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Proposed new Attendance Management Policy - Schools

Purpose

- 1.1 A new Attendance Management Policy - Schools has been drafted to reflect the Council's approach to managing sickness absence and achieving the good attendance of all school based colleagues.
- 1.2 The policy defines a transparent and supportive attendance management framework for all school based colleagues, complimenting existing health and wellbeing provisions, and giving clarity on key responsibilities.
- 1.3 The policy captures both what is expected of all school based colleagues in terms of reporting and evidencing sickness absence as well as the process that will be followed if a colleague is off work long-term or has persistent short-term absences.
- 1.4 Approving the new policy will provide all school based colleagues with a clear, consistent, and supportive approach that is aligned to the way attendance is managed throughout the Council.

Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the new Attendance Management Policy - Schools (Appendix 1).
- 2.2 To note that subject to Personnel Committee ratification, the revised policy will be published on the Schools Information Portal (SIP) and a communications roll out of the changes will be shared with school based colleagues.

Reasons

- 3.1 The current suite of attendance management policies for schools is overdue for review with some documents dating back to 2003. An updated Attendance Management – Schools policy will ensure an accurate reflection of the Council's approach to managing attendance and, whilst tailored to be fit for purpose for Schools, will align closely to the recently revised and ratified Attendance Management Policy for Council central colleagues.
- 3.2 To enable all school based colleagues, and those managing attendance, to better understand their responsibilities in relation to managing their own and their team's health, wellbeing and attendance.

3.3 To provide Schools with a robust Attendance Management Policy.

Supporting information

- 4.1 The Council is fully committed to promoting the health, safety, and wellbeing of all school based colleagues.

Helping our school based colleagues to maintain good attendance is a top priority. It contributes to a school operating effectively.

As well as the direct costs associated with sickness absence, the increased workload that covering sickness absence can create poses a risk to workforce morale.

Therefore, it is essential that absence is managed appropriately and in line with our policies.

- 4.2 Key proposed changes to the Attendance Management Policy:

- Inclusion of key responsibilities for all school colleagues, Governing Bodies, Headteachers, managers and any appointed representative that may be involved in the attendance management process. In clearly summarising the key responsibilities early in the policy the tone is set for individual accountability of health, wellbeing and attendance and for proactive support, expectation setting and prompt action from those managing attendance.
- Inclusion of the Council's target for completion of return to work conversations; within three days of a colleague's return to work from sickness absence. This clearly lays out the expectation of school management to carry out this conversation promptly, which is widely recognised as one of the most effective ways to reduce absence.
- Inclusion of a specific section related to pregnancy-related sickness absence. This provides clarity that absences related to pregnancy will be disregarded for the purpose of absence triggers, in line with the Equality Act 2010.
- Clear references to the differences in managing long-term absence and short-term absence.
- Inclusion of zero-absence targets for instances of persistent short-term absence. This will provide clarity on the Council's expectation and aid in consistency of approach.
- Reference to the Dying to Work Charter which was signed by the Council on 5 October 2018.

- Inclusion of attendance management capability hearing stage. The revised policy clearly shows the three stages of managing long-term or persistent short-term absence; informal stage, formal stage and attendance management capability hearing stage. Arranging this section of the policy in this way ensures it is clear to follow, accurately describes the process used, and removes ambiguity.
- Removal of first and final warnings as a potential outcome. Instead, and in line with the process for Council central colleagues, focusing on a supportive process to achieve acceptable attendance. Delivery of this is via target setting and monitoring periods, with regular review of the outcomes of these, before moving to the next process stage if appropriate.
- Addition of interactive signposting to support and guidance throughout the policy and in a dedicated section at the end of the policy.
- Addition of Role Definitions and Glossary appendices. These will aid the policy reader in understanding some of the terminology used throughout.
- Addition of Roles in the Attendance Management process, Sick Pay Entitlements and Attendance Triggers. These will further aid the policy reader and ensure all of the core information about Attendance Management is available in one policy document.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 5.1 The revised draft Attendance Management Policy has been developed with feedback and support from the HR and OD Management team, including Occupational Health, plus Legal Services and Learning and Skills.
- 5.2 A cross section of School Business Managers and Headteachers have also been given the opportunity to offer feedback and have provided suggestions.
- 5.3 Consultation has also taken place with Trade Union colleagues through the Policy Working Group.

Other options

- 6.1 To continue with the suite of Attendance Management policies in their current form. This option is not recommended as the opportunity for improvement of the policy in the form of the proposed changes would not be achieved.

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 None arising.

Legal implications

8.1 None arising.

Climate implications

9.1 None arising.

Other significant implications

10.1 None arising.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Paulette Brown	24/10/2022
Finance		
Service Director(s)		
Report sponsor	Simon Riley	25/10/2022
Other(s)	Liz Moore, Head of HR	24/10/2022

Background papers:	
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Draft Attendance Management Policy - Schools Appendix 2 – Draft Equality Impact Assessment