

**STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY**

(Covering all employees)

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25 March 2014

**Introduction**

* 1. The Council recognises that work related stress is a Health and Safety issue and that risks to mental wellbeing can be reduced by the implementation of good management practice. This Policy forms part of our pro-active approach to the Health and Safety of our staff as well as being an essential element of the wellbeing initiatives at work that encourage positive action on smoking, alcohol and drugs, nutrition, physical activity and stress.
  2. The Council has a legal responsibility to take reasonable care of employees’ health, safety and wellbeing whilst they are at work. We recognise the importance of protecting our employees’ mental wellbeing as well as their physical health. The Council is committed to identifying the causes of work related stress and implementing strategies to address and alleviate work related stress.

1.3 The Council will support the implementation of this policy by giving managers and employees the necessary procedures, information and support they need to:

* recognise and understand the causes and nature of stress; and
* take positive action to manage work related stress effectively.

**2. Scope**

2.1 The Stress Management Policy applies to all employees including teaching staff, chief officers and the chief executive.

2.2 Every employee is expected to treat their colleagues with dignity and respect and protect their own and others’ health and safety.

2.2 This policy is primarily concerned with stress arising from the work environment. However, issues outside work can also affect employees’ wellbeing. Often home and work lives are so interwoven that it may not be possible to identify any single cause of stress. We will provide assistance to employees who are experiencing stress whatever the cause in line with our other supportive policies and wellbeing initiatives.

**3. Definition**

3.1 Stress is a difficult and complex subject. There are many definitions and causes of stress. Individuals and organisations react to stress in different ways. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as *“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them.”*

3.2Stress is a state, not an illness, and where stress lasts for only a short period of time there is usually no lasting effect. However, if the stress is sustained over a long period of time it can have a harmful impact on physical and mental health, work performance and morale.

3.3 Pressures or demands such as excessive workload, long hours, not having the required skills to undertake tasks, lack of support, strained relationships or unreasonable targets are all health hazards. Every job brings its own demands and pressures; these are an unavoidable part of working life. Some pressure can be positive and can keep staff motivated and provide a sense of achievement. However, people’s ability to deal with stress is not limitless and stress occurs when people become emotionally or physically distressed or the demands exceed the personal and social resources that the employee can access.

**4. Aims**

4.1 This Policy sets out the objectives and responsibilities for the management of work related stress. It recognises that there can be sources of stress in the workplace and aims to reduce workplace stress by considering the HSE Management Standards for Tackling Work Related Stress.

4.2 The Council aims to reduce levels of stress by:

* assessing the risk of workplace stress;
* controlling the risk at source using reasonably practicable means;
* monitoring workplace stress indicators;
* intervening early to deal with problems;
* providing appropriate employee support; and
* encouraging sensitive management.

**5.** **Preventing Stress**

5.1 Council managers have a lead role in the prevention of work related stress and must take a proactive approach to identifying workplace stress and take practical steps to reduce its causes.

5.2 Council managers must also ensure that wherever possible employees are not subjected to excessive pressures that are likely to cause harm. To facilitate this, managers must follow the provisions of this policy and toolkit.

**6. Roles and Responsibilities**

6.1 Everyone in the Council has a responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of themselves and their colleagues. The Council is committed to being a supportive organisation where seeking support and/or assistance for stress is not perceived as a sign of weakness or incompetence. The Council is committed to increasing the general awareness and understanding of stress and stress related illness within the workplace. More information in [Appendix 1.](#Appendix_1)

6.2 The Chief Executive and Senior Management Teams are responsible for:

* implementing the Policy;
* monitoring compliance with the Policy;
* maintaining a framework of health, safety and wellbeing policies and procedures;
* promoting good communications throughout the Council;
* providing an efficient [Employee Assistance Programme](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/200911/employee_wellbeing/2003/your_new_counselling_information_and_advice_service) (EAP);and
* demonstrating positive leadership and a commitment to the Policy.

6.3 Line managers are responsible for:

* inducting new staff;
* encouraging personal development;
* carrying out team level stress risk assessments;
* carrying out individual stress risk assessments as appropriate;
* setting realistic targets;
* monitoring hours worked and discouraging excessive use of overtime;
* making sure employees use their annual leave entitlements;
* providing staff information on sources of support and advice;
* managing change effectively and empathetically;
* promoting a culture of zero tolerance towards bullying and harassment;
* taking appropriate action to support staff experiencing difficulties; and
* seeking advice and support from [Organisational Development](mailto:hrsc@edinburgh) and the Council’s [Occupational Health](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/200235/absence_and_leave/1692/managing_attendance/3) provider as appropriate.

6.4 Employees are responsible for:

* complying with the provisions of the Policy;
* protecting the health of themselves and others at work;
* recognising signs and symptoms in themselves that could indicate they are having difficulty coping;
* raising any concerns with their line manager or other manager as appropriate; and
* participating in any supportive measures put in place to alleviate stress.

**7. Monitoring and record keeping**

7.1 Managers must keep accurate and up to date records of the following documents as appropriate which are included in the Stress Management Policy toolkit:

* a managers checklist;
* strategic risk assessment for organisational change;
* preventative team stress risk assessments;
* stress risk assessment – employee questionnaire; and
* individual stress action plans.

**8. Confidentiality**

8.1 Information relating to an employee’s health is classified as sensitive data and as such will remain confidential. However confidentiality can only be maintained as far as it is reasonably practicable within our duties as an employer.The Council will only involve other agencies or share information with the consent of the employee concerned, unless we are required to do so by law or the information is necessary for the protection of children or vulnerable adults.

**9. Access to support**

9.1 The Council will provide a range of support to those employees experiencing stress at work and these include, but are not limited to:

1. **Employee Assistance Programme** (EAP)

The Council’s EAP provides free confidential counselling, financial and legal advice helplines for all employees. These helplines are available 24 hours per day every day of the year and employees can phone as often as they wish. [There is more information on the Council’s intranet site](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/200911/employee_wellbeing/2003/your_new_counselling_information_and_advice_service).

b) **Occupational Health Service**

The [Occupational Health Service](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/201042/attendance_for_managers/901/managing_attendance/2) provider will give managers advice on individual cases referred to them which may include advice on treatment and rehabilitation for those employees who have suffered stress or a stress related illness.

c) **Support during rehabilitation**

Employees returning to work after a stress related absence may require assistance to re-adjust to work routines. Managers should take a lead role in providing appropriate assistance by:

* using the individual stress action plan (ISAP);
* reorganising workload, if appropriate;
* placing temporary restrictions on particular duties which may have previously posed difficulties;
* arranging a phased return to work, if required. This should be done in accordance with the [Managing Attendance Procedure](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/200235/absence_and_leave/1692/managing_attendance);
* making sure the pressure or demands previously identified have been properly controlled, reduced or eliminated;
* providing training to the individual to help them cope with the pressure or demands; and
* monitoring the pressures or demands previuosly identified.

**10. Links to other Policies and Stress Management Toolkit**

10.1 The Council has several policies to assist managers with the effective implementation of this Policy. These include, but are not limited to:

* [Fair Treatment at Work Policy](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/103533/fair_treatment_at_work)
* [Family Care Policy](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/103576/family_care_policy)
* [Workplace Policy on Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/103664/workplace_policy_on_alcohol_drugs_and_substance_misuse)
* [Domestic Abuse Policy](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/103621/policy_on_domestic_abuse)
* [Violence at Work Policy](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/103658/violence_to_employees_at_work)
* [Managing Work Performance Procedure](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/103531/managing_work_performance)
* [Managing Attendance Procedure](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/103535/managing_attendance_procedure)

10.2 For assistance in the application of this Policy please refer to the Stress Management Toolkit.

**11. Review**

11.1 This policy is a local collective agreement between the Council and the recognised trade unions. Every effort will be made by both parties to make sure that this policy is reviewed regularly and amended by agreement, if required to meet future needs. In the event of a failure to reach agreement both parties reserve the right to end this local agreement by giving four months notice in writing. In such circumstances the terms of the local agreement will no longer apply to existing and future employees.

**Appendix 1.**

**Working Together – Everyone’s Responsibilities**

**1. Introduction**

1.1 The Council is committed to minimising the causes of stress at work. By working together we can successfully tackle the causes of work related stress. Each person can help to promote and maintain health, safety and wellbeing and prevent stress at work.

1.2 The Management Standards approach (MSa) developed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have been developed to help reduce levels of stress in the workplace. To make this approach work it must be a shared responsibility and everyone has a part to play.

**2. The Council**

2.1 The Council, through the Corporate Management Team (CMT), has overall responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees. Where risks are identified, appropriate measures must be taken to prevent the risks or protect staff from them. Within in the terms of the Stress Management Policy this will include:

* providing active leadership, direction and commitment;
* securing adequate resources for stress risk management and intervention strategies; and
* overseeing organisational performance.

**3. Directors and Senior Management Teams (SMTs)**

3.1 Senior managers are key to promoting both organisational and individual health, safety and wellbeing. They are responsible for setting the health safety and wellbeing culture of the organisation.

3.2 To meet the MSa senior managers will:

* Attend mandatory stress management training. This sends an important and positive message.
* Implement the Stress Management Policy fully in their Service Areas. This includes making sure preventative stress risk assessments are carried out, kept up to date and that action is followed through for any issues identified by either team or individual stress risk assessments.
* Demonstrate commitment to implementing the Stress Management Policy by taking all reasonable steps to ensure:
  + Sufficient resources for stress management are identified and made available;
  + Line managers attend the mandatory stress training courses;
  + All employees within their service areas follow the positive behaviours required to prevent and reduce work-related stress;
  + Stress management issues are discussed regularly at SMTs and with the trade unions; and
  + The Council’s vision and expectations for stress management are clearly communicated within service areas.
* Establish monitoring and auditing processes to check that agreed actions happen and the strategies are working;
* Support others in their roles;
* Encourage employees to take part in stress management strategies and processes; and
* Lead by example. On an individual basis, senior managers can help by:
  + recognising stress-related symptoms in other senior managers and being aware that their behaviour may have an impact on others;
  + showing a positive and helpful attitude to stress and mental health issues at individual levels; and
  + mentoring others.

**4. Operational and line managers.**

4.1 All managers have a critical role in maintaining employee health, safety and wellbeing and for minimising the likelihood of stressful situations arising for their staff. Some of the key tasks for managers can involve:

* showing a positive attitude towards stress and mental health issues;
* clarifying roles, tasks, targets and responsibilities for teams’ and individuals’ work plans. This plays a key role in the provision of service delivery and the managers actions and behaviour can have an impact on the quality of working life for staff;
* communicating information on workplace change or any identified issues for concern to both staff and senior managers;
* demonstrating awareness, recognition and early identification of problems to allow team and/or individual intervention as appropriate and as required;
* encouraging team members to participate in risk management processes. Active employee participation gives a more accurate picture of any problems and helps to make any subsequent action plans more effective;
* making sure preventative risk assessments take place regularly and actions arising from individual stress action plans are properly and promptly implemented;
* dealing sensitively and confidentially with staff who are feeling stressed;
* designing strategies to reduce work related stress and protect individuals from harm;
* making sure they have appropriate self –awareness, skills and knowledge to manage team interactions;
* managing performance in line with relevant procedures; and
* making sure an awareness of the supportive policies and wellbeing initiatives is maintained.

**5. Employees**

5.1 The MSa is a participative one. To be effective it requires the views of all employee groups to be considered at appropriate stages. This means employees need to participate fully by:

* getting involved in the stress risk assessments and management processes;
* sharing their views in an open, honest and constructive way;
* helping design strategies that reduce work related stress and protect individuals from harm;
* letting managers know if pro-active measures don’t work properly; and
* participating positively in stress management strategies.

5.2 On an individual basis employees should:

* understand how to identify the signs of work related stress in themselves and others;
* discuss their own stress related issues with their line manager or another manager as appropriate. This allows for early intervention and the provision of appropriate supports;
* take steps to minimise their own stress where possible;
* change their behaviour if it is causing stress to others;
* be sensitive and supportive when colleagues are feeling pressured at work; and
* help managers to minimise the effects of workplace stress.

**6. Organisational Development**

6.1 Organisational Development staff will act as the champions for the MSa and their roles and responsibilities will include:

* making sure the different HR policies link effectively both together and with other health and safety policies to ensure a consistent and ‘joined up’ approach to stress management;
* supporting managers with complex cases involving work related stress;
* engaging and communicating with staff about work related stress issues;
* engaging with the trade unions to promote appropriate involvement with stress management processes;
* providing relevant data e.g. absence statistics and health intervention information to relevant managers for appropriate action;
* liaising with the Occupational Health Service and the EAP providers;
* working with others, including health and safety advisers and line managers, in implementing solutions identified by staff and monitoring and reviewing their effectiveness;
* monitoring workplace health indicators that highlight stress problems;
* acting as a champion for the Council’s stress management processes and the principles of the HSE Management Standards;
* helping managers to complete stress risk assessments and develop risk control measures as appropriate; and
* making sure appropriate training and information is available to help all stakeholders, particularly managers, achieve appropriate competence in stress management.

**7. Trade Union Health and Safety Representatives (USRs)**

7.1 The active participation of USRs is vital for assisting in the delivery of improvements in employee health and wellbeing and successfully implementing the Management Standards approach. USRs need to work jointly with others to:

* encourage their members to participate in the stress management process;
* offer support and advice to TU members;
* facilitate effective communication on stress issues with management and their members; and
* support the implementation of the Management Standards approach.
* USR duties are defined in [The Agreement on Time Off and provision of Facilities for Trade Union Representatives](https://orb.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/103655/time_off_and_provision_of_facilities_for_trade_union_representatives_agreement).

**Appendix 2**

**Legal Framework**

**Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**

Whilst there is no specific legislation covering the management of stress, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers to safeguard, as far as reasonably practicable, the health safety and welfare of the people who work for them. This does not only mean physical health, but mental health as well. Ill health resulting from stress at work should be treated in the same way as ill health resulting from physical hazards in the workplace.

**The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**

Under this legislation employers are required to carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment of the health and safety risks to which their employees are exposed whilst they are at work. This includes the requirement to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities and to take measures to control any identified risk. Hazards that could lead to stress must, if significant, be included in risk assessments.

**The Equality Act 2010**

Employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace or the way in which work is done, if the existing work arrangements or the physical features of a workplace put a person with a disability at a substantial disadvantage. Ill health arising from, or exacerbated by, stress related ill-health at work may constitute a disability under the Act if prolonged.

The Act also prevents unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership. People who are discriminated against may find the experience distressing and humiliating and may consequently suffer from a stress related illness

**The Working Time Regulations 1998**

The Working Time Regulations place limitations on the number of hours that can be worked, makes provisions for rest breaks etc. and are therefore relevant to stress related illness caused by excessive working hours.

**Data Protection Act 1998**

The Data protection Act 1998 sets out rules to make sure any personal information held by employers on employees is managed properly.

The Act also requires employees to give explicit consent to the processing of any “sensitive data” by their employer. Managers must therefore obtain the employees consent before using any medical reports.