Clipstone Parish Council

Service Continuity Plan for Long-Term Staff Absence

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Service Continuity Plan is to ensure that essential services of Clipstone Parish Council continue uninterrupted during periods of long-term staff absence, while maintaining transparency, fairness, and prudent use of public funds.

This plan applies to all staff roles and covers:

- Task allocation and coverage

- Overtime management

- Office coverage arrangements

- Temporary external appointments where required

- Councillor support

- Monthly reporting and review

2. Scope

This plan applies to all staff of Clipstone Parish Council:

- Parish Clerk

- Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)

- Administrative Assistant

- Senior Parish Worker

- Parish Worker

- Caretaker

- Cemetery Gatekeeper

It addresses situations where a staff member is absent for an extended period and additional planning or resource allocation is required to maintain continuity.

3. Core Principles

1. Essential services must continue at all times.

2. Overtime should be approved, justified, and cost-effective.

3. The most cost-effective qualified person should perform essential tasks.

4. Non-essential tasks may be postponed to prioritise essential duties.

5. Transparency with staff, councillors, and the public is paramount.

6. Council oversight is required for significant decisions, including temporary external cover.

7. Monthly updates to Full Council ensure accountability.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Line Manager

- Prepare a list of essential tasks for the absent staff member.

- Estimate time required for each task.

- Identify non-essential tasks that can be deferred.

- Organise staff meetings to allocate tasks efficiently.

4.2 Staff

- Cover essential tasks as allocated.

- Record overtime related to absence separately, including:

   o Task completed

   o Staff member performing the task
   (Financial details remain confidential; public reporting includes only tasks and staff)

4.3 Full Council

- Review and approve any temporary external appointments or temporary staff.

- Receive monthly updates on task coverage and overtime plans.

- Ensure transparency, accountability, and financial prudence.

5. Essential Task Management

Step 1: Task List

- Line manager prepares a short, practical list of essential duties.

- Include frequency and approximate time required.

- Identify non-essential tasks to be deferred.

Step 2: Allocation

- Staff meeting convened to:

   o Allocate essential tasks

   o Identify any overtime required

   o Ensure coverage within normal working hours wherever possible

- Regular briefings to review workloads and maintain morale.

Step 3: Overtime Management

- Only essential tasks are eligible for overtime.

- A separate overtime record is maintained for absence-related tasks.

- Each record includes the task and staff member performing it.

- Overtime plans are reviewed by Council before approval.

6. Office Cover Arrangements

- Adjust office presence to maintain at least one officer daily.

- Options include:

  o Swapping days between staff

  o Temporarily reducing public-facing office hours

  o Maintaining email and urgent voicemail coverage

  o Clear signage with contact information for urgent enquiries

7. Temporary External Cover

Where no internal staff can cover essential tasks:

- Temporary appointment of an external contractor or temporary staff member may be approved.

- The request must be submitted to Full Council promptly.

- Council will formally approve the arrangement and budget.

- Temporary arrangements are reviewed regularly and are time-limited.

8. Councillor Involvement

- Councillors may volunteer for practical, low-risk tasks (e.g., unlocking/locking facilities for bookings) where appropriate.

- Councillor support is supplementary and does not replace staff duties but doesn't significantly reduce financial risk.

9. Reporting and Transparency

- Monthly updates presented to Full Council during prolonged absences.

- Updates include:

  o Essential tasks completed

  o Staff member performing each task

  o Planned overtime for review (financial figures confidential)

This ensures accountability and public confidence in the management of Council resources.

10. Review

- The essential task list, overtime, and office arrangements should be reviewed monthly.

- Deferred tasks should be reassessed.

- Council should monitor efficiency and cost-effectiveness of arrangements.

11. Approval and Adoption

This Service Continuity Plan was adopted by Clipstone Parish Council at the Full Council meeting on [Date].

Supporting Report – Long-Term Staff Absence Management

1. Purpose

This supporting report provides additional detail to the Council's Service Continuity Plan for Long-Term Staff Absence. It aims to guide councillors and staff on practical arrangements for managing prolonged staff absence, maintaining continuity of services, and ensuring transparency and cost-effectiveness.

It complements the formal Service Continuity Plan and provides context for monthly updates, operational decisions, and oversight.

2. Current Staffing Overview

The Council employs seven staff:

- Parish Clerk

- Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)

- Administrative Assistant

- Senior Parish Worker

- Parish Worker

- Caretaker

- Cemetery Gatekeeper

Staffing arrangements cover both office and operational duties. Office hours are currently:

- Clerk: Monday–Wednesday

- RFO: Monday and Thursday

- Admin Assistant: Monday–Friday

- The core advertised office opening hours are Monday – Friday 9am – 12 noon.

These arrangements may be temporarily adjusted to manage absence while maintaining essential services.

3. Key Considerations for Managing Absence

1. **Essential Tasks:**

   o Each absent staff member's essential tasks should be listed with approximate time estimates by their line manager.

   o Tasks include only the duties required to maintain essential services.

   o Non-essential tasks may be deferred.

2. **Internal Task Allocation:**

   o Staff meetings should allocate essential tasks fairly and efficiently.

- o Tasks should be allocated to the most cost-effective qualified staff member.

- o Regular briefings maintain transparency and morale.

3. **Overtime Management:**

- o Only essential tasks should be eligible for overtime.

- o Overtime must be approved in advance and recorded separately.

- o Records should include:

  - Task completed

  - Staff member performing the task

  - Time taken to complete the task

- o Planned overtime should be reviewed by at least two councillors / Full Council monthly for transparency.

- o Financial data may remain confidential in public reporting.

4. **Office Cover:**

- o Office presence may be rearranged to maintain at least one officer each day.

- o Temporary reduction in public-facing hours may be considered (e.g., closing on Fridays).

- o Email and voicemail coverage must be maintained, with clear public contact information displayed.

5. **Councillor Support:**

- o Councillors may volunteer for practical, low-risk tasks (e.g., unlocking/locking facilities for bookings).

- o Volunteer support is supplementary and recorded in Council minutes.

6. **External Cover:**

- o If no internal staff member can cover essential tasks, temporary external support may be engaged.

- o Requests for external appointments must be submitted to Full Council for approval.

- o Temporary arrangements should be time-limited and reviewed regularly.

4. Structured Overtime and Task Tracking

To ensure efficiency and transparency:

- A separate overtime log should be maintained for absence-related work.

- Each overtime entry should link directly to the essential task being covered.

- Councillors should have visibility of tasks and the staff member performing them during monthly updates.

- This approach ensures accountability, prevents uncontrolled overtime, and demonstrates prudent use of public funds.

5. Managing Non-Essential Tasks

- Non-essential tasks may be deferred or rescheduled.

- Staff covering essential duties should prioritise critical functions over lower-priority work.

- Where possible, deferred tasks should be incorporated into normal working hours of the covering staff member without incurring additional cost.

6. Reporting to Full Council

- Monthly Full Council meetings should receive updates including:

  o Essential tasks completed

  o Staff member responsible for each task

  o Planned overtime for review (financial details confidential)

- This ensures transparency and allows Council to monitor efficiency and fairness.

- Any proposals for external appointments or temporary staff must be formally approved by Council before implementation.

7. Financial Considerations

While specific financial figures are confidential:

- Council should ensure overtime allocation and external cover are proportionate and cost-effective.

- Where possible, lower-cost solutions (internal staff or councillor volunteer support) should be prioritised.

- A supporting spreadsheet can track overtime hours and associated tasks for internal monitoring.

8. Review and Oversight

- Essential task lists, overtime allocation, and office coverage arrangements should be reviewed monthly.

- Deferred tasks should be reassessed regularly.

- Council should ensure arrangements continue to represent value for money and maintain service continuity.

9. Summary

The Council's approach to managing long-term staff absence should be:

- Structured: Clear identification of essential tasks

- Transparent: Monthly reporting and review by Council

- Cost-effective: Prioritise internal coverage and limit overtime costs

- Flexible: Adjust office hours, staff allocation, and temporary cover as needed

- Accountable: Maintain audit trail of tasks, staff allocation, and decisions

10. Consideration of Backdating Overtime

During recent review of absence-related overtime, it has been noted that a significant amount of overtime was recorded and paid in February.

Given the volume of overtime required to maintain essential services, the Council should consider whether the formal Service Continuity Plan and structured overtime arrangements should be applied retrospectively, effective from the February payday.

Key points for Council consideration:

- **Rationale:** Applying the plan retrospectively would ensure that all absence-related overtime is recorded, reconciled against essential tasks, and monitored transparently.

- **Scope:** Only overtime linked to essential tasks performed to cover long-term staff absence would be included.

- **Financial Oversight:** Retrospective inclusion does not change amounts already paid but ensures all payments are fully documented in line with Council policy.

- **Decision:** Any backdating of the plan should be formally approved by Full Council to maintain accountability and public confidence.

This ensures consistency, transparency, and demonstrates that all overtime has been carefully managed in accordance with Council governance principles.

By following this structured approach, Clipstone Parish Council can maintain service continuity, ensure transparency with staff and councillors, and demonstrate responsible stewardship of public funds.