The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance about arrangements for sick pay and for reporting and managing sickness absence

Policy agreed on 12th July 2021

1. Policy statement

We are committed to improving the health, wellbeing and attendance of all employees. We value the contribution our employees make to our success. So, when any employee is unable to be at work for any reason, we miss that contribution. This absence policy explains:

* What we expect from managers and employees when handling absence.
* How we will work to reduce levels of absence.

This policy has been written in line with ACAS guidelines, and we welcome contributions from employees in developing and implementing this policy.

This policy deals with sick pay, reporting sickness absence and how we manage sickness absence. Failing to report absence under this policy or falsely claiming sick pay will be treated as misconduct.

This policy does not form part of your contract of employment and we may amend it at any time. This policy is only applicable to employees.

1. Key principles

The organisation’s absence policy is based on the following principles:

1. As a responsible employer we undertake to provide payments to employees who are unable to attend work due to sickness.
2. Regular, punctual attendance is an important aspect of everyone's employment. We ask each employee to take responsibility for achieving and maintaining good attendance.
3. We will support employees who have genuine grounds for absence for whatever reason. This support includes:
   1. ‘special leave’ for necessary absences not caused by sickness
   2. a flexible approach to taking annual leave
   3. access to counsellors where necessary
   4. rehabilitation support in cases of long-term sickness absence.
4. We will consider any advice given by an employee’s GP on the ‘Statement of Fitness for Work’. If the GP advises that an employee ‘may be fit for work’ we will discuss with the employee how we can help them get back to work – for example, on flexible hours, or altered duties.
5. Where appropriate we will use an occupational health adviser, to help advise the employee and their manager on the best way to improve the employee’s health and wellbeing.
6. The company’s disciplinary procedures will be used if an explanation for absence is not forthcoming or is not thought to be satisfactory.
7. We respect the confidentiality of all information relating to an employee’s sickness. This policy will be implemented in line with current data protection legislation and the Access to Medical records Act 1988.
8. Notification of absence

If an employee is going to be absent from work or where you are unable to come to work because you are sick or your children or other dependents are sick they should speak to their manager or deputy before or within the first hour of their normal start time. They should also:

* Give a clear indication of the nature of the illness and
* A likely return date.

The manager will check with other employees if there is any information they need to cover their work during the period of absence. If the employee does not contact their manager by the required time the manager will attempt to contact the employee.

An employee may not always feel able to discuss their medical problems with their line manager. Managers will be sensitive to individual concerns and make alternative arrangements, where appropriate. For example, an employee may prefer to discuss health problems with a person of the same sex.

1. Evidence of incapacity

Employees can use the company self-certification arrangements for the first seven days absence. Thereafter a ‘Statement of Fitness for Work’ is required to cover every subsequent day.

* Where the sickness absence lasts for more than a week, you must provide us with a relevant doctor's certificate, called a fit note, which will state why you are not fit for work. As we have explained above, you must also complete a self-certification form in relation to the first seven days.
* If your sickness absence is going to continue when the fit note or Doctor's certificate expires, it is your responsibility to provide us with a new certificate covering your continued absence.
* Where your doctor provides a fit note stating that you 'may' be fit for work, it is important that you tell your manager. We can then discuss with you arrangements for your return to work. Where, for whatever reason, appropriate steps cannot be taken so that you can return to work, you will remain on sick leave. The position will be reviewed at an appropriate interval.

If absence is likely to be long-term - more than four weeks continuously, there is a shared responsibility for the Company and the employee to maintain contact at agreed intervals.

1. ‘May be fit for some work’

If the GP advises on the Statement of Fitness for Work that an employee ‘may be fit for work’ we will discuss with the employee ways of helping them get back to work. This might mean talking about a phased return to work or amended duties.

If it is not possible to provide the support an employee needs to return to work – for example, by making the necessary workplace adjustments – or an employee feels unable to return then the Statement will be used in the same way as if the GP advised that the employee was ‘not fit for work’.

* 1. *Fit for Work service*
* The Fit for Work programme is a government-funded occupational health assessment service. The intention behind the programme is to help employees get back to work when they have been absent with sickness.
* If you are absent with sickness for four weeks, either we or your doctor may suggest referring you to the Fit for Work service. Your doctor can, where he or she believes it is appropriate, suggest that a referral is made earlier than 4 weeks.
  1. *Sick pay*
* We [do OR do not] provide contractual sick pay over and above any statutory sick pay to which you may be entitled. [Confirmation of your contractual sick pay entitlement will be provided by your manager [or the Human Resources team]]. [Any contractual sick pay will be inclusive of your statutory sick You may be entitled to receive statutory sick pay if you meet the statutory requirements. Statutory sick pay is not paid for the first three consecutive days of sickness absence. Statutory sick pay may be payable for up to 28 weeks.

1. Return to work discussions

When you have been absent with illness, your line manager may hold a return-to-work interview with you. The reason for the meeting is to check that you are fit enough to return to work and consider whether there are any steps that could be taken to facilitate this. It is also our opportunity to speak with you about any issues regarding your absence record.

Managers will discuss absences with employees when they return to work to establish:

* The reason for absence
* What the manager or the company can do to help
* That the employee is fit to return to work.

If an employee’s GP has advised that they ‘may be fit for work’ the return to work discussion can also be used to agree in detail how their return to work might work best in practice.

1. A more formal review may be triggered by:

Absences that are disruptive to the company’s operations e.g. frequent short-term absences or long-term absence. This review will look at any further action required to improve the employee’s attendance and wellbeing.

* 1. *Dealing with long-term sickness absence or frequent short-term absences*
* In circumstances where you have been absent for a long period or you have had frequent short-term absences, we will follow the process outlined below.
* It is important for us to understand the reasons for your absence. We want to know whether there are things we can do to help you improve your attendance and your health. In some circumstances we may need to get medical information about your illness before deciding on a course of action.
* We may need to meet with you to discuss your absence, the medical information or other related issues. We will give you reasonable notice of the meeting and location.
* Where you are unable to attend the meeting, at the time specified, it is very important that you let us know as soon as possible. We will then seek to arrange another time where you are able to attend.
* Where it is relevant, we will consider whether reasonable adjustments may need to be made to the sickness absence procedure, or to your role or working arrangements.
  1. *Medical assessments*
* In appropriate circumstances, we may ask you to consent to attending a medical assessment by a doctor or occupational health adviser. Sometimes it may be that a specialist medical practitioner is the right person for you to see and we will discuss that with you.
* We will ask you to agree that any medical report produced may be disclosed to us. Ideally, we would want to discuss the information with the occupational health adviser or doctor.
* All medical reports will be kept confidential.
  1. *First sickness absence meeting*
* This meeting will be to discuss the reasons for your absence, the likely next steps and prognosis.
* We will also want to discuss whether to obtain a medical report and whether there are any steps that you and the Company could take to improve your health.
* Where the sickness absence is of a long term nature, it may be appropriate to agree a return-to- work program
* For regular, short-term absence concerns, the Company may set you targets for improvements.
  1. *If the sickness absence does not improve*
* We will monitor your progress following the first sickness absence meeting. Where you have not been able to return to work from longer term sickness or if you are unable to meet any targets set for short term absences, we will invite you to another meeting.
* The point of the second meeting is to assess whether the absence situation is likely to improve. Where it is appropriate, we will consider redeployment opportunities
* Where we believe that it is unlikely that you will return to work from long term absence or where
* you have not been able to meet the targets for improving short-term absences, you may be given a written warning that you are at risk of dismissal. Where the circumstances require, we will agree a further review period and a meeting to follow.
  1. *Final sickness absence meeting*
* Where there is no improvement in reaching any targets set for reduction of short-term absences or you have been unable to return to work from long-term sickness we will invite you to another meeting.
* This meeting will include an assessment of whether or not to terminate your contract of employment.
* We will consider any points that you want to raise in relation to your sickness absence and the likely prognosis.
  1. *Appeal against decisions under this policy*
* Where you want to appeal against decisions taken under this procedure, you must set out your appeal grounds in writing. You will be required to submit your appeal [within one week] of the date on which the decision you are challenging was sent to you.
* We will seek to hold an appeal meeting within [three weeks] of receiving your appeal.
* We will seek to deal with your appeal fairly and reasonably. The decision will be provided to you in writing, usually within [two weeks] of the appeal hearing.
* You will have no further right of appeal under this policy.
* Where you lodge an appeal against dismissal, the date of dismissal does not change. If your appeal is successful, the dismissal will be revoked and you will receive any relevant back pay and your continuity of service is restored.

***We request that our Staff, Volunteers, and Visitors respect this Policy, a copy of which will be available on demand.***

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**Approved by the Directors of** The General Store Selkirk

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Date…………………………………………………………………………….