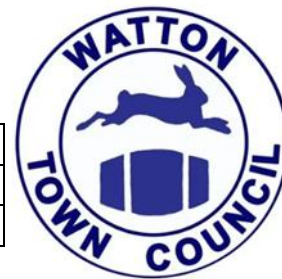


Sickness and Absence Policy



Adopted by:	Watton Town Council
Date:	April 2026
Review date:	April 2029

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 This policy explains how sickness absence will be managed at Watton Town Council. Its purpose is to support employee wellbeing, encourage regular attendance, and make sure absence is handled fairly, consistently and with sensitivity.

1.2 The Council recognises that employees will sometimes be unwell and need time away from work. The Council also recognises that good absence management helps protect services, supports colleagues and enables early support where employees are experiencing health problems or other difficulties.

1.3 The Council uses the NJC Green Book (2024) and the NALC Model Contract of Employment (2023) as guidance when determining employment terms and conditions. Not all provisions apply automatically. Where this policy, an employee's contract, or another adopted Council policy sets out a local arrangement, that local arrangement will apply.

1.4 This policy applies to employees of Watton Town Council, including full-time, part-time and fixed-term employees. It does not apply to councillors in their personal capacity. However, councillors who are involved in managing the Clerk, hearing appeals, or dealing with staffing matters under the Council's governance arrangements must follow this policy so far as it is relevant to their role.

1.5 For the purposes of this policy, references to the line manager mean the Clerk or the appropriate line manager for the employee's role.

1.6 This policy should be read alongside the Capability Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Annual Leave Policy, TOIL, Working Time and Flexitime Procedure, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Data Protection Policy and Employee Privacy Notice.

1.7 This policy is non-contractual and may be amended by the Council from time to time, subject to any contractual rights that apply.

2. Reporting Sickness Absence

2.1 If an employee is unwell and unable to attend work, they must normally notify the Clerk or appropriate line manager personally by telephone before their normal start time on the first day of absence, unless there is a good reason why this is not possible.

2.2 The employee should give a brief indication of the nature of the illness, the likely duration of the absence if known, and any urgent work issues that may need attention. Employees do not need to share more medical detail than is reasonably necessary.

2.3 If an employee is too unwell to make contact personally, another person may do so on their behalf. Text messages or emails should not normally be the only method of reporting sickness absence unless this has been agreed in advance or the circumstances make telephone contact impracticable.

2.4 During a continuing absence, the employee must keep in reasonable contact with the Council. The frequency and method of contact should be proportionate to the circumstances and may be adjusted by agreement, particularly in cases of longer-term absence or where medical advice suggests a different approach.

3. Certification and Medical Evidence

3.1 For absences of up to seven calendar days, the employee will normally be required to complete a self-certification form on return to work.

3.2 For absences of eight calendar days or more, the employee must provide a fit note from a GP or another authorised healthcare professional. Further fit notes must be provided promptly where the absence continues.

3.3 Where a fit note says that an employee may be fit for work subject to adjustments, the Council will discuss the advice with the employee and consider whether the recommended adjustments can reasonably be accommodated.

4. Statutory Sick Pay

4.1 From 6 April 2026, Statutory Sick Pay is payable from the first day of sickness absence for eligible employees. The previous waiting days no longer apply, and the lower earnings threshold has been removed. The current statutory rate is set out in the Council's Statutory Employment Entitlements Schedule and payroll records.

4.2 Statutory Sick Pay is administered in accordance with the law and HMRC requirements. Where statutory rules change, the Council will apply the updated legal position and update its annual statutory entitlements schedule accordingly.

5. Occupational Sick pay

5.1 Subject to the employee's contract and the Council's local arrangements, the Council normally provides occupational sick pay informed by the NJC Green Book service bands.

5.2 After four months' service in the first year of local government service, the normal entitlement is one month's full pay and two months' half pay.

5.3 During the second year of service, the normal entitlement is two months' full pay and two months' half pay.

5.4 During the third year of service, the normal entitlement is four months' full pay and four months' half pay.

5.5 During the fourth and fifth years of service, the normal entitlement is five months' full pay and five months' half pay.

5.6 After five years' service, the normal entitlement is six months' full pay and six months' half pay.

5.7 Occupational sick pay includes any Statutory Sick Pay that is payable. During periods of full pay, occupational sick pay normally tops up Statutory Sick Pay to normal pay. During periods of half pay, occupational sick pay plus Statutory Sick Pay will not normally exceed normal pay.

5.8 The Council may suspend or withhold occupational sick pay where an employee unreasonably fails to follow this policy, withholds medical evidence without good reason, misrepresents their fitness for work, or otherwise acts in a way that seriously undermines the Council's ability to manage the absence fairly. Any such decision will be taken reasonably and proportionately.

6. Keeping in Touch and Return to Work

6.1 The Council will maintain reasonable and supportive contact with employees during sickness absence. Return-to-work discussions are an important part of supporting employees and helping the Council manage absence fairly.

6.2 A return-to-work meeting will normally take place on the employee's first day back, or as soon as reasonably practicable afterwards. The purpose of the meeting is to welcome the employee back, confirm that they are fit to return, review any support that may be needed, check that reporting and certification requirements have been met, and identify any further action that may be appropriate.

6.3 Return-to-work meetings are intended to be supportive and informal. However, if patterns of absence or other concerns need further review, the Council may arrange a more formal attendance review meeting.

7. Medical Advice, Adjustments and Occupational Health

7.1 Where appropriate, the Council may seek medical advice or refer the employee to occupational health to help understand the likely duration of the absence, whether a return to work is possible, whether adjustments may help, and whether there is any underlying condition that needs to be taken into account.

7.2 The Council will normally meet the cost of any occupational health referral it arranges. Medical information will be handled sensitively and in accordance with data protection law.

7.3 Where an employee has a disability or long-term health condition, the Council will consider any duty to make reasonable adjustments and will avoid applying attendance management measures in a way that is unfair or discriminatory.

8. Managing Short-Term and Long-Term Absence

8.1 The Council recognises that occasional short-term illness is a normal part of working life. However, repeated short-term absence can create difficulties for service delivery and may indicate that support is needed. Where absence levels become a concern, the Council may review the pattern of absence, meet with the employee, consider support or adjustments, and, if necessary, manage the matter under the Capability Policy rather than as misconduct.

8.2 Long-term sickness absence will normally be managed through regular contact, appropriate medical advice, consideration of adjustments or phased return options, and a reasonable review process. Where the medical evidence shows that a return to work is unlikely within a reasonable period, the Council may consider capability action in accordance with the Capability Policy.

8.3 Pregnancy-related absence will be managed separately and will not be treated in the same way as ordinary sickness absence for attendance management purposes.

9. Abuse of Sickness Absence Procedures

9.1 The Council expects employees to use sickness absence arrangements honestly and responsibly. False claims of sickness absence, misuse of sick leave, or deliberate failure to comply with reporting requirements may be treated as a conduct issue and dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.

9.2 Before any formal action is taken, the Council will consider the facts carefully and will distinguish, where appropriate, between genuine absence, capability concerns, and misconduct.

10. Data Protection

10.1 Information about an employee's health is particularly sensitive personal data. The Council will keep sickness absence records securely, limit access to those who need the information for legitimate employment purposes, and process that information in accordance with the Data Protection Policy and Employee Privacy Notice.

10.2 Absence records may be recorded and monitored through the Council's HR systems, including Breathe HR where applicable.

11. Monitoring and Review

11.1 The Council will keep this policy under review and may amend it where required by changes in law, guidance, Council decision or operational practice.

11.2 This policy will be applied in a way that is proportionate to the size, resources and staffing arrangements of Watton Town Council while ensuring fair treatment and compliance with statutory rights.