SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

Introduction
The Southern Co-operative (TSC) has a genuine concern for the health and welfare of its colleagues and will treat all sickness related absence with a fair and consistent approach. TSC will encourage and support colleagues back to work after sickness.

If a colleague shows signs of recurring illness, TSC will work with the colleague to identify whether it can offer more support to improve their attendance or whether a more formal approach needs to be adopted to resolve the situation.

TSC aims to encourage all its colleagues to maximise their attendance at work. It is recognised, however, that a certain level of sickness absence is inevitable. For colleagues who are genuinely sick TSC will offer support and where possible help them with their recovery and support their return.

Scope
This policy and process applies to all colleagues in respect of Sickness related absence only. Time off for sickness is not to be used for non-medical reasons e.g. emergency carers leave, emergency appointments Holidays etc.

Reporting Absence
• On the first day of sickness related absence the colleague must notify their line manager immediately, but in any event no later than one hour before their normal starting time or no later than 9.30am, whichever is the earliest.
• Contact must be made by the colleague to the line manager by phone. Texting, emailing and notification by others is not acceptable.
• An explanation of why the colleague is absent and the nature of the problem should be provided.
• The line manager must also be given an indication of the length of time they expect to be absent. If this is not possible then the line manager must be contacted daily to keep them fully updated.
• For an absence which continues beyond 7 days a medical certificate must be given directly to the line manager. This procedure must also be followed for all future medical certificates.
• Colleagues must keep in regular contact with their line manager and confirm their return date as soon as they know they are fit to return to work

Returning to Work
• Regardless of the length of absence, colleagues must complete and sign a TSC Sickness Absence Form when they return to work.
• The line manager will then complete the remainder of the form and forward to HR Services. TSC Sick pay cannot be processed without this form.
• The line manager will speak to the colleague when they return to ensure that they are fully recovered and to establish whether there is any support that TSC can give. The colleague will have the opportunity to discuss and explain their reasons for being absent.
• A Sickness Absence Review form/Return to Work form will be completed and the colleague will be asked to sign the forms so that both the colleague and line manager are aware of what has been written.

Short Term Frequent Absence
• If a colleague is away from work regularly or frequently, their line manager will talk to them about their absence levels.
• If necessary, timescales for improvement will be set by the line manager.
• In the event of recurring illness colleagues will be required to complete a consent form so medical information can be requested from their Doctor.
• TSC reserves the right to insist that any colleague with unsatisfactory attendance records provide a medical certificate for any period of absence, irrespective of its duration.

Absence due to an act of violence at work
• If a colleague is absent as a result of an attack or act of violence whilst at work, the first four weeks of any resulting sickness absence will not count against the individual’s TSC Sick Pay.

Absence due to contact with a notifiable disease
• If a colleague is compelled by a medical authority to be absent from work following contact with a notifiable disease the period of absence will be regarded as special leave with pay. Pay in these circumstances will be the difference between full wages and any benefit which the colleague is entitled to receive under any statutory or local authority regulations.

Long Term Absence
• Long Term Absence is defined as 4 or more consecutive weeks absence from work.
• The line manager will remain in contact with the colleague throughout their absence to understand their reasons for absence and to establish what support, if any, TSC can give to help the colleague improve their health.
• Colleagues must give all Doctor certificates to their line manager on a prompt basis.
• To ensure that TSC is doing everything it can to support colleagues on long term absence, they will be invited to attend regular meetings with their line manager and/or HR Advisor. The meeting will be conducted in a supportive and sensitive way discussing the colleague’s current level of health, when they anticipate being able to return and what adjustments TSC can make to help the colleague return. If appropriate, a phased return-to-work programme will be drawn up if this helps when the colleague returns to work.
• TSC may need to seek professional medical advice if colleagues are absent for any period of time. Therefore TSC may ask colleagues to be medically examined by an Occupational Health Practitioner nominated by TSC so it can fully understand what it can do to support the colleague and whether TSC is able to hold the colleague's job open until they are able to return.

Ending Employment
Where there is no reasonable prospect of an individual returning to work in the near future, TSC may consider that ending the employment is the most appropriate course of action. Consultation with the colleague would take place prior to taking any such decision and if the employment were ended as a result the colleague would have the right of appeal (as per the procedure set out in the disciplinary section).

Monitoring Absence Levels
• To ensure that all colleagues are treated fairly and the spirit of the Absence Management process is respected, line managers will monitor each individual’s absence levels over the previous 12 months.
• If any colleague has an absence record that is too high, TSC reserves the right to take appropriate action to either reduce the level of absence or to review whether TSC can continue to support the situation on an ongoing basis.
• The absence thresholds will be:
  ▪ First period of absence – Counselling Interview (and Sickness Absence Review Form will be completed)
  ▪ Second period of absence – Counselling Interview (and Sickness Absence Review Form updated)
  ▪ Third period of absence – Counselling Interview (and Sickness Absence Review Form updated)
- Fourth period of absence – Colleague may be referred to Occupational Health Professional for medical opinion as to why absence levels are so high. Unless mitigation is offered, Colleague will be invited to Disciplinary Hearing and this may result in a First Written Warning being issued.
- Fifth period of absence – Colleague will be invited to Disciplinary Hearing and this may result in a Final Written Warning being issued.
- Sixth period of absence – Colleague will be invited to Disciplinary Hearing and this may result in Dismissal from TSC (With Notice).

Any Disciplinary decisions will also be followed with the opportunity to appeal against the decision taken.

TSC Sick Pay

TSC Sick Pay is paid to colleagues with at least 6 months’ continuous employment who are absent from work due to sickness or injury. It is intended to compliment Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). If colleagues qualify for SSP, TSC Sick Pay is the difference between their basic pay and SSP. If they do not qualify for SSP, TSC Sick Pay is their basic pay.

TSC Sick Pay year runs from 1st April to 31st March and the maximum TSC Sick Pay payable to a colleague in any year, according to their length of service at the start of the year, is set out in their contract of employment.

Colleagues joining TSC from 1 April 2012 do not receive any TSC Sick Pay for the first three days of each period of sickness absence in their first three years of employment.

TSC Sick Pay is not paid in the following circumstances :-

- The absence is due to an accident /injury when working for another employer or acting as a self employed person.
- The absence is due to a self-inflicted injury or affliction. A self inflicted injury may be considered to include injuries received as a result of taking part in a dangerous pastime such as rock climbing or hang-gliding.
- Sickness/injury occurs during periods of pre-booked holiday. Holidays may only be adjourned due to sickness either prior to the holiday or on the first day of the holiday providing that the colleague advises their line manager immediately of the sickness and the appropriate absence certification is complied with. After the first day the holiday will be deemed to have continued unless exceptional circumstances prevail.
- The maximum TSC Sick Pay has been paid in the preceding TSC Sick Pay year and the colleague has not returned to work (normal contracted hours) for 13 consecutive weeks with no absences other than holiday.
- TSC considers that a colleague’s absence is not due to a bona fide sickness or injury.
- As a disciplinary sanction for an unacceptable attendance record. Such a sanction may only be imposed following a properly constituted disciplinary hearing and not before a written warning has been issued that such sanction may be used in the future. Each absence will be dealt with on its merits.
- The absence is as a result of an accident and the colleague receives damages from a third party or insurance company. In this event, TSC Sick Pay will be paid, less the amount of damages received. Where TSC Sick Pay has been paid and damages are subsequently received then you would be required to repay TSC Sick Pay.

In addition, TSC Sick Pay may not be paid in the following circumstances :

- Where colleagues are facing a disciplinary investigation or hearing, and a period of sickness occurs at that time, TSC will investigate the reason(s) for the sickness and a decision could be taken to withhold TSC sick pay.
- Colleagues are expected to behave in an appropriate manner whilst off sick whether the absence is with or without pay. Behaviour should be in accordance with the reason for
the absence. Inappropriate behaviour, which may aggravate the illness or injury, or
behaviour which is inconsistent with the illness or injury may result in the non-payment of
TSC sick pay and disciplinary action may be taken in accordance with the TSC
disciplinary procedure.

Failure to comply with Sickness Policy
Whilst TSC anticipates that all colleagues will respect and follow TSC’s procedures relating
to sickness absence, it will take appropriate action against any colleague who is found to be
non-compliant.

TSC reserves the right to take appropriate action against any colleague who takes sick leave
for non medical reasons. These actions may include TSC Sick Pay being withheld and/or
Disciplinary action being taken.

Notes
See also the policies in respect of:-

Maternity Leave
Disciplinary Policy
Dependants Leave
Parental Leave