

Stress Policy

May 2006

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1. Policy Statement

The Council is committed to:

- Ensuring that staff are not made ill by their work
- Taking action to reduce stress which will be cost effective
- Ensuring that managers undertake stress risk assessments and review these regularly
- Ensuring that action is taken to identify service areas with a high level of work related stress sickness absence and to put in place strategies to deal with this
- Fostering a proactive approach to the identification and management of stress through a programme of support (e.g. well being days, stop smoking campaigns)

The policy supports existing Council health and safety guidance and policies.

2. Purpose of the Policy

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. The policy distinguishes between pressure, which can create a 'buzz' and can be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive. The costs of stress to the Council can be seen through high staff turnover, an increase in sickness absence, reduced work performance, poor timekeeping and an increase in customer complaints.

The policy therefore supports other HR policies and procedures, for example, Attendance Procedure, Capability Procedure and Dignity At Work Procedure.

The aim of this policy is to bring about a reduction in the number of staff who are on sickness absence or who cannot perform well at work because of stress (whether the stress is work related or due to issues in their personal lives).

3. Statutory Requirements

The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 places a general duty of care on employers to protect its employees whilst at work. Targets have been set by the Health & Safety Commission which make stress a key objective. Organisations are therefore required to reduce the incidence of work related stress by 20% by 2010 and reduce the number of working days lost through occupational stress by 20% by 2016. These have been accepted by the Council and are integral to Health & Safety policies and guidance. A failure to recognise and manage stress may lead to prosecution but more commonly could lead to civil claims against the Council. The Health & Safety Executive

(HSE) requires every employer to conduct risk assessments for health and safety hazards, including work related stress.

4. Who the Policy applies to

The policy applies to all employees of the Council. The policy will be made available to all new staff during the induction period.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The policy and the corporate Health & Safety guidance notes set out the roles and responsibilities of

- Employees
- Line management
- Human Resources
- Occupational Health

Employees

The responsibilities of employees are as follows:

- To use supervision and appraisal meetings to discuss excessive pressures of work
- To assist the line manager in identifying means to reduce stress, in consultation with appropriate professional advisers

Line Managers with staffing responsibilities

The responsibilities of line managers are as follows:

- To assess the risk of stress occurring in the immediate workplace and taking reasonable steps to deal with those pressures, referring to the Corporate Guidance on Stress At Work in doing so
- To review the risk assessment whenever s/he considers that it is no longer valid
- To involve staff and safety representatives at every stage of the assessment process
- To use the Return to Work process within the Attendance Procedure to identify and respond to any work related stress issues
- To consider any temporary or permanent reasonable adjustments which would assist in reducing or removing the stress
- To ensure staff attend a Stress awareness session (for schools based staff: to ensure they understand their responsibilities under the Policy)

6. Putting the Policy into Practice

This policy is supported by the Corporate Guidance on Stress At Work, issued by the Health & Safety Unit, which is available on the Intranet. Professional counselling is also available through referral by Occupational Health via Departmental Human Resources sections. Training and support in the form of stress management training, personal organisation, time management, and other activities (e.g. Well being events organised by Occupational Health) can be accessed through the Corporate Learning & Development programme or through local departmental initiatives, as and when publicised.

The Council's Occupational Health Services is the subject of ongoing review to ensure that appropriate support programmes are in place to support this policy.

The Council's Risk Management Action Plan identifies stress as a key strategic (level 6) risk.

7. Monitoring the Policy

Human Resources will monitor matters arising as a result of implementation of the policy through feedback from briefing sessions, consultation with the Health & Safety Unit and Occupational Health Services. The policy will be reviewed every two years in consultation with staff representatives, the Corporate Health & Safety Unit, the Council's Occupational Health provider, appropriate national equality organisations and local voluntary or public sector organisations. The results of equality impact assessments, reviews, new initiatives; monitoring and consultation exercises will be reflected in any revisions to this policy.

The Staff Attitude Survey will also provide evidence that staff feel valued and supported in performing their duties and that the organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fair treatment of staff.

May 2006
Head of Human Resources