



Diocese of Coventry Clergy Sickness Policy and Procedure

Document Overview

Purpose	This document sets out the Diocese’s policy on clergy sickness absence, and the accompanying procedure sets out the process of reporting absence and dealing with clergy absences due to sickness.
Confidentiality	This document is not confidential
Document owner	Archdeacon Pastor
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Version History

Version	Date	Status Note
1.0	03/04/2024	Approved by BCST
1.1	18/03/2026	Amended s7.1 as SSP is a day 1 right from 06/04/2026

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1. Pastoral Note

- 1.1. The Diocese of Coventry takes the well-being of clergy very seriously. This document and policy, while following legal and HR obligations, is designed to help you to understand the procedure that will be followed should you become ill and need time off work.
- 1.2. Illness can come at any time, whether that is a cold requiring a few days of self-certified absence or a condition that requires more time away from work. It can also bring with it feelings of guilt at not being able to attend to all the pressing matters of the benefice and in the case of long-term illness anxiety as to what the future may hold. Whatever the situation, this policy outlines what you and the diocese need to do so that you will feel supported and upheld during your time of absence. It also gives the process of how a return to work will be managed after a prolonged period of sick leave. The flow chart at Appendix 1 gives a basic understanding of the process.
- 1.3. If you need advice or further clarification on this document, please contact the Archdeacon Pastor.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. The Diocese of Coventry will do all they can to support the clergy during periods of absence and to provide help and guidance for their return to work.
- 2.2. The following document sets out the Diocese's policy on sickness absence, and the accompanying procedure sets out the process of reporting absence and dealing with clergy absences.

3. Sickness Policy

Principles

- 3.1. The policy encompasses the importance of taking care of one another within a pastoral framework which is clear to all. The principles underlying the policy are that during the course of the illness there should be:
 - i. good pastoral and practical care
 - ii. respect for the privacy of the individual
 - iii. professional medical advice sought at the right time
 - iv. clarity on the financial support available
- 3.2. Clergy sometimes feel that they should undertake light duties when they are unwell and try to cover the essential services – but this policy aims to reduce the pressure on clergy to feel they have to work when they are ill and should be taking time off.

Pastoral Care during Sickness Absence

- 3.3. Pastoral care will be provided through one of the Archdeacons, who should be notified of all illnesses, along with the necessary support and involvement from the Area Dean. In cases of long-term absence, the diocese would wish to maintain pastoral care of the clergy and their family and will remain in regular contact for such purposes. This responsibility will be shared by the senior clergy.
- 3.4. For those in self-supported ministry pastoral care during periods of ill health is equally important and should be brought to the notice of the Archdeacons and Dean of Self-Supporting Ministry where the illness is longer term and /or serious, but the financial provisions of this policy do not apply.
- 3.5. The Archdeacon Pastor will be responsible for the overall management and administration relating to the absence. In cases of long-term sickness, the Archdeacon Pastor may contact the clergy to arrange a home visit as well as being responsible for arranging an Occupational Health Referral.

Cover Arrangements

- 3.6. In times of sickness, office holders should use all reasonable endeavours to make arrangements for the duties of the office to be covered by another person. In parochial posts where the individual is unable to do this the responsibility lies with the churchwardens, in consultation with the Area Dean where necessary.
- 3.7. Where appointments or short periods of sickness significantly impact a cleric's ministry then these should be reported to the Archdeacon Pastor. Clergy are encouraged to report all self-certified days to the Archdeacon Pastor.
- 3.8. In cases of serious illness, please ensure the Archdeacon Pastor is informed as soon as possible.
- 3.9. All illnesses should be reported to the Archdeacon Pastor who will inform the Area Dean. Depending on the circumstances of the parish the Area Dean may need to be involved with the clergy of the deanery in deciding who should be providing cover during the illness. In larger parishes cover may be conveniently arranged through their clergy team, but for others the Area Deans will arrange for cover following the notification of the illness.

Sick Pay

- 3.10. All stipendiary Clergy are entitled to receive their stipend at the full rate for the first 28 weeks of sickness, and this payment will include Statutory Sick Pay. At this stage if the illness appears to be longer term, guidance will have been sought from Occupational Health so that advice can be sought on the likelihood of a return to work, as sick pay will reduce. (See section 6).

Disability

- 3.11. In its support of all sick clergy including their family circumstances, the Diocese will follow the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended from time to time)
- 3.12. Where a critical illness has left an individual with a disability within the meaning of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 the Diocese will take responsibility for working with the individual (and where appropriate local senior colleagues) to ensure that appropriate reasonable adjustments are made that will enable the individual to work effectively.

4. Sickness Absence Procedure

Notifying Absence

- 4.1. The clergy should report absence on all occasions when they are unable to fulfil their normal duties and usual workload. Their obligations and rights if they are unable to perform their duties because of sickness are set out in Regulations 27 and 28 of Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Regulations 2009 (as amended from time to time) (“the Regulations”).
- 4.2. On the first day of absence the clergyperson should telephone the Archdeacons’ office who will then inform Churchwardens, the Area Dean and any other colleagues as necessary. Where they are part of a team, they should notify the Team Rector or, in the event they are unavailable, a senior colleague. The Churchwarden should contact the Areal Dean to inform the Area Dean of the details of the forthcoming services, and to ask for cover to be provided if the Churchwarden is unable to find cover.
- 4.3. Clergy are required to inform [Simon Taylor](#) (Assistant to the Archdeacons) at the Diocesan office:
 - if they are unable to perform the duties of your office because of illness for any period of one day or more.
 - and;
 - provide a medical certificate for absence of more than 7 days.
- 4.4. Where Clergy are unable to do this themselves, they should inform the Churchwarden who will then be responsible for cancelling other appointments at which the clergyperson was due to attend.
- 4.5. Where parishes employ an administrator, it may be agreed that the administrator will undertake the notification duties detailed above on behalf of the Churchwarden.

Documentation required for periods of Sickness Absence

- 4.6. Records of Sickness Absence need to be kept and the Archdeacon Pastor’s department are responsible for keeping such records. Copies of the required documentation (see section on Sick Pay) will be kept on file.

Return to Work

- 4.7. Where the absence has been for less than 7 calendar days, the clergyperson should telephone the Churchwardens and the Area Dean to confirm they have returned to work.
- 4.8. In cases of absence lasting 7 calendar days or more, the clergyperson should also telephone the Archdeacon Pastor to notify their intended return to work. The Archdeacon Pastor will ensure that the person is well enough to return to work and provide advice on any phased return. Where the absence has been long term it is likely that, if requested by the Bishop through the Archdeacon, the Diocesan HR department will arrange an Occupational Health referral to ensure that an appropriate return to work is planned.

5. Long Term Sickness Absence Policy

Introduction

- 5.1. The Diocese of Coventry recognises the need for pastoral and practical support for clergy in the event of illness and it is the aim of the Diocese to assist office holders in both maintaining a healthy lifestyle and in regaining health after a period of sickness.
- 5.2. As part of its role, the Diocese needs to have in place fair and equitable procedures to deal with absence management and sickness payments.
- 5.3. This policy applies to all office holders on Common Tenure.
- 5.4. Although not all aspects of the policy will apply to those who have freehold, the same underlying principles will apply in dealing with long-term sickness absence.

Policy Aims

- 5.5. Serious illness is a cause for worry and increased anxiety for any individual. Therefore, it is the aim of this policy to provide clear guidance to clergy on how they will be supported during periods of ill health and particularly during long-term sickness.
- 5.6. The policy also aims to provide clear guidelines for Senior Staff and Clergy concerning their responsibilities during periods of sickness.

Principles

- 5.7. This policy and associated procedures incorporate the following principles:
 - 5.7.1. Confidentiality
Information relating to sickness absence will be held confidentially and will only be accessed by those who need the information in order to carry out their role. Medical information will be dealt with in accordance with the medical guidelines provided for this purpose.
 - 5.7.2. Fairness
The policy and procedures will be applied consistently, and any action taken will be reasonable and necessary.
 - 5.7.3. Care
The Diocese will contact the office holder regularly and will endeavour to assist in providing pastoral and practical care as appropriate to the circumstances.

Definition

- 5.8. Any period of absence lasting more than four weeks will be deemed as long-term sickness. This includes:
 - 5.8.1. Long-term illness because of a single illness or disability
 - 5.8.2. Repeated periods of illness arising from a single illness or disability.
- 5.9. Long-term sickness absence will require the submission of Statements of Fitness to Work ('Fit Notes').

Procedure

- 5.10. If clergy become incapacitated due to illness, they must inform the person nominated by the Diocese under Regulation 27, [Simon Taylor](#) (Assistant to the Archdeacons), on the first day of sickness. This is necessary in order to comply with the requirements for recording sickness absence for Statutory Sick Pay purposes. The nominated person will ensure that the Church Commissioners are informed.
- 5.11. All illnesses should be reported to the Archdeacon Pastor who will inform the Area Dean. Depending on the circumstances of the parish the Area Dean may need to be involved with the clergy of the deanery in deciding who should be providing cover during the illness. In larger parishes cover may be conveniently arranged through their clergy team, but for others the Area Deans will arrange for cover following the notification of the illness.
- 5.12. Office holders should use all reasonable endeavours to make arrangements for the duties of the office to be covered by another person. This may, where appropriate involve notifying the churchwardens and the Area Dean.
- 5.13. For short absences lasting seven days or less, clergy need to complete a self- certificate form that can be accessed via the link <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-sick-pay-employees-statement-of-sickness-sc2> . This should be sent to the [Simon Taylor](#) (Assistant to the Archdeacons).
- 5.14. Illnesses that last more than seven days require a Statement for Fitness to Work certificate from a medical practitioner, which should be sent to [Simon Taylor](#) (Assistant to the Archdeacons) who will then forward a copy to the Church Commissioners.
- 5.15. For clergy signed off work with a Statement of Fitness to Work, the Archdeacon Pastor, through the Assistant to the Archdeacons, will inform the Bishops' PAs and they will inform the Bishop (and core staff if appropriate) so that they are aware of the illness.
- 5.16. Clergy signed off work with a certificate that states that they are not fit for work must not undertake any duties. This is so that they can concentrate on making a good recovery but also to ensure that those in the parish(es) are clear about the situation.
- 5.17. During a period of long-term sickness, the Area Dean and Archdeacon will maintain regular contact. The frequency of the contact will depend on the nature of the illness but the contact should occur at least once per month.
- 5.18. The main purpose of this contact will be to provide support to the clergy and family, if appropriate, and to ensure that cover is provided for the duties of their office.
- 5.19. If there are concerns about the physical or mental health of a clergyperson, the Diocesan Bishop, through the Archdeacon Pastor, may direct the clergyperson to undergo a medical examination carried out by a medical practitioner selected by agreement between the Bishop and the office holder. If there is no agreement, then there will be an examination by medical practitioners consisting of a practitioner chosen by each party.

Return to Work

Prior to return to work from long-term sickness the Archdeacon Pastor will discuss with the office holder the arrangements for their return and whether any particular adjustments are required on either a short term or long-term basis.

Phased Return to Work

- 5.20. Following a long period of illness, it may be appropriate for a clergyperson to have a phased return to work.

- 5.21. This should be done on the basis of medical or occupational health advice. A number of temporary adjustments including the following may be appropriate:
- reduced working hours
 - reduced days
 - only working one or two 'sessions' a day/week etc
 - change in role
 - reduced responsibilities
 - recommendations to assist plans for transport to and from work engagements
 - onward referral for other professional specialist advice and guidance (where appropriate these costs will be met by the Diocese),
 - any other reasonable adjustments that would be helpful
- 5.22. A phased return should not usually last for more than eight weeks and when the phased return ends, it is expected that the office holder will return to full duties.
- 5.23. The programme for the phased return should be agreed between the Archdeacon Pastor and the clergyperson before the return to work commences. They will also agree who will be responsible for communicating this to those in the parish, as they will need to be kept informed on progress.
- 5.24. After an occupational health report has been produced, the Archdeacon Pastor will discuss with the cleric who will be responsible for arranging any service cover required while they are on a phased return to work.

6. Procedure if Clergyperson is Unable to Return to Work

- 6.1. In the case of serious illness, it may be that clergyperson will not be able to return to or maintain their duties. Should this be the situation then it should be approached with great care and sensitivity.
- 6.2. It is important that independent medical advice be taken before any decisions are made and that discussions should take place with the individual to establish their views on the next steps.
- 6.3. The diocese will explore a variety of options with the individual that could include ill health or early retirement, permanent redeployment and moving from full time to part time.
- 6.4. When the clergyperson expresses the wish to retire on the grounds of ill health and their own doctor/specialist and the Occupational Health advice concurs, the Diocese, through the Pastoral Provisions Meeting, will make the appropriate arrangements to apply for ill health retirement through the Clergy Pension Scheme.
- 6.5. Where the clergyperson is not able to move from the diocesan property into their own accommodation the Diocese will do all it can to provide assistance and/or advice.
- 6.6. Initially, a period of 2 months will be given to remain in the current property during which time the Diocese will work with the clergyperson and their family to help them find appropriate alternative accommodation. A decision and agreement on any further support will be made at the Pastoral Provisions Meeting.
- 6.7. Where the clergyperson does not wish to retire but the medical evidence indicates that they are not able to return to work then it may be necessary to pursue the matter through the Capability Procedure. This will only be undertaken as a last resort after all other routes have been explored.

7. Sick Pay

- 7.1. Clergy are usually entitled to receive their stipend at the full rate for the first 28 weeks of absence. The payment of full stipend will include the entitlement to SSP.
- 7.2. Statutory sick pay (SSP) is payable for 28 weeks in respect of any one period of incapacity for work. One period of incapacity can be linked to another if they are separated by no more than 56 days. The linked periods constitute a single period for the purpose of calculating the maximum entitlement.
- 7.3. In order to comply with the statutory requirements for statutory sick pay you must report your sickness absence to the [Simon Taylor](#) (Assistant to the Archdeacons), the nominated person for this purpose, and comply with the Diocesan arrangements for sickness reporting.
- 7.4. This payment will include Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). However, the clergyperson will be responsible for completing the forms to claim SSP.
- 7.5. From the first day of absence, form SC2 must be completed. This should be sent to [Simon Taylor](#) (Assistant to the Archdeacons) at the Diocesan Office who will keep a copy and inform the Church Commissioners. Via the People System. A copy of the SC2 form can be downloaded via the link below:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-sick-pay-employees-statement-of-sickness-sc2>
- 7.6. Once the absence continues for more than 7 calendar days a Doctors' Certificate will also be required. This should be sent to [Simon Taylor](#) (Assistant to the Archdeacons) at the Diocesan Office who will keep a copy and inform the Church Commissioners. Via the People System. A copy will also be provided to the DBF HR department who will consider whether an Occupational Health referral is needed.

Absences Lasting more than 28 Weeks

- 7.7. Entitlement to payment at the rate of a full stipend will cease after a period of 28 weeks.
- 7.8. If the sickness absence continues beyond the date when entitlement to SSP ceases, the continued payment of stipend will be at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop.
- 7.9. In cases where the payment continues, it shall be reviewed every three months in the light of the medical evidence available.
- 7.10. Payment may only be extended in exceptional circumstances.
- 7.11. If the Bishop agrees to further payment it will be at half pay less the Employment and Support Allowance, for the following twelve weeks.
- 7.12. Pay would cease after nine months unless the Diocesan Bishop chooses to extend it.
- 7.13. Once the absence approaches 28 weeks, the Church Commissioners will write to the clergyperson to explain that the entitlement to SSP will expire and inform of the need for the clergyperson to apply to receive Employment and Support Allowance (or ESA which was formerly known as Incapacity Benefit). The claim must be made to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) after completion of a Work Capability Assessment which includes a Work-Focused Health-Related Assessment. A claim can be started by contacting the Jobcentre Plus on 0800 055 66 88.
- 7.14. It is the responsibility of the clergyperson to claim ESA and to notify the Diocese, through [Simon Taylor](#) (Assistant to the Archdeacons) of the amount received.
- 7.15. There is no entitlement to SSP during a phased return to work. However, a cleric on a phased return to work should receive their full stipend, regardless of whether they have been on reduced pay preceding this.

- 7.16. Where there is no prospect of the individual returning to work in the near future and all reasonable efforts have been made to resolve the situation, a decision may be taken by the Diocesan Bishop to cease payment of the stipend, after taking advice as part of a review process.

8. Counselling and Other Professional Support

Pastoral Support

- 8.1. The Archdeacon Pastor will liaise with the clergyperson during a period of long-term sickness to provide the most appropriate pastoral support. This might include putting the individual in touch with those who are able to provide professional or practical support.
- 8.2. It is expected that further support will be provided through the Area Dean and other colleagues in the Deanery.
- 8.3. In addition, the Diocese will work with individuals to seek out information that may help with their circumstances, and where appropriate and wanted, put people in touch with others known to the Diocese who may have knowledge of/been through similar circumstances and can offer support.

Professional Counselling Support

- 8.4. Through the Occupational Health referrals, individuals may be recommended for confidential professional counselling - this may be to an external therapist or to the Diocesan Service as most appropriate. Other referrals may be for other short-term medical interventions/support such as physiotherapy.
- 8.5. Individual members of the clergy, and their families are also able to refer themselves independently to the [Diocesan Counselling Service](#).

The Role of Occupational Health

- 8.6. Where there are concerns about the impact of the illness on the clergyperson a professional opinion may be sought from an Occupational Health Doctor. The doctor is independent and is bound by the Access to Medical Records Act in terms of confidentiality. Their expertise on the Occupational Health advice focuses on how the clergyperson's medical condition impacts on their ability to fulfil their role and what reasonable adjustments might be made to facilitate a return to full capacity. Advice may include a framework and guidelines for managing a gradual return process, and may also include, where appropriate, advice for family, colleagues, and senior staff.
- 8.7. The consent of the Clergyperson will be required to carry out the assessment. If they are not willing to consent, then the Bishop and Archdeacon will make a judgement based on the information that they have.
- 8.8. The Occupational Health professional will look at nature of work, workload, current pressures, and priorities, and give their advice on what is realistic and what is not advisable.
- 8.9. The Diocese use an occupational health provider called Thrive Worldwide. They will conduct an Extended Occupational Health Assessment. The referral forms used are standard and although the terminology used is 'employee', they are very experienced in supporting clergy and offer specific services to the church, so will have a full understanding of a clergyperson's role.
- 8.10. If the sickness absence should result in financial hardship for any reason, the diocese will provide information on grants and other benefits that may be available from appropriate bodies. The diocese will assist with applications to such bodies where appropriate.

