

County of Essex Policy Manual

Attendance Support Policy

Policy Number:	07-002 (Formerly 2007-02)
Approved by:	County Council
Department:	All Departments of the County
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Originating Department:	Human Resources
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Replaces Policy No:	

1.0 Introduction

This policy sets out the County of Essex’s expectation of regular attendance at work. This policy also sets out the County’s commitment to assist and encourage employees to attend work regularly, and its intent to address both Accountable Absenteeism and excessive Supported Absenteeism, as defined below, in alignment with the County’s strategic goals of promoting transparency and awareness, and being an employer with impact.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the County. This policy has also been adopted by the Essex-Windsor Solid Waste Authority (“EWSWA”) and applies to EWSWA employees.

3.0 Definitions

- **Attendance Concern Meeting:** A meeting between an employee and management to discuss absenteeism when reasonable thresholds have been exceeded.

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- **Accountable Absence/Absenteeism:** Absenteeism within an employee's control and occur without valid reason, proper notification, or necessary documentation.
- **County of Essex:** means the Corporation of the County of Essex, and may be used interchangeably with the terms the 'County', the 'Corporation' or 'County of Essex'.
- **Incidental Sick Days:** Short-term absences due to illness or injury, typically lasting a few days or less, that do not require long-term leave. Incidental Sick Days are counted as days, not incidents.
- **Ontario Human Rights Code ("Code"):** The Code is a provincial law that protects individuals from discrimination and harassment in employment based on protected grounds such as race, sex, disability, age, religion, and family status. Employers have a legal duty under the Code to accommodate employees up to the point of undue hardship.
- **Supported Absence/Absenteeism:** Absenteeism caused by circumstances beyond the employee's control (e.g., illness, short- or long-term disability leave, protected leave under the *Ontario Employment Standard Act, 2000*, as amended ("ESA"), family emergency, etc.).

4.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to foster sustainable employee attendance by recognizing the complex factors that contribute to absenteeism, including psychological, occupational, and systemic stressors. This policy provides a trauma-informed and equitable framework to support employees experiencing non-occupational illness or injury - whether physical or psychological - through compassionate, non-disciplinary engagement.

This policy further ensures that employees are aware that Accountable Absences, i.e. those that do not meet the County's attendance expectations and are unexplained, unsupported, or otherwise non-compliant with the County's expectations will be addressed and managed through progressive discipline.

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5.0 Policy

Employees play an essential role in maintaining the high standard of service expected by the County. Regular attendance supports both team continuity and public service. The County recognizes that absences may result from a range of factors, including physical illness, mental health concerns, caregiving responsibilities, or personal crises.

This policy is geared towards:

- Managing employee attendance with a wellness focus and assisting employees to return to work as soon as they are able to do so, including where appropriate, assisting employees with referrals for appropriate care.
- Ensuring that all employees meet their obligation to maintain regular attendance and provide awareness on how poor attendance affects other team members.
- Providing clear and transparent guidelines for the County to reasonably and consistently manage all absences.
- Enabling the County to better ascertain employee job fitness through objective findings and, where appropriate and possible, to accommodate employees with performing the essential duties of their jobs.

This policy is intended to be reviewed with, and will be applied alongside, the Attendance Support Procedure (SOP 050).

6.0 Responsibility

6.1 Employee Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of each employee to attend work regularly. To foster a culture of wellness, collaboration and accountability, employees are expected to:

- Report absences as soon as possible, including the reason for absence, in accordance with collective agreement provisions and County policy.

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- Submit required documentation (e.g., absence forms, medical notes) in a timely manner, and in accordance with subsection the Attendance Support Procedure (SOP 050).
- When possible, take appropriate steps to address health needs early, support timely recovery and take steps to ensure inconveniences do not prevent attendance at work wherever possible.
- Follow health and safety policies and procedures to prevent injury or illness at work.
- Make reasonable efforts to schedule appointments and personal obligations outside of working hours.
- Seek assistance early when personal or occupational issues impact attendance.
- Stay in regular contact with their supervisor or Human Resources during any leave, and provide sufficient information to support wellness planning.
- Collaborate in the return to work process along with the union (if applicable) and assist in the identification of any reasonable accommodations as defined under the Code.
- Communicate openly and in good faith in a timely way regarding changes to their health or ability to work, while knowing their dignity and confidentiality will be respected.
- Assume positive intent regarding their colleagues' absences and refrain from gossip or speculation about the reasons for another employee's absence.
- Follow attendance-related procedures set out by the County.

6.2 Manager/Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisors and managers play a vital role in cultivating psychologically safe, healthy, and inclusive work environments. Leadership grounded in empathy, transparency, and proactive engagement is essential to sustaining attendance and wellbeing.

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As part of their role, managers and supervisors are responsible for:

- Ensuring all employees understand this policy, including their rights, responsibilities, and access to support resources.
- Promoting a workplace culture that encourages early help-seeking, mental health literacy, and peer support engagement.
- Maintaining regular, respectful, and compassionate communication with employees who are absent.
- Collaborating with Human Resources, as well as the Manager of Employee Wellness, and appropriate union, where applicable, to coordinate timely and appropriate wellness supports, referrals (e.g., FSEAP, Peer Support, family-inclusive care), and individualized accommodations in accordance with the Code, while considering indicators of potential occupational stress or burnout.
- With the assistance of Human Resources, monitoring and documenting the absence record of each employee and assessing if absences are within threshold limits, as defined herein.
- Meeting with employees to discuss both Accountable Absences and Supported Absences in a solutions-focused manner, to offer assistance, and to support the implementation and follow-up of any recovery, wellness, or return-to-work plans.
- Preparing, reviewing, and/or distributing for signature any correspondence between the department and its employees.
- Actively recognizing employees for sustained attendance and contributions to team wellbeing.
- Remaining in contact with employees on extended leave to ensure that information regarding potential changes in health status are shared and any return-to-work initiatives can be planned for.

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- Follow attendance-related procedures set out by the County.

6.3 Human Resources Responsibilities

Human Resources will assist the departments and the employees to assure an effective absence support policy by:

- Acting as the liaison with the employee to obtain medical information, including the Medical Certificate.
- Assist in preparing health assessment forms or letters to aid in the management of a disability as required.
- Referring employees for Medical Assessments to facilitate an evaluation of an employee's ability to perform their regular job tasks in relation to their current health status and/or to verify whether an illness/injury is a continuation/recurrence of a previous claim.
- Monitoring and assessing fitness to return to work.
- Assisting in the development of case management strategies.
- Co-operating with managers/supervisors to formulate appropriate return to work strategies.
- Keeping the manager/supervisor advised of an employee's medical progress (in a manner respecting employee confidentiality), the possibility of a return to work, or planned date of return, and the potential need for accommodation of a disability as defined under Code.
- Compiling quarterly reports related to employee absenteeism for review with departments.
- Assisting managers/supervisors with addressing Accountable Absenteeism, including providing training, templates, or other advice as required.
- Following procedures set out by the County.

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6.4 Third Party Disability Insurer Responsibilities

For employees whose Short Term or Long-Term Disability (STD/LTD) benefits are administered by a third-party insurer, the following responsibilities are managed by the insurer on behalf of the County:

- Receiving, reviewing, and adjudicating STD/LTD claims in accordance with applicable policy and eligibility criteria established by the insurer.
- Communicating directly with employees regarding the status of their claim, any documentation required, and expected timelines for decisions.
- Confidentially handling all personal and medical information submitted in compliance with applicable privacy legislation.
- Coordinating with the County and the employee's health care provider to support safe and timely return to work.
- Requesting and assessing medical documentation to support claims in accordance with their policies and guidelines.
- Informing the County of claim decisions and any changes that may impact the employee's ability to return to work, without disclosing specific medical details.

7.0 Amendments

This Policy may be amended by the County from time to time to ensure operational effectiveness and compliance with applicable laws and Collective Agreements.

In the event of an amendment, the County will provide the Union with advance notice. Where appropriate, consultation may occur; however, policy development and amendment remain the responsibility of the employer.

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8.0 Related Documents/Legislation

- Attendance Support Procedure
- Accommodation Policy
- Early and Safe Return to Work Policy
- *Human Rights Code*, RSO 1990, c H.19, as amended

9.0 Summary of Amendments

Date	Amendments
2004-10-20	Policy adopted as 2004-001 Attendance Management Policy
2007-07-18	Council Report # 2007-R06-HR-0718-GPS updates policy and changes policy to 2007-01 "Absences due to Non-Occupational Injury/Illness"
2015-05-06	Council Report 2015-R2-HR-0506-GPS updated policy criteria and changed name to "Attendance and Wellness Program"
2016-01-20	Council Report 2016-R01-0120-GPS updated Section 5.6
2020-02-19	Council Report 2020-0219-HR-R01-GS updated Section 5.4
2025-11-05	Policy revised to include process for accountable absenteeism, revised thresholds and process, and split out procedures into corresponding SOP 050 (subject to Council approval)