

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY 21 JULY 2003 AT 2.00 P.M.**

Agenda Item No.

3

HEALTH AND ATTENDANCE POLICY

Report of the Corporate Director (People & Property)

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Executive Member:- David Beatty

1. Purpose of report

- To propose a new policy and approach to managing Ill Health Absence within the County Council. (attached)

2. Summary

The County Council issued "Guidelines in Ill-Health Cases" in 1993. The guidelines incorporated advice and information for managers and personnel departments in relation to the management of ill health.

Our experience in the management of ill health absence has shown us that we need to provide stronger and clearer advice to managers. This proposed new policy incorporates latest advice from the Employers Organisation and current employment law.

3. Conclusion

Cabinet is asked to consider approving the new policy entitled "Health and Attendance".

4. Background

The purpose of the Health and Attendance Policy is to ensure that absence due to ill health is kept to a minimum and that staff welfare is managed appropriately. Where people are absent, support is structured to ensure that they are able return to work as quickly as possible.

The new policy brings together in a coherent form our responses to legal developments including not least, the Disability Discrimination Act which placed new positive duties on employers not to treat employees with disabilities less favourably.

The policy provides practical guidance, support and common standards for the management of ill health across the County Council.

There are three overall themes within the new policy:

- **Getting the Balance Right**

This will ensure that when dealing with ill health, managers are equipped with the guidance and resources to properly balance the needs of the individual and the needs of the authority.

- **Providing Effective Support for Disabled and Non Disabled employees**

This deals with the issue of providing support to all employees. The emphasis is on positive approaches as to how things can be done, e.g. changes to the work environment, working patterns etc.

- **Positive Attendance Management**

The approach is one of encouraging managers to be better informed about employee health matters in order that they can provide early constructive support rather than delayed, punitive action.

Consultation

UNISON were invited to comment on the draft in January 2003. Despite efforts to get a reply, nothing was received until the end of June. Their comments have been taken account of in the final document. They have however concluded their comments as follows:

“UNISON is disappointed that the County Council has chosen a punitive and controlling process to manage absence. We believe that this document needs to be totally revised although we have tried to put some fairness into it. It still leaves UNISON concerned to the point that we could not support the process”

The proposed new policy has been developed in the light of the Employers Organisation’s “Management of Ill Health Handbook” which is an up to date best practice guide for Local Authorities. The suggestion that the policy introduces a punitive approach has not been substantiated in the other comments which UNISON have made.

Consultation has also taken place with the County Councils Disabled Employees Co-ordinating Group and, at UNISON’s request, feedback from a specially convened “employee focus group”, has also been taken into account.

In the light of the above, it is suggested Cabinet consider approving this policy but delegate authority to the Corporate Director (People & Property), in

consultation with the Executive Member, to make any necessary minor changes should they be required following further discussion with UNISON.

Background Papers:

“Management of Ill Health Handbook” – Employers Organisation for Local Government 2002

“Guidelines on Ill Health Cases” – Personnel Policies & Procedures, Hertfordshire County Council 1993