

3 Principles

- 3.1 The Council recognises work-related pressure and stress as a genuine health and safety issue.
- 3.2 The Council is committed to fulfilling its health and safety duties by reducing the causes of work related pressure and stress. We will achieve this by working together with employees to minimise stress in the workplace and through working with individuals affected by stress - whether work related or of a personal nature - to mitigate the adverse effects of stress.
- 3.3 The Council believes all employees can participate in this process by doing whatever they reasonably can to reduce work-related stress.
- 3.4 The Council strives to create an environment where employees are able to undertake stimulating, challenging and satisfying work, which does not adversely affect their health and wellbeing.

4 Definition of Stress

- 4.1 Stress is “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress, which can be detrimental to health.
- 4.2 Pressure is not always bad, as a certain amount of pressure and stimulation can be a positive force that motivates particularly when there are deadlines or targets to be met. However, it is when an individual feels that they cannot cope and can see no end to the pressures they are feeling that signs of stress may occur.
- 4.3 The Council recognises that there are occasions when pressures at work and/or home can affect people’s behaviour and their ability to cope. Stress can affect both the health and performance of an individual, as well as impacting on colleagues and the organisation.
- 4.4 The aim is to help both employees and managers recognise and manage potentially stressful situations and to look at ways to support employees.
- 4.5 The Council recognises that:
 - anyone can suffer from stress;
 - that stress is not a mental illness, but the natural adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures and demands imposed on them;
 - that ill health can often be caused by stress due to problems outside work which may then affect the employee’s performance and relationships at work;

- that there can be beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge;
- people have a varying ability to deal with the pressures encountered in life and some people are particularly vulnerable but if the emotional and physical demands on a person are greater than their capacity to cope, ill health may occur;
- individuals who are suffering from stress for whatever reason must have support and access to help.

5 What the Council will do

The Council will:

- identify workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- provide training for managers and supervisory employees in the management of stress.
- monitor stress (see below).
- provide initiatives, which have various health benefits and may help to reduce stress and help employees relax.
- provide confidential counselling for employees affected by stress. (see below)

6 Help for employees feeling under pressure

- 6.1 All employees have free access to a number of sources of help. There is a service provided by a chaplain, who can be contacted by e-mailing HR.
- 6.2 Human Resources advisors are available throughout the week to listen and to discuss with you any concerns you have, please contact them through HR Connect.
- 6.3 UNISON offers a confidential welfare service, which is open to UNISON members. If you would like to discuss anything with this welfare officer, please contact your union representative.
- 6.4 External counselling services are available; you need to be referred by HR. If appropriate, counselling provided externally is funded by the Council and is entirely confidential.

7 Monitoring Stress

- 7.1 Taking action to reduce stress can result in better health, reduced sickness absence, increased performance and output, better working relationships and lower employees turnover.
- 7.2 Human Resources will monitor stress levels within the Council by looking at:
- long and short term sickness absence levels relating to stress

- stress related ill health retirements
- employees turnover rates
- accident statistics

This information will be referred to the Chief Executive as part of the regular employees statistics submitted.

8 Responsibilities

8.1 It is the responsibility of Managers to ensure that:

- they set clear objectives, have good communication channels, involve employees in decision-making, provide management support and appropriate training.
- all jobs are risk assessed regularly (including assessing the risk of stress) and that measures are put into place to address jobs with high demands/pressures.
- they set realistic deadlines, plan and agree working hours, look at flexibility in work schedules.
- tasks and responsibilities are well defined, ways of avoiding boring repetitive jobs are considered, skills are used appropriately, suitable training is provided
- employees are treated with respect and dignity, training is available in interpersonal skills, effective systems are in place for dealing with interpersonal conflict e.g. bullying or harassment.
- they seek help/advice when required – support and advice are available from HR and Occupational Health.

8.2 It is each employee's responsibility to:

- take a share in the joint responsibility of management of health and stress hazards in the workplace.
- highlight to managers/supervisors anything that may lead to stress or other health related hazards.
- take responsibility for one's own health and wellbeing:
- working healthily
- taking regular breaks, rest and holidays
- supporting one another.

9 Preventing Stress

There are a number of corporate policies, which give direction and guidance to managers and their employees. These include, but are not limited to:-

- Health and Safety Policy
- Flexible Working Hours
- Conduct Policy

- Grievance Procedure
- Capability

10 Healthy Initiatives

A healthy life-style approach is encouraged through:

- healthy lunchtime walks
- initiatives to encourage employees to cycle to work and to take walks at lunch thus improving their physical well being.

11 What to do after a stress related illness

If an employee has been off work with a stress-related illness, their manager will talk about it with them on their return. It is important that employees say how they feel, explain what led to the event and what they would like to see happen.

12 HSE Expectations

The HSE expects the Council to conduct risk assessments for work-related stress, just as they would for other health and safety hazards, as required by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

13 The HSE management standards for work related stress

13.1 The HSE has launched its Management Standards for Work-Related Stress. They are benchmarks against which employers will be expected to measure themselves. The Standards highlight the six key aspects of work which experts have decided can contribute to stress if not managed properly:

- **Demands** – workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Control** – the amount of say employees have in how they do their work
- **Support** – encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the Council and colleagues
- **Relationships** – positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** – the understanding by employees and the avoidance of conflicting roles
- **Change** – the organisation and management of large and small change within the organisation

13.2 These are key to the control of adverse pressures or stress at work. The Council accepts these standards and will work with them. These standards help the Council measure its performance in managing

work-related stress. The Standards approach helps the Council to prioritise. They look at the issues affecting most employees most of the time. At the moment, these Standards are not designed to tackle individuals' responses to stress, nor do they address stress arising outside the workplace.

13.3 The Management Standards approach is based on employers, employees and their trade union representatives working together to continuously improve performance in tackling work-related stress. Following this process can help the Council to identify the causes and the solutions.

14 Spotting the signs of stress

14.1 People can react in many ways when facing danger or feeling threatened. Listed below are a few of the common 'signs' that indicate when someone may be suffering from stress.

Physical effects:

- Raised heart rate
- Blurred vision
- Increased sweating
- Aching neck/shoulder
- Headaches
- Skin rashes
- Dizziness
- Lowering resistance to infections
- Loss/gain in weight
- Faster breathing/pulse
- Tiredness

Behavioural effects:

- Poor work
- Mood swings/depression
- Lack of self esteem
- More accident prone
- Tendency to drink more alcohol/smoke more
- Changing sleep patterns
- No enthusiasm - Poor concentration
- Increased anxiety / irritability / frustration / aggression
- Inability to deal calmly with everyday tasks/situations

15 The causes of stress

15.1 People react in different ways to different types of stress. What one person finds exciting and challenging another can find daunting. A repetitive, boring job for one person, can be fulfilling to someone else.

15.2 An individual's reaction to stress can often be influenced by their personality, experience, motivation and the level of support received from their manager, colleagues, friends and family. Stress can come from a variety of sources and can often occur when:-

- pressures pile on top of each other or are prolonged (overload)
- there is an inadequate or inappropriate level of knowledge and skills for the job
- the type of job brings its own stresses e.g. dealing with the public
- employees feel trapped or unable to exert any control over demands placed upon them
- employees are confused by conflicting demands made on them
- employees feel a high degree of uncertainty about their work, objectives, job or career prospects
- work schedules are inflexible and over demanding
- there is lengthy/wearing travelling involved
- there is prolonged conflict between individuals e.g. where an individual is experiencing bullying or harassment
- there is a lack of understanding, leadership and support
- employees are working long hours
- employees are tired and do not take appropriate breaks e.g. working through lunch
- there are no rewards recognition for work undertaken
- there is a lack of social integration with colleagues/team
- there is inadequate or unreliable equipment
- there is insufficient training
- there is inconsistency about what is required from employees
- there is little communication from managers/colleagues
- employees are not assertive and have poor time management skills
- there is inadequate feedback from managers/colleagues

15.3 Certain jobs may place extra emotional demands on employees e.g. those dealing with people in distress or requiring help. Physical conditions too can be stressful e.g. excessive noise, heat/humidity, bad lighting or lack of space.

15.4 It should also be remembered that the source of stress might be from outside the workplace. Employees who are experiencing stress caused by home, family or financial pressures may find it difficult to

16 The HSE's stress management standards for tackling work related stress demands

16.1 The HSE's stress management standards includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment. The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

16.1.1 What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work;
- People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

16.2 Control

How much say the employee has in the way they do their work. The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

16.2.1 What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills;
- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.

16.3 Support

Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues. The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

16.3.1 What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their employees;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

16.4 Relationships

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour. The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

16.4.1 What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- Employees share information relevant to their work;
- The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behavior.

16.5 Role

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles. The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and

- responsibilities; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

16.5.1 What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
- The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and
- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

16.6 Organisational Change

How change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the Council. The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The Council provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
- Employees are aware of timetables for changes;
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

17 What employees can do to help

Mental and physical health are closely linked. All employees therefore are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle, which enables a more holistic management and control of stressful situations. The following advice will not prevent work-related stress, but may help employees take care of themselves and ensure that they do not make the problem worse.

In particular, the following are promoted:-

- healthy eating;
- stopping or reducing smoking
- try to keep within Government recommendations for alcohol consumption – alcohol acts as a depressant and will not help tackle the problem;
- watch the caffeine intake – tea, coffee and some soft drinks (e.g. cola drinks) may contribute to increasing anxiety;
- being physically active – it stimulates and gives more energy;
- learning relaxation techniques – some people find it helps them cope with pressures in the short term;
- developing a support network for sharing and discussing concerns. Talking to family or friends about feelings may be able to help and provide the support needed to raise concerns at work