****

**How to manage long term sickness**

Long term sickness is normally an absence of more than four weeks, or can be when a member of staff has repeated absences for the same reason. There are two stages to managing long term sickness – managing the absence itself, and then supporting the member of staff on their return to work.

Staff must provide a ‘Fit Note’ after seven calendar days absence and should keep their manager up to date on their absence from work. Fit Notes can state that a member of staff is not fit for work, or may be fit for work taking into account specific advice.

How long term sickness absence is approached will depend on the nature of the condition, prognosis and medical advice / information. When it becomes apparent that an absence from work will become long term, it is recommended that a referral to Occupational Health is made. They may take advice from other medical professionals such as the individual’s GP or specialist. OH will be able to provide information on the individual’s state of health, readiness to return, support required to facilitate a return to work and overall prognosis / possible length of absence.

During long term absence, managers should keep in touch with staff who are on long term sickness absence. See our separate guidance on this.

Managers should be aware that some reasons for long term sickness absence may also amount to a disability, so reasonable adjustments may also be required as part of any return to work plan.

If short term cover is required as a result of an absence from work, please discuss this with HR in the first instance.

When an individual returns to work from long term absence, it may be necessary to put into place a formal plan to support that return (agreed in advance with the individual), ensure appropriate support is in place and help them re-integrate back into the workplace. Also ensure that a detailed Return to Work meeting is held.

HR can provide advice and guidance on the management of long term sickness with particular reference to the specific circumstances of the case.