

Title of POL: Absence Management

Custodian: Chief People Officer

Version Number: 08

Issue date: 08.05.26

Review date: 08.05.29

**POLICY (POL)**

<b>Title of Policy</b>	Absence Management		
<b>What type of document is this?</b>	Policy (POL)	<b>Policy Reference Number</b>	HHH-POL-016
<b>Purpose of POL</b>	<p>Helping Hands is committed to the health, safety, and wellbeing of our employees.</p> <p>This policy aims to provide a fair and consistent framework for handling absence, and ensuring any employee, genuinely absent from work due to ill health receives all the necessary support that Helping Hands can reasonably provide.</p>		
<p><b>ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES</b></p> <p>Include in this section details of the key roles and associated responsibilities relevant to the document</p>			
<b>Roles</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>		
Chief People Officer	Responsible for reviewing and updating this policy and ensuring that the policy is communicated across the company through the Senior Management Team(s)		
Helping Hands Managers	Responsible for implementing and embedding this policy within all teams across the company		
Helping Hands Employees	Responsible for adhering to this policy		
<b>Scope of POL</b>	This policy applies to employees employed by Helping Hands. It does not apply to workers, contractors, consultants, or any self-employed individuals working for the organisation.		

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Helping Hands: Restricted

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	<p>Short term absence is defined as an absence lasting one to twenty-seven calendar days. Where an employee is on long-term sickness absence, defined as twenty-eight calendar days and longer.</p> <p>The reporting procedure will enable us to monitor absences and identify any trends or issues to support employees to maintain their attendance levels. It will also enable us to ensure appropriate cover within teams for the duration of the absence.</p> <p>This policy does not form part of any employee’s contract of employment, and we may amend it at any time. We may also vary this procedure, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case.</p>
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**1. Confidentiality**

Each matter will be treated with respect and sensitivity; all absence matters must remain confidential throughout the process.

**2. GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations)**

When dealing with absence we will process any personal data collected in accordance with our Data Protection Policy which can be found on collaborate. In particular, we will record only the personal information required and keep the information for only as long as necessary.

**3. Medical conditions and health concerns**

We encourage employees to notify their Line Manager of any diagnosed medical condition or health concerns (physical, mental, or neurodiverse) which may impact on their ability to perform in their role, so that any reasonable adjustments may be considered to support them, their attendance and for them to carry out their full duties.

In order for Line Managers to support employees with their medical conditions, it is essential that a medical questionnaire is completed, which can be found on Collaborate within HR Forms section. If any employee needs support with completing this, they can contact the People Team at [hrhub@helpinghands.co.uk](mailto:hrhub@helpinghands.co.uk).

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Any employees who have underlying health conditions can be referred to occupational health to ensure we have a full understanding of their condition and how to support them. Employees should also inform their Line Manager of any prescribed medication they are regularly taking, and any side effects they may be experiencing from this. Employees may need to seek advice from their GP, alternatively we can request an occupational health referral.

**4. Pregnancy-related absences**

Absences that are due to a pregnancy related illness, will be discounted for the purposes of absence management and will not count towards absence triggers.

**5. Disability**

Employees are not required to notify their Line Manager if they have a disability. However, we do encourage employees to share any medical conditions so that we can ensure that appropriate support is provided. This may include, but is not limited to, adjustments to the premises, aspects of their role and/or the absence triggers.

If a sickness absence is due to a disability, the Line Manager should discuss any potential reasonable adjustments which may help the employee return to work or support them when they have returned.

**6. Short term absence reporting procedure**

If an employee becomes ill at work, they should notify their Line Manager. The employee and their manager will agree the best course of action.

If an employee is unable to attend work due to illness or injury, they must telephone their Line Manager (or on-call team if their Line Manager/ branch team is unavailable, e.g. out of hours at weekends etc) at least 60 minutes before their expected start time. Text messages and emails are not an acceptable form of communication when reporting absence. Employees must telephone their Line Manager (or on-call team if their Line Manager/ branch team is unavailable, e.g. out of hours) on each day thereafter that they remain ill to confirm their continuing sickness. This notification requirement applies on each day of sickness, including days on which the employee, e.g. carer, is not scheduled to work, unless

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otherwise agreed with their Line Manager. Failure to report ongoing illness may result in the specific day (s) of sickness not being recorded correctly and may affect payment of any entitlement to sick pay.

The following details should be provided when reporting an absence:

- The nature of their illness or injury
- The expected length of their absence from work
- Contact details
- Any outstanding or urgent work that requires attention

Managers should ensure that:

- Any illness that is notified to them (including liaising with the on-call team) is recorded on our internal systems (Select HR for Salaried roles and People Planner for carer roles). Managers must record the start and end of the illness.
- Arrangements are made, where necessary, to cover work and to inform employees and clients (while maintaining confidentiality)
- An employee knows they are expected to telephone their Line Manager (or on-call team if their Line Manager/ branch team is unavailable, e.g. out of hours) on each day they remain ill to confirm their continued sickness (or a contact period agreed with their Line Manager) for the first seven calendar days (including days on which the employee, e.g. carer, is not scheduled to work), to provide:
  - An update and to discuss their illness or injury
  - Their expected return to work date

## 7. Evidence of absence

For absences of more than seven calendar days an employee must obtain a medical certificate from their doctor (a Med3 or "Statement of Fitness for Work") stating that they are not fit for work and the reason(s) why. This should be forwarded to their Line Manager as soon as possible. If the employee's absence continues, further medical certificates must be provided to cover the whole period of absence.

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If their doctor provides a certificate stating that they "may be fit for work" the employee should inform their Line Manager immediately. The People Team can be contacted ([hrrhub@helpinghands.co.uk](mailto:hrrhub@helpinghands.co.uk)) to discuss any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate a return to work, taking account of the doctor's advice or where appropriate, the Line Manager may refer the employee to occupational health. This discussion will take place at a return-to-work meeting, if appropriate measures cannot be taken, the employee will remain on sick leave, and the Line Manager will set a date to review.

**8. Unauthorised absence**

Where employees have failed to follow the absence reporting procedure or the company have reason to believe that their absence is not genuine, this will be treated as unauthorised unpaid absence and may be dealt with under our disciplinary policy or the additional time off policy as AWOL.

**9. Sick pay**

Unless specified in an employee's individual contract, Helping Hands does not offer company sick pay. For any employees entitled to company sick pay, any payments made by Helping Hands in respect of sickness absence (including company sick pay or any other contractual payments) will be offset against any entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP).

An employee may be entitled to SSP if they meet the relevant statutory requirements. The rate of SSP is set by the Government in April each year. SSP commences on the first day of absence and may be payable for up to 28 weeks. Periods of sickness absence may be treated as linked in accordance with statutory rules, which may affect SSP entitlement.

For the purposes of sick pay, qualifying days are used to determine the days for which sick pay may be payable.

- For employees with fixed contractual working days (for example, Saturday and Sunday), qualifying days will be those contractual working days.

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- For employees with variable working arrangements (who could be required to work a shift at any time from Monday to Sunday), qualifying days will be treated as Monday to Sunday.

Where an employee holds more than one role or contract of employment with Helping Hands, these will be treated as a single employment for the purposes of SSP. SSP entitlement will be calculated once across the employee's total employment and is not payable separately in respect of each role or contract. Where an employee is entitled to any form of company sick pay under one of their contracts, any such payments will be inclusive of SSP for the same period and will not be paid in addition to SSP.

Employees must follow the short-term absence reporting procedure set out above for sickness to be recorded and so that sick pay can be calculated correctly. Failure to report ongoing illness may result in the specific day(s) of sickness not being recorded correctly and may affect payment of any entitlement to sick pay. Payroll will notify employees who are not eligible for SSP or if their SSP entitlement is coming to an end.

We will continue to make employer pension contributions based on an employee's normal pay during any period of paid sickness absence (including SSP). The contributions that an employee may make will be based on the actual pay that they receive during their sickness absence.

The organisation's pension contributions will cease during any period of unpaid sickness absence.

#### **10. Sickness and annual leave**

Where sickness coincides with prebooked annual leave, employees must notify their Line Manager and provide a Med3 (Statement of Fitness for Work) to cover the sickness period. Annual leave will be cancelled in place of sickness, unless otherwise agreed with their Line Manager.

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Annual leave entitlement continues to accrue during periods of sick leave.

If an employee has a period of sick leave which spans two holiday years, or if they return close to the end of the holiday year, they must take their remaining annual leave prior to their return if reasonable to do so. This will be discussed and agreed on a case-by-case basis.

## 11. Keeping in touch

Overall, Helping Hands expect employees to remain in regular contact (e.g. telephone, email and teams calls) with their Line Manager throughout their absence.

Where absence continues, employees will need to make every effort to attend arranged welfare meetings with their Line Manager. Employees do not have the right to bring a companion to a welfare meeting.

In cases of long-term absence, where the absence spans for more than 27 days, the Line Manager will liaise with the employee and agree how regularly keeping in touch calls are required. Keeping in touch calls are important to ensure the employee is comfortable in returning to work and remains updated on any key information – and the Line Manager can understand the likely duration of their absence.

The Line Manager may also recommend an occupational health referral where the employee can be assessed by a medical clinician. This is important to ensure the Line Manager is aware of how to support the employees return and whether any adjustments need to be arranged, such as a phased return.

The Line Manager may also request medical reports, if they are required, to ensure the relevant support is provided to the employee during their short term and long-term absence.

If an employee cannot attend the welfare meeting for any reason, they should advise their Line Manager as soon as possible and agree a new meeting date. If they do not make contact or refuse to attend a welfare meeting without an appropriate reason, the Line Manager may make decisions based on the information they have .

**POLICY (POL)****12. Returning to work**

If an employee has been absent for any reason, a return-to-work meeting will be scheduled to ensure they are fit to return to full duties (subject to any adjustments agreed following medical advice).

A return-to-work meeting is required to confirm the details of the absence. It also gives the employee an opportunity to raise any concerns or questions they may have, and to bring any relevant matters to our attention.

The return-to-work form can be found on Collaborate under HR forms. If further support is required, please contact the People Team at [hrrhub@helpinghands.co.uk](mailto:hrrhub@helpinghands.co.uk)

**13. Absence management triggers**

Persistent and high levels of absence impact the quality of service provided to our customers; it is therefore important that absence triggers are used to identify when absence becomes unsustainable.

Absence triggers will be reviewed on a rolling 52-week period based on:

- 4 or more occasions of absence and/or.
- 12 working days of consecutive absence and/or.
- A pattern of absence which is causing concern (e.g. absences regularly occurring on a particular day/week, pre/post annual leave, school/public holidays)

For part-time employees, the trigger points will be pro-rata to the number of days worked, but not the number of occasions.

**14. Absence management procedure**

The absence management procedure is the formal process to address absence which has met one or more of the company trigger points. The aim is to ensure that high levels of absence are managed and where possible brought to a sustainable level. The procedure is designed to be supportive and does not question the validity of sickness absence and the reasons for all absences will be considered.

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The absence management procedure is formed of 3 stages.

**15. Stage 1 absence management**

At the stage 1 hearing the chairperson will discuss:

- I. The Absence record and explore the reason(s) for each absence.
- II. The employee will be given the opportunity to comment on this and to advise if there is any relevant information which should be taken into account prior to any outcome being issued;
- III. The chairperson may consider seeking medical evidence or advice before making a decision.

If as a consequence of the hearing, the chairperson concludes that the absence record is a matter of concern then this will be made clear to the employee. The employee will be advised that the absence record has reached an unacceptable level and is bringing into question their ability to fulfil their contract of employment.

The employee will be informed that an improvement in their overall attendance is required with a First Written Warning being applied to their personnel file for absence. This will remain in force for a period of six months. The chairperson may also recommend additional welfare support where appropriate.

The decision will be confirmed in writing as soon as possible after the hearing, but ideally within 10 working days.

If during the period of six months there are no further absences, then the First Written warning will be disregarded for future absence management purposes, after this period subject to satisfactory improvement during that time but will form a permanent part of the employee record. Should further absences occur a Stage 2 Absence Management Hearing will be required.

**16. Stage 2 absence management**

If whilst on a first written warning for absence an employee fails to show the required improvement in their attendance a stage 2 hearing will be scheduled.

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At the stage two hearing the Chairperson will discuss:

- I. The latest absence(s), and explore whether there may be any underlying reason for this
- II. The employee will be given the opportunity to comment on this and to advise of any relevant information, which should be considered prior to any outcome being issued
- III. The Chairperson may consider seeking medical evidence or advice before making a decision on the outcome.

If as a consequence of the hearing, the Chairperson concludes that the absence record is a matter of concern then this will be made clear. The employee will be advised that their absence has remained at an unacceptable level and continues to bring into question their ability to fulfil the contract of employment.

The employee will be informed that an improvement in their overall attendance is required, and a Final Written Warning will be applied to their personnel file for absence. This will normally remain in force for a period of twelve months.

The decision will be confirmed in writing as soon as possible after the hearing, but ideally within 10 working days.

Provided that there is satisfactory improvement during the twelve-month period, the Final Written Warning will be disregarded for absence management purposes but will remain a permanent part of the employee file. Should further absence occur during this period, a Stage 3 Absence Management Hearing will be required.

### **17. Stage 3 absence management**

If whilst on a final written warning for absence an employee fails to show the required improvement, a Stage 3 Hearing will be scheduled.

- I. In these circumstances it is important for the Chairperson, in discussion with the People Team, to consider if an Occupational Health or Access to Medical Report Request should be made
- II. During the Stage 3 meeting the Chairperson will discuss the latest absence(s) and the contents of any medical report.

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- III. The employee will be given the opportunity to comment on this and to advise of any relevant information that should be considered prior to any outcome being issued.

At the end of the Stage 3 hearing the Chairperson will adjourn and take some time to decide how to proceed with the case, there are three options available to them:

- I. To extend the period of monitoring applied under the Stage 2 of this procedure. This course of action will normally only be taken in exceptional circumstances.
- II. Dismiss the employee on grounds of absence levels
- III. To refer the case to the Capability (Ill Health) Policy and Procedure to determine whether the employees' contract should be terminated on the grounds of capability.

Any decision will be confirmed in writing within as soon as possible after the hearing, but ideally within 10 working days.

### **18. Notification of absence management hearings**

Where a formal Stage 1-3 hearing is required, an employee will be notified with the time, date, and location of the meeting in writing along with confirmation of their right to be accompanied by a Trade Union Representative or Work Colleague.

The invite letter will contain details of the absences which have caused the concern and the possible outcome from the meeting.

The meeting will usually be Chaired by the employee's Line Manager, and they will be accompanied by a company representative to take minutes.

### **19. The right to be accompanied**

Employees are entitled to bring a Trade Union Representative or Work Colleague to the formal meeting. The employee must notify the Chairperson of the identity of their companion 24 hours prior to the meeting so that arrangements can be made for them to attend.

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At the hearing, the companion may make representations and ask questions but should not answer questions on the employee's behalf. The employee may talk privately with their companion at any time during the meeting.

It is the employee's responsibility to arrange for their companion to attend. Acting as a companion is voluntary and there is no obligation to do so. A companion will be granted reasonable time off duties without loss of pay.

If the chosen companion is unavailable at the time the meeting is scheduled for and is not available for a further seven calendar days, we may request that another companion is identified.

We reserve the right to refuse or request an alternative companion where there is a concern that their presence may impede the procedure.

**20. Right of appeal**

If an employee feels that their case has not been fairly considered under the Helping Hands Absence Management Policy, they may request an appeal of the original decision at each stage. All appeals should be submitted in writing, stating the full grounds of appeal. The appeal should be sent to the named manager in the outcome letter within seven days of the outcome letter.

In the appeal submission the employee should clearly set out the full grounds detailing any new evidence or inconsistency in the procedures used. The right of appeal is not on the basis of the outcome being 'unfair.'

Following receipt of the written appeal the chairperson will arrange an appeal meeting, and a letter will be sent to the employee confirming the date, time, and location of the appeal meeting, providing a minimum of 48 hours' notice.

Where an employee cannot or fails to attend an appeal hearing in person, the meeting may be rescheduled, or they may provide a written submission to the appeal chair for consideration. Where an employee fails to attend on more than one occasion without providing a reason in advance, the hearing will take place in their absence and a decision made based on the evidence available to the appeal chair.

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The appointed chair will be a more senior manager who has not dealt with the original matter. The chairperson will be accompanied by a company representative to take minutes of the meeting.

If the employee raises any new matters in their appeal, the chairperson may adjourn the meeting to carry out further investigation. If any new information comes to light, this will be provided to the employee with a summary including where appropriate, copies of additional relevant documents and witness statements. The employee will have a reasonable opportunity to consider this information before the appeal hearing, and they or their companion may comment on any new evidence arising before any decision is made.

The appeal chair may adjourn the meeting to enable them to consider the information presented before they deliver a decision. In any event written notification of the outcome will be sent to the employee within seven calendar days of the hearing, or as soon as a decision has been reached.

The chairperson may decide to;

- I. Confirm the original decision
- II. Revoke the original decision; or
- III. Substitute a different sanction.

Following the completion of the appeal process there will be no further right of appeal.

## **21. Long term absence**

Long term absence is defined as a continuous period of absence of 28 days and over. We are committed to dealing fairly with and sympathetically with colleagues who are absent from work for long periods because of ill health.

We aim to strike a reasonable balance between the pursuit of operational needs and the needs of colleagues to take time off work because of ill health.

Line Managers should use supportive measures such as keeping in touch to maintain levels of contact with colleagues on long term sick.

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Occupational health reports, Statement of Fitness for work and medical reports may provide helpful information to enable us to support an employee back to work and better understand the impact of their condition on them. Line Managers should ensure that they are discussing these with colleagues and requesting permission to get a report when appropriate. It is recommended that an occupational health report or medical report is gathered before progressing to the Capability (Ill Health) Procedure.

Where there are concerns that a colleague is unable to fulfil their contract of employment because of long term sickness absence the correct procedure is available in the Capability (Ill Health) Policy and Procedure.

**22. Employee assistance programme**

Help and support is available through our employee assistance programme (EAP). Employees can use our EAP to speak to an independent adviser on a confidential basis about any issue that is troubling them. To access the EAP website, go to:

[www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk](http://www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk) and entering these details:

Username: helpinghands

Password: Employee365!

<b>TRAINING</b>	No
Is training required?	
Details of training	Refer to the People Team for advice and guidance
<b>COMPLIANCE</b>	Compliance will be monitored through monitoring of absence management procedures, including review of relevant documents as part of the absence process.
How is compliance within this document	

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going to be monitored?		
<b>EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND PROCEDURAL INFORMATION</b>		
	Positive/Negative/N/A	Comments
Does the document have a positive or negative impact on one group of people over another based on their:		
• Age?	N/A	
• Disability	N/A	
• Gender assignment?	N/A	
• Pregnancy and maternity (which includes breastfeeding)	N/A	
• Race (including nationality, ethnic or national origins or colour)?	N/A	
• Marriage or civil partnership?	N/A	
• Religion or belief?	N/A	
• Sex?	N/A	
• Sexual orientation?	N/A	
If you have identified any potential impact (including any positive impact which may result	N/A	

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<p>in more favourable treatment for one particular group of people over another), are any exceptions valid, legal, and/or justifiable?</p>		
<p>If the impact on one of the above groups is likely to be negative:</p>		
<p>Can the impact be avoided?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
<p>What alternatives are there to achieving the document's aim without the impact?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
<p>Can the impact be reduced by taking different action?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	
<p>Is there an impact on staff, customer, or someone else's privacy?</p>	<p>If yes, privacy impact assessment required</p>	
<p>Changes since previous version</p>	<p>- Clarification of sickness absence reporting and recording processes &amp; sick pay calculations</p>	
<p>Who was involved in developing /reviewing/amending the document? (list titles)</p>	<p>Chief People Officer Senior Finance Director People Services Director ER Team Leaders</p>	
<p>How confidential is this document</p>	<p>Restricted</p>	<p>Can be shared freely within Helping Hands but NOT outside</p>
<p>References</p>	<p><i>Employment Rights Act 2025</i></p>	
<p>Associated Documents</p>	<p>Return to work form Absence management letter templates</p>	

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	Meeting notes document
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