

Sickness Absence Policy

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Introduction

At Elizabeth Finn Homes, your health and wellbeing matter to us. We understand that sometimes you may need time off due to illness, and we're here to support you through that. This policy explains what to do if you're unwell, what you can expect from us, and how we'll work together to help you return to work safely and confidently.

We want to make sure sickness absence is handled fairly, consistently, and with care. This guide also gives your manager the tools they need to support you.

Who This Policy Is For

This policy applies to everyone who works at Elizabeth Finn Homes no matter your role, contract type, or how long you've been with us. It covers short term sickness absence and outlines how to report, record, and manage time off due to ill health.

Colleagues within Probationary Period

If you're currently in your probation period, please note that the full sickness absence policy does not apply to you. However, you are still expected to follow the notification of absence procedure in full. This means reporting any sickness absence in the correct way and within the required timeframes.

For details on how absence is managed during probation, please refer to the Probationary Policy.

Your Responsibilities

We ask that you make every effort to attend work during your normal working hours. If you're unable to do so due to illness, it's important to follow the reporting procedures outlined below. Unauthorised absence may lead to formal action, so please keep us informed.

All managers, heads of department, line managers, and employees are expected to familiarise themselves with this policy and adhere to it fully. Where the Equality Act 2010 applies, managers have a duty to assess individual circumstances and take appropriate action, including implementing reasonable adjustments to support affected employees

Reporting Sickness Absence – All Colleagues

If you're unwell and can't come to work, please call the Home and speak to the person in charge, this should be the Home Manager, their Deputy, or another a Head of Department at least one hour before your shift starts so that alternative cover can be arranged. If you're part of the night team, please make contact by midday before your shift so there's enough time to arrange appropriate cover. If you are not based in a Home then please call and speak to your line manager. Texts or emails are not acceptable, you must speak to the person in charge directly. If you're unable to call yourself, please ask someone to call on your behalf and follow up personally as soon as you're able.

Let us know the nature of your illness and how long you expect to be off. If your absence lasts more than seven consecutive days, you'll need to provide a Fit Note from your GP.

Staying in Touch During Your Absence

During your time off, you must ring in for every planned shift and provide updates so that we know how you are doing and can offer support. If your absence lasts more than seven consecutive days, you'll need to provide a Fit Note from your Medical Practitioner.

If you're off sick during annual leave and have a doctor's certificate, you may be able to have your leave reinstated, please refer to the Leave policy for more information. Please note that we don't cover the cost of obtaining medical certificates

Returning to Work

When you're ready to come back, your line manager will complete a Return to Work meeting with you to understand your period of sickness and ensure you are fit to return. This usually happens within 24 hours of your return. It's a chance to talk about your health and any trends or patterns in your absences, as well as how you're feeling and whether any adjustments might help ease your transition back.

Fit Notes and Adjustments

If your doctor recommends light or amended duties, we'll do our best to accommodate that temporarily to help you ease back into work. For any sickness absence lasting more than 7 consecutive days, a Fit Note issued by a UK registered medical professional must be provided from day 8 onwards and must cover the full period of absence. Fit Notes should be submitted promptly. Keep in mind that Fit Notes don't exempt you from our absence procedures.

Failure to provide a Fit Note within the required timeframe could result in your absence being recorded as unauthorised (AWOL) which will be unpaid. If the absence continues over seven days, then your line manager or Head of Department will ring you on a regular basis and if necessary, arrange a Welfare meeting.

Medical Reports and Occupational Health

Sometimes we may ask for a medical report from your GP or refer you to our independent Occupational Health support to better understand your condition and how we can support you. We'll always ask for your consent first. If you're referred, we ask that you cooperate fully with the process.

Your manager will meet with you to discuss any medical advice received and explore adjustments or phased return options to help you get back to work safely.

If you have consented to an Occupational Health referral, you are expected to attend the appointment that is arranged for you. If you are unable to attend, you must let us know as soon as possible so we can rearrange it.

If you do not attend the appointment without a reasonable explanation, there may be a charge for the missed appointment, and this cost may be passed on to you. We will always let you know in advance if this applies.

Occupational Sick Pay (OSP)

If you're a permanent employee or on a fixed term contract and have successfully passed your probation and have at least 26 weeks continuous service, you are entitled to Occupational Sick Pay (OSP). Please refer to your contract of employment for full details. OSP is paid at your basic rate of pay and calculated in hours. It may be withdrawn if you do not follow our absence procedures or if your actions delay your recovery.

If you receive a formal warning through a disciplinary or capability process, your OSP may be paused for the duration of that warning. If OSP is paused, we will confirm this to you in writing and explain when it may be reinstated. You would still receive Statutory Sick Pay if OSP is withdrawn.

Reduced Occupational Sick Pay (ROSP)

ROSP replaces Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) and is paid for up to 28 weeks after your OSP ends. Please refer to the government website for further details of the current weekly pay and qualifying criteria for Statutory Sick Pay.

Bank Workers

If you're a bank worker, you'll receive Statutory Sick Pay if you meet the qualifying criteria.

Overtime Shifts

If you're scheduled for overtime and unable to attend due to sickness, please note that these shifts won't be counted as part of the absence monitoring process. The trigger system only applies to absences from your contracted working hours.

We understand that overtime is voluntary and often taken on in addition to your regular duties, so any missed overtime shifts due to illness won't affect your sickness absence record under this policy. However, please make every effort to fulfil the shift. If overtime shifts are repeatedly missed due to illness, overtime may be withdrawn from you and/or an investigation will take place under our Disciplinary policy.

Managing Repeated Absences

This policy defines a structured three step trigger process for managing absence frequency over a 12-month rolling timeframe. The trigger process is as follows:

Trigger Level	Definition	Action
Green	First episode of sickness absence	Return to work discussion - No formal action
Amber	Second episode of sickness absence	Return to work discussion - No formal action
Red	Third episode of sickness absence	Return to work - Informal absence review

Absences related to pregnancy, disability, or long-term conditions may be excluded, and our standard triggers may not apply, however we will review reasonable adjustments to support attendance in the workplace. All meetings and actions will be documented, and your manager will consult the People Support team before taking formal steps.

Absence Review Meetings

If you've had three separate absences within a 12-month rolling period, your manager will invite you to an informal absence review meeting. This is a chance to talk through the reasons for your absences and explore any support you might need. If there's no underlying medical condition, your manager will explain that improvement is expected and agree on any reasonable steps to help you improve your attendance.

Formal Procedure

If your attendance doesn't improve after the informal absence review, your manager may begin the formal process. This includes three steps:

Stage 1 Formal Hearing: First Written Warning

You'll be invited to a disciplinary hearing and receive written details in advance. You can bring a colleague or Trade Union Representative with you to this meeting. Following the hearing a First Written Warning may be issued and the Manager chairing the hearing will set clear attendance targets and timelines for improvement. A decision will only be made once the hearing Chair has reviewed and considered all information available to them. You will have the right to appeal.

Stage 2 Formal Hearing: Final Written Warning

If there's still no improvement within a rolling 12-month period, you will be invited to a second disciplinary hearing and receive written details in advance. You can bring a colleague or Trade Union Representative with you to the meeting. Following the hearing a Final Written Warning may be issued and the Manager chairing the hearing will set updated attendance targets and timelines for improvement. A decision will only be made once the hearing Chair has reviewed and considered all information available to them. You will have the right to appeal.

Stage 3 Formal Hearing: Dismissal

If your attendance still doesn't improve within a rolling 12-month period, you will be invited to a final disciplinary hearing and receive written details in advance. You can bring a colleague or Trade Union Representative with you to this meeting. Before this, we'll review any medical advice and ensure all reasonable adjustments have been considered. If dismissal is the outcome, it will be with notice or pay in lieu of notice. A decision will only be made once the hearing Chair has reviewed and considered all information available to them. You will have the right to appeal.

Appeals

You can appeal any formal decision, including dismissal. To do so, email peoplesupport@elizabethfinn.co.uk within seven days of the date of your outcome letter. Your appeal should explain the reasons why you wish to appeal the decision. A different chair will be appointed, and their decision will be final.

Long-Term Absence

If you're off for more than four weeks, or if your condition suggests a longer recovery, your manager will invite you to a welfare meeting. Ideally this will be face to face however if you are not well enough to attend the Home then alternative options include meeting via Microsoft Teams or a telephone call. We'll talk about how you're doing, any treatment you're receiving, and what your return to work might look like.

We'll continue to check in with you every four weeks to offer support and understand your progress.

Ending Employment Due to Ill Health

If returning to work isn't possible within a reasonable timeframe, and all other options have been explored, we may consider ending your employment on the grounds of ill health. This would only happen after a formal hearing and recent medical advice has been sought. You'll be invited in writing and have the right to be accompanied. Dismissal is always a last resort.

You'll also have the right to appeal this decision.

Phased Return to Work

If you're coming back after a long absence, surgery, or injury, we may offer a phased return. This could mean starting with reduced hours and gradually increasing them over a period of up to 12 weeks. You'll be paid for the hours you work, and any remaining time may be covered by sick pay or annual leave, based on your entitlement. However, you will be unpaid for this period if you do not have any remaining entitlement.

Disability-Related Absence

If you have a disability, we're committed to supporting you. Please speak with your manager so we can explore any reasonable adjustments that might help. We may also refer you to Occupational Health or external services like Access to Work to ensure you get the support you need.

If your condition prevents you from continuing in your current role despite adjustments, we'll explore other options with you before considering any changes to your employment.

If a new health condition is diagnosed during your employment, please update your information on the employee update form available on the SONA app. Your manager will then arrange a meeting with you to discuss this further and agreed appropriate support.

Hospital and Medical Appointments

We understand that you may need to attend medical appointments from time to time. Wherever possible, please try to schedule appointments outside of your normal working hours to minimise disruption to your team.

If that's not feasible, aim to book appointments at times that cause the least impact on your work. You'll need to:

- Get prior approval from your line manager before attending any appointment during work hours.
- Provide proof of the appointment (such as a confirmation letter, text, or email).
- Give as much notice as possible so we can plan accordingly.

If you take time off without prior authorisation, it may be considered unauthorised absence and could lead to disciplinary action. We're here to support your health needs, so please keep us informed and work with your manager to make arrangements that work for everyone.

Pregnancy-Related Absence

If you're absent due to a pregnancy-related illness, we'll record it separately and it won't count toward absence triggers. If you're off during the four weeks before your due date, your Birth Parent Leave will begin automatically. You'll be entitled to maternity pay (if eligible), rather than sick pay.

Menopause and Perimenopause Support

If you are experiencing symptoms related to menopause or perimenopause that are affecting your health, wellbeing, or attendance at work, please speak with your line manager, another manager or the People Team. We understand that symptoms can vary and may change over time, and we want to make sure you feel supported.

You can discuss any concerns you have about how your symptoms are impacting your work, and we will explore what support or adjustments may help. This might include temporary changes to your duties, flexible working arrangements, or other reasonable adjustments to help you manage your symptoms at work.

Any menopause related absence will be handled sensitively and fairly, and we will take your symptoms into account when reviewing sickness absence. You will not be treated less favourably or discriminated against because of menopause or perimenopause.

For further details about Menopause support, please refer to the Menopause Policy.

Stress-Related Absence

We take your mental health seriously. If you're off due to stress, anxiety, or depression as noted on your medical certificate we'll make sure you're supported. When you return, your manager will complete a wellbeing risk assessment with you. If work-related issues contributed to your absence, we'll work with the People Support Team to address them and take reasonable steps to help.

For details on the support tools available to you, please refer to the Wellbeing Policy.

Accident or Injury at Work

If you're injured at work and believe your illness is related to that accident, please notify your manager immediately. We'll complete an Accident Reporting Form and further investigations will take place. We will ensure you get the support you need.

Unauthorised Absence

If you take time off without following the correct procedures or without approval, it may be considered unauthorised absence. This can affect your pay and may lead to disciplinary action. Always speak with your manager if you're unsure about what's required.

Medical Suspension

In rare cases, we may need to suspend you from work on medical grounds, for example, if there's a risk to your health or the health of others. This would be a precautionary measure and not a disciplinary sanction. If this happens, we'll explain the reasons clearly and support you throughout the process. We will ensure we keep the matter under review whilst seeking medical guidance and will aim to make the period of suspension no longer than is necessary. Your suspension therefore may be lifted at any time.

Review date	Next Review Date
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