroll will only process pay based on the information received from the manager. Statistics are maintained by the Human Resources team, monthly and quarterly Key Performance Indicators are produced, as well as an annual report to the Board on absence levels is produced.

## **12. PAYMENT DURING SICKNESS ABSENCE**

12.1 There are two main elements to the payments made during sickness absence – Statutory Sick Pay and also enhanced contractual payments (occupational sick pay) which are made by the organisation.

12.1.2 The payment of occupational sick pay does not imply that termination of employment may not take place whilst the employee is in receipt of occupational sick pay.

12.1.3 Full details of entitlement can be found in the Blackwood Sick Pay Scheme which can be located on the Loop

## **13. ABSENCE MANAGEMENT APPROACHES**

13.1 Blackwood has defined approaches for the management of sickness absence. These are suggested procedural approaches but it is important to note that each case must

be treated on its merits and advice should be obtained from Human Resources as applicable.

## 13.2 **Impact of Equality Act 2010**

13.2.1 Disability, under the Act, is defined as a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse affect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. It is Blackwood's obligation under the act not to treat any employees less favourably if they have a disability and to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that the employee can continue to work. This has obvious implications for the approach taken to the management of long term absence and return to work, but also means that underlying causes must be identified in cases of casual and short term absence.

13.2.2 The approaches to sickness absence management below take the above requirements into account, however, Human Resources will advise managers and employees as appropriate on the application of the Act. It may be appropriate for the employee to attend an Occupational Health assessment so that clinical advice on reasonable adjustments can be taken into consideration.

## 13.3 **Procedure for Dealing with Short Term Absences**

### 13.3.1 **Repeated Casual and Short Term Absence Triggers**

<b>Casual and Short Term Absence Trigger Points</b>
3 or more casual absences in a rolling 6 months
3 or more short term absence in a rolling 12 months
13 days or shifts lost in a rolling 12 months

13.3.2 Trigger points should be discussed as part of the Return to Work Interview to consider whether any management actions are required. Factors that should be considered are the nature of the absences and whether they are minor, often unconnected, ailments. Recurring patterns of absence should be identified and may include, e,g patterns of absence such as frequent Fridays and/or Mondays.

13.3.6 The review may necessitate an Attendance Review Meeting to be held by the manager, details of which are outlined below. It should be noted that in some cases no action will be taken as a result of a trigger being reached. Each absence case is different and must be reviewed on its individual merits.

## 13.4 **Attendance Review Meeting**

13.4.1 An Attendance Review Meeting is a separate meeting to be held when there is a requirement to discuss concerns about absence. They are most likely to occur where a trigger point has been reached but this is not always the case.

13.4.2 The purpose of the Attendance Review Meeting is:

- To review the employee's attendance record during the relevant period.
- To give the employee the opportunity to discuss any problems or concern.
- To decide whether any further action is required such as a request for a GP's report or a referral to an Occupational Health assessment in order to assess if there is an underlying health problem.

- To set a target for improvement and a period over which absence will be monitored.
- To arrange for support or work adjustments as recommended by the GP or Occupational Health report.
- To inform the employee that a failure to improve within the time period being monitored, may be dealt with under Blackwood's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

13.4.3 Following this initial meeting, the situation will be monitored and reviewed after a period of 3 months with regular update meetings during this period possibly at one month intervals.

13.4.4 It is recognised that high levels of absence may be due to underlying medical problems. Blackwood will undertake to try to identify any underlying causes where possible. These will be dealt with sympathetically considering the employees capability to perform their job whilst maintaining a balance with the needs of the organisation. Reference should be made to Blackwood's Alcohol and Substance Abuse Policy and Procedure where an addiction problem is suspected to be the underlying cause of absence.

13.4.5 If however, an employee's absence record is causing concern and, following receipt of a GP and/or Occupational Health report, there is no underlying health issue, this will be seen as a separate issue and dealt with under the Blackwood Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. Where formal disciplinary action is to be taken employees have the right to be accompanied at any formal meeting or disciplinary hearing held under the policy by a trade union representative or work colleague.

13.4.6 In defining unacceptable absence, Blackwood recognises that each case will be different and therefore will be reviewed by the Human Resources team before any action is taken.

### 13.5 **Persistent Casual or Short Term Absence**

13.5.1 If, after 3 months, there has not been any improvement in the employees attendance and there are no personal or medical reasons to explain the absence, management can take a view on either:-

- Proceeding with the organisation's disciplinary process
- Reviewing the situation in conjunction with the Human Resources team and extend the review period for a further 3 months.

In both cases the following should be taken into account:-

- Employee's length of service and sick absence record.
- Overall levels of absence in the team.
- Personal circumstances or problems of a domestic nature.

### 13.6 **Exceptions to this Approach**

13.6.1 This approach to casual and short term absence management will not be taken in cases where the employee's absences are pregnancy or disability related, where there is an alcohol or substance misuse problem or where the employee is suffering from work related stress.

13.6.2 Where the underlying cause is identified as being an alcohol or substance misuse problem reference should be made to Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy and Procedures which can be found on the Loop

### 13.7 **Termination of Employment**

Blackwood can not be expected to tolerate unlimited amounts of casual or short term absence as service levels have to be maintained. Whether the causes of absence have an underlying medical cause or not, the organisation will have to balance the requirements of the service with the tolerable levels of absence and may decide to terminate an employee's employment if the level of absence can not continue to be sustained. The employee would be consulted in advance of the possibility of such a decision being taken. The payment of occupational sick pay does not imply that termination of employment may not take place whilst the employee is in receipt of occupational sick pay.

### 13.8 **Procedure for Managing Long Term Sick Absence**

13.8.1 Blackwood's definition of long term absence is 4 or more calendar weeks absence from work. Long term absence should be managed in a sympathetic and flexible manner, taking into consideration the individual circumstances and balancing this with the needs of the organisation.

13.8.2 The role of the manager is fundamental in managing long-term absence. There are several main elements involved:

13.8.3 **Keeping in contact with the employee** - contact should be maintained on a regular basis using a sensitive and non-intrusive approach. The form of this contact should be agreed with the employee and manager and, where appropriate, the union or employee representative, but it should involve regular telephone contact and also regular Wellbeing Meetings (which are meetings with employees during their absence).

13.8.4 The purpose of this contact is to discuss all issues relating to the absence such as:-

- Notification and certification of absence through fit notes
- Any advice from GP on fit note to facilitate earlier return to work
- Likely length of absence
- Occupational Health involvement
- Review of sick pay entitlement
- Changes at work
- Return to work
- Other options which may include considering redeployment to another position within the organisation or termination on the grounds of capability.

13.8.5 Normally managers will first arrange to meet with the employee for the first wellbeing meeting following a continuous absence of 4 weeks. After that they should be undertaken on a regular basis, or arranged where there is a development that needs to be discussed. The wellbeing visits will be arranged preferably within Blackwood

premises or at a mutually agreed location and will normally be carried out by the appropriate manager and another member of management or a member of the Human Resources team.

13.8.6 Notes will be taken of the meeting to be retained as part of the absence management documentation.

13.8.7 **Using professional advice and treatment** – GPs and Occupational Health professionals will play a major role in evaluating the reason for absence, carrying out health assessments, and assisting Human Resources and managers in planning a return to work, or considering reasonable adjustments.

13.8.9 **Planning and undertaking workplace controls or adjustments** - some obstacles may hinder an employee's return to work. A risk assessment combined with GPs advice on a fit note, or a GP's or Occupational Health report can identify measures or adjustments to help workers return and maintain their attendance.

13.8.10 Examples may include:

- Changing work patterns or management style to reduce pressure and give the employee more control.
- Altering the employees working hours.
- Accommodating the employee's mobility.
- Allowing a gradual or phased return-to-work, e.g. building up from part-time to full-time over a maximum period of 4 weeks (unless otherwise advised by Occupational Health). In these cases the employee will be paid for actual hours worked with consideration given to using accrued annual leave, through mutual agreement, to limit the financial impact of working reduced hours.
- Provision of equipment and other aids to assist the employee to return to work.
- Consideration of whether redeployment to an alternative position is a possibility and will allow the person to return to work.

### 13.9 **Planning and co-coordinating for a return to work**

13.9.1 A written return to work plan must be agreed by the employee, the manager, and any other employees or teams likely to be affected.

The plan needs to include:-

- the goals, such as modified working hours, or a modified job role.
- the time period.
- a statement about the new working arrangements.
- the checks that will need to be made to make sure the plan is put into practice.
- the dates when the plan will be reviewed by the employee and the manager.
- consideration of a phased return to work as outlined above

13.9.2 It may be helpful to appoint a senior team member to co-ordinate the return-to-work process. This may include keeping colleagues of the absent employee informed of progress, so that all understand the situation as well as easing the transition back to work and maintaining working relationships.

### **13.10 Redeployment**

13.10.1 Consideration should be made as to the possibility of redeploying an employee who is not fit to return to their present role but who could return to work in a suitable, alternative role. The obligation is not to create a new role but simply to consider what the person is capable of doing and identifying any opportunities in Blackwood for that.

### **13.11 Termination of Contract On The Grounds Of Ill Health**

13.11.1 Sometimes there may be no other alternative but to consider terminating the employee's contract, due to their continued incapability to work and the lack of suitable, alternative employment where this is appropriate. Before this can be done, it is essential that all the steps outlined in section 3.11.3 are carried out as good practice in long term absence case management.

#### **13.11.2 Final sickness absence meeting**

Where an employee has been warned that they are at risk of dismissal, and the situation has not changed significantly, Blackwood will hold a meeting to consider the possible termination of the employee's employment. Before making a decision, any matters the employee wishes to raise and whether there have been any changes since the last meeting will be taken into consideration

#### **13.11.3 Appeals**

The employee may appeal against the outcome of any stage of this procedure. If the employee wishes to appeal they should set out their appeal in writing to the Head of HR & OD, stating the grounds of appeal, within one week (7 days) of the date on which the decision was sent or given to them. If the employee is appealing against a decision to dismiss them, Blackwood will hold an appeal meeting, normally within two weeks of receiving the appeal. This will be dealt with impartially and, where possible, by a more senior manager who has not previously been involved in the case.

The final decision will be confirmed in writing, usually within one week of the appeal hearing. There is no further right of appeal.

13.11.2 Human Resources must be closely involved in all cases where termination of employment is being considered.

## **14. STRESS RELATED ABSENCE**

14.1 If an employee is absent from work due to a stress related illness, anxiety or depression managers should refer to the Blackwood Stress Policy in order to identify the necessary actions to identify any stress factors and to manage them. This should be done as soon as possible and the matter must be discussed with Human Resources.

14.1.1 Blackwood will provide adequate and proper support to employees but in order to do so medical advice will be required either from the employees GP or Occupational Health. The organisation will also work with the employee to identify the causes of stress where these are work related in order to effectively manage these in the future. In cases of work related stress an Individual Stress Risk Assessment tool will be used to identify the stressors and work with the employee to reduce or remove the impact of these stressors.

## **15. CONDUCT ISSUES RELATING TO ABSENCE**

- 15.1 Misconduct means the employee is believed to have done something wilfully, knowingly or otherwise deliberately that is unacceptable. In relation to sickness absence, conduct issues do not relate to the employee's state of health but to their behaviour e.g. fraudulent absence or failure to follow correct notification or certification absence procedures.
- 15.2 Policy and Procedure.

## **16. ROLE OF THE COUNSELLING SERVICE**

- 16.1 Blackwood provides a free Employee Assistance Programme called Lifeworks. This includes a web based self help resource as well as a confidential 24 hour help line and possible referral to upto 6 sessions of counselling.
- 16.2 Employees may access this themselves at any time and managers may refer employees for counselling where it is deemed to be appropriate.
- 16.3 Managers should also use Lifeworks to access advice on managing sensitive issues, employees suffering from stress, etc.
- 16.4 Contact details for the counselling service are available on the Loop under the resources file.

## **17. BECOMING SICK WHILST ON ANNUAL LEAVE**

- 17.1 If an employee becomes sick whilst on annual leave or a public holiday, they must notify their manager at the earliest opportunity using the notification procedures outlined above. Where the absence is certified by a GP or hospital the employee may be classed as being absent due to sickness for the period covered by the certificate rather than being on annual leave. The annual leave may then be taken at another time.
- 17.1.1 A return to work interview should be conducted when the employee returns to work as normal.

## **18. ACCRUING ANNUAL LEAVE WHILST ABSENT DUE TO SICKNESS**

- 18.1 Annual leave and public holidays continue to accrue during periods of long-term sickness.

## **19. SUSPENSION AND SICKNESS ABSENCE**

- 19.1 If an employee falls sick whilst on suspension from work, the suspension will continue, and salary will be paid on that basis. This is due to the particular terms of suspension taking priority over an employee being unable to work due to sickness – during a period of suspension they are not required to work. Any disciplinary process will continue as appropriate during the period when the employee falls sick whilst on suspension from work.
- 19.1.1 Similarly, the appropriate support and management of a period of sickness during suspension will be applied as outlined in this policy.

## **20. REVIEW**

- 20.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or earlier as required.