Sickness Absence Policy

1. Introduction

Future Directions CIC recognises that it is crucial to monitor and, as far as possible, control the costs associated with sickness absence whilst dealing sympathetically with employees during periods of ill health. Future Directions CIC recognises that absence needs to be addressed through the application of a consistent and clear policy and the fostering of a culture which emphasises the importance of a positive attitude towards attendance.

It is inevitable that employees will be absent from work from time to time due to sickness and this policy and procedure sets out standards detailing how managers should manage sickness absence and how individuals may expect to be treated following and/or during periods of sickness absence.

This policy and procedure aims to provide a systematic, fair and consistent method of managing sickness absence and will be applied to all employees irrespective of their race, sex, age, religion, beliefs, disability or sexual orientation.

All employees who suffer from ill health or have sustained an injury will be treated sympathetically and any employee who becomes aware that they have an illness is encouraged to inform their manager at the earliest opportunity.

The Sickness Absence Procedure sets out the arrangements for managing both long term and frequent short-term sickness absence. Future Directions CIC may dismiss employees whose sickness absence is continuously at levels that cannot be sustained, whether or not sick pay has been exhausted.

For the purpose of this policy long term absence is defined as any continuous absence of 28 days or more which would need to be covered by a medical certificate.

Information that staff share with Managers is to be treated in strict confidence (see Confidentiality Procedure). Any breaches of this procedure may result in disciplinary action being taken against said staff.

2. Sickness Reporting

In order to ensure that sickness records are maintained accurately, sick pay is calculated correctly and to enable appropriate help and assistance to be provided, all employees should observe the sickness reporting procedure at all times.

It is expected that an employee reporting sick will speak to the on call manager. It may be necessary for Team Managers or Operational Network Managers to call employees back if they need to confirm any details regarding this period of sickness absence.

Text messages or e-mails are unacceptable methods of communication, however, in exceptional circumstances it may be acceptable for a family member/friend/partner to report the sickness absence, e.g. hospitalisation or loss of voice. Failure by an
employee to notify their manager of their sickness may result in the absence being treated as unpaid unauthorised absence.

It is not acceptable for staff reporting sick to leave a message with a support worker or colleague at their place of work.

On the first day of absence the employee should telephone on call as soon as possible before the commencement of their shift or normal start time, in accordance with the local reporting procedures for that area.

If circumstances make it impossible to comply with the reporting requirements as described above, the employee should report sick no later than one hour after they were due to commence work. Failure to do so may result in sick pay being withheld or disciplinary action being considered.

When reporting sick, employees will be asked for the following details:

- Name
- Workplace
- Commencement time of shift/normal start time
- Details of symptoms/reason for absence
- Expected date of return
- Telephone number on which the member of staff can be contacted
- Name of person making the call, if not the member of staff, and their relationship to the member of staff, e.g. friend, relation, colleague

When taking a call, the manager will deal with the employee in a sympathetic manner whilst obtaining as much relevant information as possible. “I am sick” will not be accepted as a reason for absence; the known reason for absence or, at the very least, details of the symptoms of the illness must be recorded.

Contact during sickness absence will be determined on an individual basis, and will be done in a constructive and supportive manner with the aim to try and seek as early a return to work as possible, taking into account the health of the individual.

An employee who falls ill whilst at work must report sick to their Team Manager or in their absence the on call manager before leaving the workplace. Failure to observe this will result in the absence being regarded as unauthorised and may also lead to disciplinary action. Sickness absence of less than half a shift will not be recorded for pay purposes as sickness but repeated failure to complete shifts or normal working days will be regarded as unacceptable and may result in disciplinary action.

As soon as an employee knows their fitness to return date they should telephone the on call manager who will inform the employees Team Manager of their return date.

### 3. Sickness Certification

Certification is required from the first day of sickness and employees must forward, by post or in person to Future Directions CIC at Marle House, a self certification form within 7 calendar days of the 1st day of sickness.

Sickness of more than 7 days' duration must be supported by a medical certificate which should be forwarded to Future Directions at Marle House within 7 calendar days of
becoming due. Employees should note that sickness in excess of seven days will not qualify for occupational sick pay unless supported by a medical certificate.

Future Directions CIC reserves the right to ask an employee to produce a medical certificate for any or all periods of sickness. Where a manager wishes to introduce this procedure, they will first discuss it with the employee concerned.

Failure to produce a certificate within the specified time frames or following a specific request from a manager may result in occupational sick pay being withheld. Failure to produce medical certificates may also result in disciplinary action.

4. **Unauthorised Absence**

Failure to comply with the rules outlined in respect of sickness absence, covering both notification procedures and certification, without an acceptable reason may result in such leave being unpaid and may also lead to disciplinary action being taken.

Occupational sick pay will not be paid for the duration of the unauthorised absence. Statutory sick pay will be paid on receipt of appropriate certification of sickness absence.

5. **Welcome Back Meeting**

Following a period of absence and upon returning Welcome Back meetings will be conducted by the employee’s Team Manager (or in their absence the Operational Network Manager). This should be as soon as possible on the day of return or as soon after as is reasonably practicable. Targets for improvement may also be set at this time – see informal absence meeting.

6. **Occupational Health**

An employee may be referred to Occupational Health if their health gives cause for concern e.g. due to persistent short term sickness, long term sickness absence or if they have or develop a condition which impacts upon their capability to fulfil their contract of employment.

7. **Short Term Sickness Absence**

Managers should consider a number of factors to assess the level of concern, including: the employee’s previous attendance record, change of personal circumstances, the reasons given for absence, any emerging patterns e.g. absence following a bank holiday/after weekends/following additional bank hours/partial day sickness; length of the absence, and recently changed work requirements. With the above in mind managers should arrange an informal absence meeting when the following criteria are met;

- 3 occasions of absence within a 12 month rolling period, whether self-certified or medically certified;
- 14 cumulative days absence within a 12 month rolling period, whether self-certified or medically certified
Stage 1 - Informal Absence Meeting

Note: Within stages 1 and 2 Manager refers to Team Manager and/or Operational Network Manager

Managers should discuss the reason for absence with the employee and inform them that their attendance will be monitored for a period of 12 months from the date of the meeting. A target to have no more than 2 occasions or 12 cumulative days of sickness absence within the 12 month review period will normally be set. Monitoring during the review period will be agreed between the employee and manager.

Employees must be informed that a lack of improvement in attendance may lead to a Stage 2 - Formal Absence Meeting being called.

An Informal Absence meeting should form part of the Welcome Back meeting on return from sickness when appropriate.

Stage 2 - Formal Absence Meeting

If there is a failure to meet the targets set at Stage 1 the manager will arrange to meet with the employee and advise that their attendance levels are unacceptable. Managers should discuss the reason for absence with the employee and inform them that their attendance will be monitored for a period of 12 months from the date of the meeting and new targets to have no more than 2 occasions or 10 cumulative days of sickness absence within the 12 month review period will normally be set.

If there is a failure of the targets set at Stage 2 the manager may refer the member of staff to Occupational Health and arrange a Stage 2 review meeting. A representative from Human Resources may also be in attendance at this meeting. Managers should discuss the reason for absence with the employee and an outcome from this meeting may be that their Stage 2 targets are reset with a further 12 month monitoring period.

Unless satisfactory reasons are given for a failure to meet targets set for attendance, consideration will also be given to the issue of a formal caution that, if their attendance continues to be unsatisfactory, the next stage of the procedure will be to consider dismissal.

The formal caution will remain in place for 12 months and monitoring during the review period will be agreed between the employee and manager.

Stage 3 - Capability Meeting

If there is a failure under caution of the targets set at Stage 2 a Stage 3 - Capability Meeting will be convened. This meeting will normally be heard by a manager delegated with the authority to dismiss. The manager must consider all of the information available, including up to date Occupational Health advice. The manager may then dismiss on the grounds of unsatisfactory attendance. A member of Human Resources must be present to support the manager in this decision and the employee must be advised in writing of their dismissal with the appropriate paid notice and their right of appeal against this.
Another outcome may be that Stage 2 targets and caution are reset for a further 12 month monitoring period and there will be regular formal reviews during this period.

8. **Long Term Sickness Absence**

8.1. Long term sickness is defined as a period of absence due to illness that has lasted continuously for more than 28 days and for which there does not appear to be a firm date for a return to work.

Absences of this nature will normally be due to a serious illness, operation or industrial injury and employees should be afforded support, reassurance and a reasonable period to recover, however, Future Directions CIC will have to consider the bigger picture when considering long term sickness and, where individuals have had more than one period of long-term sickness in a 3 year period, will have to look at the total amount of absence over that longer period and the subsequent disruption to service provision when considering outcomes.

When managing long term sickness it is essential that there is early intervention by the Team Manager or in their absence Operational Network Manager to ascertain the seriousness of the illness and its likely length and effect. Every effort will be made to facilitate an employee’s return to work, including making reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act.

8.2. **Contact**

Throughout the period of sickness absence the employee and their manager should maintain contact and review the situation at appropriate intervals e.g. every week or two weeks if it is a prolonged illness. If an employee has been absent from work due to sickness for at least 14 days and there is no clear indication when they are likely to return to work, the manager should contact the individual to:

- Find out how they are recovering and when they think they are likely to return to work
- Find out what support needs they might have to enable them to return to work
- Enquire about the possibility of a home visit, if appropriate
- Remind them to submit valid medical certificates during their absence
- Remind them of the importance of maintaining contact with their manager
- Consider a referral to Occupational Health if there is no clear date of return to work
- Update them on any new developments about work

8.3. **Stage 1 - Informal Absence Meeting**

*Note: Within stages 1 and 2 Manager refers to Team Manager and/or Operational Network Manager*

As soon as it has been established that the period of absence is likely to be for more than 28 days the manager should arrange to meet with the employee. The aim of the meeting is to:

- Establish face to face contact
• Seek information on how their recovery is progressing and any details in relation to GP/Specialists treatment
• Seek views on when they believe they will be able to return to work
• Arrange a referral to Occupational Health, if appropriate

If there is a known return to work date the manager and employee must discuss and plan for this. Once the employee has settled back into work (usually within 4 weeks of return) it would be appropriate to set a target to have no more than 2 occasions or 12 cumulative days of sickness absence within a 12 month review period. Monitoring during the review period will be agreed between the employee and manager.

8.4. Stage 2 - Formal Absence Meeting

Where the absence lasts beyond 28 days, and a return to work date has not been identified, the manager should arrange a further meeting with the employee. This should usually be within 2 months of the start of the absence. A representative from Human Resources may be present at this meeting and, if an Occupational Health report has been requested, the manager should discuss the content of this report and any measures that could support a return to work.

Where the sickness absence continues, the manager should arrange a review meeting with the employee to discuss any new information, to try to ascertain a return to work date and to offer any supportive measures that may be applicable, including reasonable workplace adjustments or temporary/permanent redeployment.

This meeting will usually take place within 5 months from the start of the absence, but this may be extended or reduced depending on the reason for absence and the information contained in the Occupational Health report. A formal caution may be issued that, if the attendance continues to be unsatisfactory, the next stage of the procedure will be to consider dismissal. If a caution has been issued before an employee has returned to work, this will be reset to run in line with any subsequent targets that have been issued.

If the employee does return to work or is redeployed, and the health issue is resolved, it would be appropriate to set a target to have no more than 2 occasions or 12 cumulative days of sickness absence within a 12 month review period. Monitoring during the review period will be agreed between the employee and manager.

In certain circumstances, for example, where an employee is receiving on-going treatment for an illness, it may be necessary to have review meetings at regular intervals before considering progressing to Stage 3 – Capability Meeting.

8.5. Return to Work Plan

Early interventions to facilitate a return to work following illness or injury are important for securing a successful rehabilitation. As appropriate for the individual circumstances, managers will consider in conjunction with the employee, Occupational Health and Human Resources what assistance Future Directions CIC can offer to support an employee prior to and following a return to work and agree a Return to Work Plan.

Individual Return to Work Plans may include one or more of the following:

• Encouraging staff to visit the workplace prior to return to work.
• Keeping in touch
• Reasonable workplace adjustments.
• Additional supervision sessions.
• Updating on changes in policies, people, and services
• Refresher training
• Debriefing following incidents at work.
• Phased/staged return to work.

Reasonable workplace adjustments can be temporary or permanent and might include:

• Altering hours of work.
• Assignment to a different place of work.
• Training or mentoring.

A phased return to work may be offered at the discretion of the Operational Network Manager as part of a Return to Work Plan, having taken into account the individual circumstances in each case. Phased returns to work will be facilitated as follows:

• By a temporary reduction in contracted hours
• By a combination of reduced hours and use of annual leave

8.6. Redeployment

Where the employee is unable to return to their substantive post for medical reasons, the manager should, where possible take positive steps to identify suitable redeployment opportunities which may be either temporary or permanent, however, it should be noted that Future Directions CIC is not required to create a special job for the employee concerned.

8.7. Stage 3 - Capability Meeting

Where the sickness absence continues, the employee remains unfit for work and there is no reasonable return to work date, a Stage 3 – Capability Meeting will be convened. This meeting will be heard by a manager delegated with the authority to dismiss and will usually take place within 8 months from the start of the absence, but this may be extended or reduced depending on the reason for absence and the information contained in the Occupational Health report. A member of the Human Resources must be present to support the manager at this meeting.

After considering all reasonable adjustments, redeployment options, and up to date Occupational Health or other medical opinion, the manager may dismiss on grounds of capability and this may or may not be before the employee has reached the end of their contractual paid sickness absence period.

The employee must be advised in writing of their dismissal with the appropriate paid notice and their right of appeal against this.

There is an expectation that a final decision on the future employment of an employee will be made within 12 months from the date the absence begins, however, as previously
stated the manager can extend any of the timeframes stated above, by consultation with Occupational Health and in agreement with a member of the Human Resources Department.