Employee benefits briefing, October 2026
The ‘Keep Britain Working’ Initiative

Rising sickness absence and long-term ill health are placing a growing financial burden on the UK economy, costing businesses an estimated £85 billion a year and the state a further £212 billion through health-related economic inactivity.

In response, the government has backed the **Keep Britain Working Review**, an independent review chaired by Sir Charlie Mayfield, which calls for a more proactive approach to workplace health.

Rather than relying on new legislation, the Review emphasises shared responsibility between government, employers and employees, with a focus on prevention, early intervention and better use of employee benefits to help people remain healthy and in work.

In this briefing, we explore the Review's key recommendations, what they mean for employers and how employee benefits can help organisations respond.

How the initiative works

The framework is being introduced in phases. It is currently in its three-year Vanguard Phase (2026–2029), during which the government is working with more than 60 “vanguard employers”, including Google UK, John Lewis, and Aviva, to test workplace health interventions and build a strong evidence base.

By 2029, the Review aims to establish three core pillars to improve workplace health across the UK economy:

- **The Healthy Working Lifecycle:** National standards to help employers support employees throughout their working lives, including effective onboarding, employee retention and support for older or neurodivergent workers.
- **Workplace Health Provision:** A more joined-up approach to workplace health support, providing access to early intervention, occupational health services and appropriate treatment. The aim is to help employees remain in work or return following illness, while making better use of existing health and wellbeing benefits.
- **Workplace Health Intelligence Unit (WHIU):** A new body providing data, evidence and confidential benchmarking to help employers understand which workplace health interventions are most effective.

Fit Note Reform is another important recommendation. The Review proposes moving towards a system that places greater emphasis on helping employees remain in or return to work, including the use of Stay-in-Work and Return-to-Work Plans alongside existing medical certification.

What this means for employers

The framework reframes workplace health, moving the emphasis from responding after someone goes off sick to helping employees stay well while they are still working.

Preventative care can deliver meaningful returns. Sickness absence is at a 15-year high and replacing one employee costs more than £11,000 on average. Proactive retention measures can protect productivity and reduce avoidable costs.

You do not need to wait until 2029 to act. Many employers already have the tools needed to prepare for these changes.

Practical steps to take today

Many organisations already fund resources that support these aims, but they are often spread across separate services.

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To prepare for the new national standards, employers should consider:

- **Audit existing benefits:** Review group protection, Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), private medical cover, and digital healthcare apps to ensure they complement each other, rather than working in isolation.
- **Train line managers:** Help managers spot early signs of physical or mental burnout. Timely, open conversations can prevent short-term issues becoming long-term absences.
- **Promote internal support:** Make sure employees know what healthcare benefits are available. Greater use of early physiotherapy or mental health support can help keep your workforce healthy and active.

Embedding workplace health into your business infrastructure can help you prepare for future regulatory change, improve engagement, reduce absence, and retain key talent.

How we can help

Aligning your employee benefits package with the Keep Britain Working Framework can help maximise its value.

If you would like to review your employee benefits and group protection arrangements to ensure they support your team effectively, please contact us today to book a strategy review.

Get in touch

Our team of employee benefit consultants helps employers of all sizes review their current offering and select the most suitable package of benefits for their people.



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