

Stress at Work

Introduction

1. The Council seeks to maintain a positive and supportive working environment for all employees. It accepts that stressors in the workplace can have a detrimental and negative impact on the organisation and employees – affecting health, morale, absenteeism and work performance. This policy aims to establish an effective and consistent approach to the prevention and management of occupational stress. The Council has adopted the approach recommended by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which is based on a set of 'Management Standards' primarily concentrating on 6 key areas; Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role and Change.

Definition

2. Understanding the difference between pressure and stress is essential to enable employees and managers to determine the severity of hazards, situations or events.
3. The Council adopts the definition of stress used by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE):

"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed upon them".

Stress

4. Stress, in itself, is not an illness, but prolonged exposure to excessive pressures can lead to psychological conditions such as anxiety or depression. There are also physical ill-health conditions such as skin conditions that can be aggravated or caused by stress.

Pressure

5. Pressure is the positive, motivating or driving factor that inspires people to perform to their full potential. A reasonable amount of pressure is necessary to ensure staff perform to their capabilities and achieve their goals. Consistently high levels of pressure can lead to staff developing stress related symptoms that can impact negatively on workplace performance and personal wellbeing.

Stressors

6. Stressors are the cause of stress and can be defined as:

Factors that cause stress

An event or context that elevates adrenaline and triggers the stress response because it throws the body out of balance and forces it to respond.

It is accepted that any job can cause stress and also that it is not just about overwork. Boredom and monotony can also be stressful.

Presenteeism

Presenteeism is when staff attend work when they are either unwell or have work or non-work-related issues on their mind which prevents them from working effectively. Presenteeism has a similar impact on the workplace as sickness absence, as it affects productivity and morale.

Prevention

Whilst the Council recognises that personal stress, which is unrelated to the work environment is beyond the organisational control, it does however recognise that personal stress can have an adverse effect on staff wellbeing and therefore the council as a whole. The Council will therefore make every effort to support staff in managing stress irrespective of its source by:

Promoting the mental wellbeing of all staff through:

- providing information and training to raise awareness about mental wellbeing through Mental Health Champions, Mental Health Awareness courses and through our Corporate Induction - opportunity for signposting.
- providing opportunities for employees to look after their mental wellbeing through volunteering, attendance to wellbeing groups, social and team events.
- promoting policies and practices that promote wellbeing, such as agile working and flexible working policies.
- providing appropriate employee support services such as Employee Assistance Programme and Occupational Health.
- ensuring that all staff, at all levels, are aware of the steps that they can take to minimise the effects of stress on themselves (5 ways to wellbeing). Ensuring that all staff adhere to their duty of care to raise concerns with their line managers and complete a stress risk assessment.
- fostering a culture that provides reasonable and practicable support where appropriate, for staff with stress-related or mental-health related issues through reasonable adjustments.
- Monitoring the organisation's stress levels through mood trackers, surveys and annual staff satisfaction survey.

- Monitoring and recording of stress related sickness absence at Team, Service and Directorate levels.

Management Skills and Responsibilities

Developing skills for managers and supervisors to:

- Promote and provide sound management practice and positive management behaviours to all line managers and supervisors of staff;
- Promote the wellbeing of employees by ensuring that teams have the opportunity to come together and build relationships;
- Deal with issues around mental health and stress effectively through building capability, attendance to Sickness Absence Management course;
- Undertake regular [Stress at Work Risk Assessment](#) for teams and individuals.
- Signpost team members to appropriate services in a timely fashion;
- Complete the Stress Management Competency Indicator tool; <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm>;
- Discuss health and wellbeing with staff at one to one's, team meetings and annual appraisals with a particular focus on work related pressures and staff resilience levels e.g. changes, service demands;
- Seek advice when needed, from the councils Health and Wellbeing Adviser, HR and if identified, then through the councils Occupational Health services;
- Identify problem areas through sickness absence data;
- Monitor working hours and holidays to ensure that staff are not overworking and are taking appropriate breaks;
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful training and development opportunities;
- Ensuring clear lines of communication and reporting structures, providing employees with clear definitions of demands and responsibilities realistic to post;
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated, and that inappropriate behaviour is dealt with in line with the Council's Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination policy.

Support

Providing support to employees through:

- Providing a work environment that promotes and supports mental wellbeing for all employees;
- Providing support for staff returning to work after a period of absence due to mental health problems or stress, including the consideration of reasonable adjustments;
- Ensuring individuals suffering from mental health and stress are treated fairly and consistently and are not made to feel guilty about their problems;

- Investigating the contribution of working conditions and other organisational factors to mental ill health and work-related stress and remedy this where possible/practicable;
 - Providing specialised support for those employees where high levels of stress identified.
7. Occasionally managers are required to address poor performance or conduct issues through disciplinary procedures. It is recognised that the prospect of disciplinary proceedings or the proceedings themselves may be stressful for the staff involved. This should not in itself prevent managers from undertaking appropriate management action as indeed undue delays in dealing with these procedures can result in an exacerbation of symptoms, equally not addressing the issue of workplace stress with an employee can also have an adverse effect.

Work-Related Stress Risk Assessment/Management of cases of stress

8. The Council has a legal duty under the Management of Health and Safety in the Workplace Regulations to undertake risk assessments to identify hazards in the workplace. Where cases of workplace stress are identified, managers should seek information from the individual as to the contributory factors perceived by the individual and possible solutions. Individuals should complete a [Work Related Stress Risk assessment](#) to aid this process.
9. The HSE has identified six key “Management Standards” that cover the primary sources of stress at work and it is these factors that the Council’s stress risk assessment/work activity assessment process focuses on.
10. The six Management Standards are:
1. **Demands** – Workload, work patterns and the working environment.
 2. **Control** – How much say someone has in the way they do their work;
 3. **Support** – Staff receive adequate information and support from line managers and colleagues.
 4. **Relationships** – Promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
 5. **Roles** – Clarity and understanding of the role itself, how to carry it out; how it relates to immediate team, service and wider Council’s plan
 6. **Change** – Communication, consultation and management of change.

In addition:

- External factors - can impact on an individual’s ability to cope with work pressure.

Employee Responsibilities

- Raise issues of concern and seek help from their line manager at the earliest opportunity. Contact the schools HR Adviser.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.
- Complete a Work-Related Stress Risk Assessment.

Monitoring and Reporting

11. The HR and Health, Safety and Wellbeing team will be responsible for reviewing the stress policy and for monitoring its effectiveness by measuring:
 - Staff sickness levels
 - Staff turnover
 - Use of Occupational Health Services
 - Employee satisfaction survey
 - Early retirement through ill health
 - Exit interviews
 - Working hours and patterns.
 - Incidence of work-related stress
 - Complaints of harassment and bullying.

Review of policy

12. We check our policies regularly to make sure they are up to date; the latest version can be accessed from the intranet.
13. If you have any questions about this policy contact the schools HR Adviser.

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Related policies

HR policies are available on the schools [intranet](#).

- Managing Sickness Absence - Model Policy for Oxfordshire schools
- Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination policy