

## HR Policies and Procedures Equality Impact Assessment

TITLE: Absent Management Policy

Section responsible: HR

Officers responsible for Screening: Tracy Walters

Date of Screening: 24 August 2025

Subject matter: Tracy Walters

### **Background**

The Council is committed to ensuring that all policies and procedures promote equality, diversity, and inclusion while meeting organisational objectives. Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) are carried out to examine whether policies have the potential to affect different groups in different ways, either positively or negatively. This ensures compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and supports the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations across all protected characteristics. This EQIA covers the sickness absence HR policies, which set out a consistent and supportive approach to managing employee sickness absence.

### **Communication with staff:**

Skills byte sessions, All staff communication, Intranet

### **Equalities Impact Assessment – Initial Screening**

#### Stage 1: Initial Screening of proposals

##### Section 1: About this EIA initial screening

Name of the activity being screened:	Absence Management Policy
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Type of activity being screened:	Policy
Business Area	HR
Name of screening officer:	Tracy Walters
Date of screening:	23 August 2025
Sign off by Project Sponsor	Bal Toor
Sign off by council equality lead:	Christine Ford
<b>Section 2: Information about the policy change</b>	
1. Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of this activity.	Provides clear and consistent processes for reporting, recording, and managing sickness absence, ensuring employee wellbeing while maintaining service delivery
2. Who a) implements and b) is responsible for this activity?	Tracy Walters -Implementation  All line managers are responsible for the application of the absence management policy
3. What are the desired outcomes?	Consistent and fair management of sickness absence across all services.  Improved employee well-being and retention through supportive measures.  Reduced risk of discrimination claims by applying absence triggers proportionately.  Greater confidence among employees that sickness absence will be managed sensitively and equitably.  Improved organisational resilience and productivity through sustained attendance.

<p>4. Who is expected to benefit from this activity and in what way?</p>	<p>Employees: Benefit from a supportive, transparent framework that balances well-being with attendance requirements, ensuring fair treatment and reasonable adjustments where appropriate.</p> <p>Managers: Gain clear guidance and consistency in handling sickness absence, reducing the risk of bias or unfair treatment.</p> <p>SBC: Gains improved service delivery through better attendance management and reduced risk of grievances or legal challenges.</p> <p>Residents/Service Users: Indirectly benefit from improved workforce attendance and continuity of service delivery.</p>
<p>5. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to this activity?</p>	<p>All employees</p>

### Section 3: Identifying and assessing equality impacts

#### An equalities analysis of the staff in the scope of change

6a. Have the results of the equalities analysis shown that any particular equality group(s) will be disproportionately affected by this change? Please explain and provide evidence to support your response.	<p>Age: Potential disproportionate impact on older staff due to long-term conditions.</p> <p>Disability: Clear risk of adverse impact if absence triggers are applied without adjustment.</p> <p>Gender (Sex): Women may be more affected due to pregnancy-related or caring-related absences.</p> <p>Pregnancy/Maternity: Policy already exempts pregnancy-related absences from triggers.</p> <p>Race: Risk of indirect impact if cultural or language barriers affect communication with managers.</p> <p>Religion/Belief: Risk of conflict if medical absences link to fasting/observance periods.</p> <p>Sexual Orientation: No direct impacts identified.</p> <p>Gender Reassignment: Absences linked to transition or medical treatment could risk unfair management if not explicitly referenced.</p> <p>Marriage/Civil Partnership: No specific impact identified.</p> <p><b>Mitigation</b></p> <p>Occupational Health referrals and reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>Pregnancy-related absences excluded from absence triggers.</p> <p>Employee Assistance Programme available.</p> <p>Flexible phased return to work and redeployment options.</p>
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	<p>Consultation with HR on the application of the policy for gender reassignment.</p> <p><b>Monitor:</b></p> <p>Monitor absence data by protected characteristic to identify patterns of adverse impact.</p> <p>Ensure adjustments to trigger points are applied consistently where equality issues are present.</p>
7a Who will be consulted on this change?	CLT, TU, Networks, Employment Committee
8a During consultation, were any equality concerns raised by stakeholders? If so, please briefly explain the issue(s).	None
9a. If one or more groups is likely to be disproportionately affected, are there any mitigating actions that can be taken to address this? Please explain	<p><b>Mitigation</b></p> <p>Occupational Health referrals and reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>Pregnancy-related absences excluded from absence triggers.</p> <p>Employee Assistance Programme available.</p> <p>Flexible phased return to work and redeployment options.</p> <p>Consultation with HR on the application of the policy for gender reassignment.</p> <p><b>Monitor:</b></p> <p>Monitor absence data by protected characteristic to identify patterns of adverse impact.</p>

Ensure adjustments to trigger points are applied consistently where equality issues are present.

6b What are the potential equalities impacts of the proposed activity? Please complete the table below.

Equality group	Is there a negative/ adverse impact?	
Age:	Yes	Potential disproportionate impact on older staff due to long-term conditions – mitigation in policy details, clearly defined trigger points, allowing employees to receive relevant treatment.
Disabled staff or those with mobility requirements	yes	Clear risk of adverse impact if absence triggers are applied without adjustment. The policy talks to adjustments being made
Ethnic groups	Yes	Risk of indirect impact if cultural or language barriers affect communication with managers
Gender	Yes	Women may be more affected due to pregnancy-related or caring-related absences.
Pregnancy and Maternity		No
Gender Reassignment	Yes	Separate guidance to be developed to support managers and employees navigating gender reassignment

Marriage and civil partnerships		No	
Religious/ Faith groups	Yes		<p>Risk of conflict if medical absences are linked to fasting/observance periods.</p> <p>Mitigation: SBC currently offers flexibility during periods of fasting.</p>
Sexual Orientation		no	
7b. Can the negative/adverse impact(s) highlighted be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group? Or any other reason? Please explain	<p>Some adverse impacts may occur, particularly for disabled employees and older staff who are more likely to reach absence triggers. These impacts can be justified where consistent attendance management is necessary to ensure service delivery and fairness across the workforce. However, the policy already includes mitigations (reasonable adjustments, exemptions for pregnancy-related absence, phased returns) to ensure that no group is unfairly disadvantaged. The application of triggers is therefore proportionate when balanced against the duty to provide essential public services, provided managers apply flexibility where equality considerations are present.</p>		
8b. <b>There are no negative / adverse impact(s)</b> If you have not identified any negative/ adverse impacts please briefly explain your answer, providing evidence.	n/a		
9b. <b>Have any <u>positive</u> impact(s) been identified?</b> If you have identified any positive impact(s) please briefly explain your answer, providing evidence.			
	<p>Explicit protection for pregnancy-related absences supports women's equality in the workplace.</p> <p>The requirement to consider reasonable adjustments promotes disability equality and inclusivity.</p>		

Support mechanisms such as the Employee Assistance Programme and phased return to work promote employee wellbeing and retention.

Equal treatment in monitoring helps identify and address patterns of disadvantage across protected groups.

#### Section 4: Next Steps

10. What data will be used to monitor the future impact of this policy?

What are the future monitoring arrangements?

SBC workforce data (age, gender, disability, ethnicity).

Workforce data is developed each month and cascaded with directorates with support from HR.

11. What is the date of the next review?

August 2027