Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
caring supporting improving together

Policy and External Guidance (PEG) Assurance Committee
18th March 2026 at 11am via Microsoft Teams
MINUTES

PRESENT

Clare Shannon	Co-Director, Nursing and User Experience
Wendy McLoughlin	Head of Podiatry Service representing AHPS
Claire Nellis	Assistant Service Manager, Modernisation, Workforce Planning & Attendance Management - HR & OD Directorate
Karen Devenney	Senior Manager, Nursing Quality & Patient Safety
[redacted]	Information Governance Manager, Children's Services
	Standards & Guidelines Manager

1.	**APOLOGIES**
	Sara Templer, Keren Kerr
2.	**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**
	No conflicts of interest.
3.	**New or Updated Policies (for approval)**
	3.1 (DB 09) Regional Management of Sickness Absence Policy & Procedure Claire Nellis presented the policy and informed the Committee of the following: • New version now includes the application of a new five step process in terms of if a member of staff is off on long or short term sick leave. • 28 days is a prompt for long term and the staff member is invited to an absence support and review meeting. if they're absent 28 days or more after the 1st of April. • If any of the other prompts reached e.g. 2 working weeks in a 12 month rolling period, then that's a prompt and the staff member is invited to the first step review and support meeting and placed on a monitoring period for 12 months and it's a rolling 12 months. • At Step three, employee is advised if they don't return to work or unable to return to work by 8 weeks, manager is to consider Step 4, which is an absence panel hearing. • The absence panel hearing has the authority to dismiss. • They can also put staff member back to step three that again is a rolling 12 month period. Managers must apply their discretion, and the policy gives some examples of when discretion can be applied. • Suggested change when referring to carrying out duties, was changing to conducting duties or performing duties. This wasn't accepted as it's already an agreed regional policy. • Discussions took place as to whether to include the HSC pensions link in the policy, and this will be included. • Other amendments included mostly typos, everything else is the same as the current policy. Karen Devenney commented that it's a very clear policy and a huge piece of work and asked will there be a link to training. Claire informed the Committee that they are talking to directors and trade unions about making it mandatory for anyone who has responsibility for attendance management. Links to the training sessions that are going on until the end of April for the key changes are advertised and the management of

	sickness absence policy full program is on HSC elearning. Classroom based learning can also be offered if preferred, the e-learning package is there for the key changes at the moment, although it will be removed in a few months. Then the elearning package will be ready. Clare Shannon asked if any staff currently on long term sick leave, from the 1st of April, will automatically move to this process. Claire responded if they're on long term sick at before the 1st of March they will remain under the current policy until the absence ends or they come back to work and are off again, (then it's the new policy). Managers are being encouraged to use the same principles of the new policy even though they won't be putting staff on step one, step two etc. Regular communication is key here. Managers must meet staff after 28 days and plan a review. If staff reach a prompt, the manager must meet them and have a first absence and support and review meeting. This can't be monitored on HRPTS. The design for equip is going to include that, but there will be a gap between the 1st of April and November. Sonya McGuckin asked if the prompts will come from HR or is it up to the manager? Claire advised that it will be the managers responsibility between April and the new equip system launching. Clare then sought confirmation from Karen regarding the meeting being one short of quorate and what would that mean for approval of the policy. Karen confirmed that she had discussed quorate with Mark Cross and he confirmed extraordinary meetings generally tend not to be quorate because they are such short notice and as long as there is a Chair and representation across some areas, then approval can go ahead. Claire confirmed the policy was approved and commented it's clear, feedback from the staff is they like the structured approach and the reminders about time frames etc.