

EMPLOYEE MENTAL WELL-BEING POLICY



EMPLOYEE MENTAL WELL-BEING POLICY

(Covers ALL council employees)

CONTENTS

1.	POLICY STATEMENT	Page 3
2.	THE LEGAL DUTY	Page 3
3.	POLICY AIMS	Page 3
4.	DEFINITIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS	Page 4
5.	IDENTIFYING THE CAUSES AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS	Page 4
6.	STRESS PREVENTION MEASURES	Page 5
7.	MANAGEMENT AND TREATMENT OF STRESS	Page 7
8.	TRAINING	Page 8
9.	RESPONSIBILITIES	Page 9
10.	LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES	Page 10
11.	REVIEW	Page 10

1. POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 A fundamental element of the council's [People Strategy](#) and [Employee Wellbeing Framework](#) is the commitment to create a healthy and safe working environment for its workforce.
- 1.2 Good mental and physical health is fundamental to general wellbeing and the council acknowledges the benefits of supporting employees achieve healthy working lives in maintaining high levels of morale and productivity in the workplace.
- 1.3 Mental health problems can be triggered by factors both internal and external to the workplace. The key aim of this policy is to ensure a working environment in which employees can achieve peak performance without suffering the effects of excessive or sustained work pressure that can lead to stress and a variety of physical and mental health problems.
- 1.4 The council however also acknowledges that the wellbeing of individuals at work can be affected by external factors and as such seeks to ensure that its employment policies are supportive of employees who may need to deal with other pressures and challenges that arise from time to time within their personal lives.
- 1.5 This Policy is supported by [guidance](#) which provides advice to managers and employees in the form of good practice and practical measures that can help them implement the aims of the policy.

2. THE LEGAL DUTY

- 2.1 Under the terms of the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Management Health and Safety Regulations (1992), the council has a statutory duty of care to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees while at work. As part of that duty of care, the council is required to carry out risk assessments to ensure that the workplace is not likely to cause injury or illness to employees.
- 2.2 Employees equally have a duty to work in a safe and considerate manner so as not to put themselves or colleagues at risk.
- 2.3 Mental impairments which have a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual's ability to carry out day to day activities constitute a disability under the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.4 Disabled people are afforded protection from discrimination under the Equality Act and the council is required to make reasonable adjustment for disabled people within the provisions of its recruitment and selection and sickness absence management policies.

3. POLICY AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the policy are to:
 - Promote mental health and wellbeing for all staff
 - Promote an open and supportive culture where mental health issues can be raised and dealt with effectively
 - Communicate and promote the council's commitment to identifying and tackling

organisational issues that negatively affect mental health

- Ensure suitable and sufficient risk assessments are conducted to prevent, identify and control sources of work related stress and ensure that the outcomes of risk assessments are reported and acted upon
- Provide employees experiencing mental health problems with access to professional assistance and support
- Reduce barriers to employment for people with a history of mental health

4. DEFINITIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS

- 4.1 Mental health and wellbeing is an important aspect of overall health and wellbeing and can be affected by different factors, including life events such as relationship breakdowns, bereavement, workplace pressures and mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety. The National Health Service (NHS) describes mental wellbeing and mental illness as follows:

Mental Wellbeing

- 4.2 Definitions of mental wellbeing generally include aspects such as: life satisfaction, optimism, self-esteem, mastery and feeling in control, having purpose in life, and a sense of belonging and support.

Mental Illness

- 4.3 Mental illness refers to a diagnosable condition or personality disorder that significantly interferes with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities eg depression, anxiety, schizophrenia. The International Classification of Diseases ICD 10, Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive list of recognised mental and behavioural disorders.

Stress

- 4.4 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. It arises when they perceive that they are unable to cope with those demands'.
- 4.5 Although it can be healthy for people to experience challenges in their lives, this can cause a degree of pressure on the individual. It is acknowledged that too much pressure can be harmful and destructive to health and if excessive or long term, this can lead to stress.
- 4.6 It is recognised that while stress can result from a build-up of excessive pressures in the workplace, it can equally result from non-work related pressures or life events that transfer the symptoms to the workplace.

5. IDENTIFYING THE CAUSES AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

- 5.1 A strong moral and business case exists for addressing the causes of stress in the workplace and the council places emphasis on preventing stress wherever possible. In order to do so, managers and employees alike need to be equipped to identify possible sources and triggers of stress in the workplace.
- 5.2 While the council cannot prevent or control the causes of stress out with the

workplace, early identification of the symptoms of stress will allow employees to be supported in the workplace and assisted to manage the circumstances which are causing them stress.

- 5.3 The Guidance document that supports the application of this policy sets out typical examples of the triggers and symptoms of stress within and out with the workplace.

6. STRESS PREVENTION MEASURES

- 6.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines the characteristics or culture of an organisation where the risks from work-related stress are being effectively managed and controlled.

- 6.2 Through its [People Strategy](#) the Council aims to implement HSE management standards by promoting a working environment where:

- employees are able to cope with the demands of their jobs
- employees are able to have a say about the way they do their work
- employees receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors
- employees are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours eg bullying at work;
- employees understand their role and responsibilities
- the council engages employees frequently when undergoing organisational change
- systems are in place to respond to any individual concerns relating to any of the above.

- 6.3 Key to achieving the HSE management standards set out in 6.2 above is ensuring supportive leadership and effective and consistent communication along with appropriate risk assessment.

Supportive Leadership

- 6.4 Managers can help to prevent excessive pressure becoming stress by recognising the common signs and symptoms of this in themselves and others, by ensuring that appropriate interventions are carried out and by promoting an open and supportive environment that encourages employees to discuss issues.

- 6.5 Managers should also ensure that their management style accords with the principles set out in the council's [Code of Practice on Promoting Appropriate Working Relationships and Behaviours](#).

- 6.6 The Code specifically addresses the manner in which managers should manage the performance of employee as follows:

"Managers are responsible for fostering and maintaining good and effective working relationships with their staff and for creating an environment of mutual trust in which performance is managed through open and regular communication. In this regard it is essential that feedback to staff is constructive and provides the opportunity to jointly agree measures to address identified performance problems and/or progress

personal development plans and career aspirations”.

Effective and Consistent Communication

- 6.7 Effective and consistent communication with team members enables managers to maintain an awareness and appreciation of current workloads and individual capabilities when delegating and distributing tasks to their employees. This can be achieved through:
- Regular team meetings
 - Regular ‘one to one’ meetings
 - Appraisal and Development Reviews
- 6.8 The communication methods referred to in 6.7 above provide the opportunity for constructive discussion between manager and employee(s) in relation to manageable workload and development needs. Regular communication also enables work plans to be amended and updated as new demands are placed upon employees.
- 6.9 The Appraisal and Development Review (ADR) framework supports effective day-to-day leadership and management practice. Put simply ADR reviews are;
- ‘all about ensuring you are clear about what is expected of you, how you are expected to do it and how well you’re doing it. It also ensures that all aspects of your job are considered in giving you feedback and agreeing any performance development action required’.*
- 6.10 Regular communication will also offer employees the opportunity to alert their line manager to any stress/mental health related concerns they may have. Communication at an early stage is important to allow the causes of stress to be identified and appropriate action to be taken to minimise its effects on the employee and on service delivery.

Risk Factors

- 6.11 Managers should be alert to the potential risk of stress occurring within their teams particularly during periods of organisational change where there may be increased pressure on workloads and feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. Employees already suffering from a mental ill health condition are likely to be more vulnerable to the risk of stress in these circumstances particularly if they subjected to increasing workload demands due to organisational changes.
- 6.12 Regular monitoring of management and performance information will also help in identifying signs that may indicate that stress is prevalent in the workplace. High levels of team sickness absence, high staff turnover, increased numbers of violent incidents, grievances, disciplinary and/or bullying and harassment cases should be explored as potential symptoms of stress.

Induction and Training Considerations

- 6.13 Failure to provide induction and meet training needs can lead to employees experiencing feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability especially when moving to a new or changed role. It is therefore important that employees in these circumstances have access to learning opportunities and support so that they can maintain sufficient levels of competence and confidence in their new role.
- 6.14 Thereafter, learning needs should be identified and met on an ongoing basis through

the use of the ADR process and regular one-to-one meetings.

Communication and Support during Periods of Change

- 6.15 Managers responsible for areas undergoing significant organisational change must anticipate the need for and ensure that the employees in the areas affected are given adequate support and leadership during the period of transition. It is essential that agreed workforce management protocols for communicating and consulting with employees are fully observed.
- 6.16 As indicated earlier at Paragraph 6.11, Managers should be particularly aware of the impact of organisational change on employees who may already be vulnerable or prone to stressful reactions to changes in working routines and increased work load. Wherever possible, arrangements should be put in place to reassure and support those individuals through the transition.

Bullying and Harassment

- 6.17 The council's [Code of Practice on Promoting Appropriate Working Relationships and Behaviours](#) sets out the standards of behaviour expected of employees by the council in order to foster and maintain a working environment that is supportive, equitable and free from discrimination. In particular the Code makes it explicitly clear that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated in the workplace and provides for a process to investigate and act upon with complaints of bullying and harassment.

Employee Health and Wellbeing

- 6.18 It is recognised that stress can affect our health and conversely improving our health and wellbeing can improve our ability to cope with or manage stressful situations.
- 6.19 In accordance with the council's [Employee Wellbeing Framework](#), the Healthy Working Lives Steering Group encourages a healthy lifestyle for employees through a range of initiatives and support services including personal health checks, advice on healthy eating, smoking cessation, drugs and alcohol.

7. MANAGEMENT AND TREATMENT OF STRESS

- 7.1 Employees who are experiencing symptoms of stress are encouraged to advise their manager at the earliest opportunity in order that the most appropriate means of help can be identified and offered.
- 7.2 In some cases the employee's concerns will be alleviated by reviewing the balance of their workload commitments and any other non-work commitments to determine whether they are taking on more than they can realistically cope with. A temporary adjustment to workload priorities and/or some support in self-regulating their work such as the use of time management techniques may be sufficient to assist the employee manage and control their stress levels.
- 7.3 The council's Learning and Development Team also provides training interventions that help participants to understand the causes of stress and the types of tools and coping strategies for dealing with the effects of stress.
- 7.4 If an employee is not comfortable approaching their manager or having done so feels that their concerns have not been adequately addressed, they should seek advice from Human Resources. Additionally the employee may wish to seek advice from a Trade Union representative, and if appropriate, seek a medical view from their GP.

- 7.5 The council offers free access to a qualified counsellor. This confidential service is available to all employees and includes support for non-work related problems. Normally six appointments are available free of charge, although in exceptional circumstances this may be increased. Paid time off is granted to attend appointments during normal working hours. Appointments can also be made out with normal working hours.
- 7.6 In order to ensure that anonymity is preserved, Senior Managers will only be informed of the number of counselling appointments and the service area to which they relate. A self-referral form for the counselling service can be accessed [here](#).
- 7.7 [Guidance](#) to accompany this Policy is available on MyToolkit and provides further information on stress treatment and how managers can effectively support employees with mental health problems.

Council Policy on Supporting Attendance at Work

- 7.8 Where an employee is advised by their GP to take some time off as a result of a stress-related health condition, the relevant provisions of the council's [Supporting Attendance at Work - Policy & Procedure](#) will apply in conjunction with this policy. In these circumstances, managers should adopt a proactive but sensitive approach so that the employee does not feel isolated or guilty. In this regard the manager should establish with the employee whether regular contact would be helpful and how this should be arranged during the period of absence.
- 7.8 A key element of the council's [Supporting Attendance at Work - Policy & Procedure](#) is the need to establish effective support mechanisms to assist an employee's return to normal work following a period of sickness absence, particularly after periods of prolonged absence. Where an employee returns to work following prolonged absence due to work-related stress, a suitable return to work programme should be put in place.
- 7.9 Return to work programmes should be developed by the employee's manager in conjunction with the employee, their GP/specialist as appropriate, and the Occupational Health Adviser. Such arrangements should not necessarily be regarded as short-term interventions. Depending on the nature of the case, options to be considered range from phased return in the initial stages, to longer term or permanent adjustments to work patterns and conditions if appropriate.
- 7.10 Where evidence suggests that an employee's stress-related absence could potentially be linked to factors in the workplace, it is important that these factors are investigated and addressed before the employee returns. Reasonable adjustments should be made wherever possible so that the employee is not reintroduced into the same working conditions that led to their absence. Further information can be found in the [Managers Guide on Reasonable Adjustments](#).
- 7.11 Following return to work, an employee's progress should be reviewed regularly by their manager until such time as the employee no longer feels they need additional support. Thereafter, ongoing performance reviews carried out under the ADR process in addition to regular one-to-one meetings should be used as a means of checking that the employee is continuing to cope well.

8. TRAINING

8.1 The council provides 'Mentally Healthy Workplace' training for managers designed to;

- Help managers identify the key factors that contribute to a mentally healthy workplace
- Give managers a broad understanding of mental health in the workplace
- Ensure managers are aware of their responsibilities in relation to health and wellbeing
- Improve managers skills and confidence in dealing with mental health in the workplace
- Focus specifically on stress in the workplace and how to prevent, identify and manage it using the HSE management standards approach.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES

Managers

Managers play a key role in creating a mentally healthy workplace and in this regard are responsible for:

- Encouraging a workplace culture in which mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing are regarded as equally important;
- Ensuring as far as is reasonably practicable, that the work environment is safe and that measures are taken to reduce the risk of mental ill health as a result of work related factors;
- Providing supportive leadership and creating an open and supportive environment that encourages employees to discuss issues related to mental ill health;
- Maintaining effective and consistent communication with team members in accordance with the council's [People Strategy](#);
- Reviewing management information, being alert to indicators of stress within the team and undertaking risk assessment as appropriate;
- Ensuring that all new employees receive appropriate induction and training and thereafter identifying and meeting the learning needs of all employees through the use of the ADR process and one-to-one meetings;
- Ensuring that all employees are aware of the council's support mechanisms including confidential counselling, occupational health and procedures for dealing with bullying & harassment at work;
- Liaising with Human Resources to maximise support for employees who have mental health problems;

- Supporting employees who become sick as a result of mental ill health in accordance with the council's Managing Sickness Absence Policy;

Employees

All employees are obliged to take account of their own health and safety in the workplace along with that of others and in this regard are responsible for:

- Being alert to symptoms of stress in themselves and others;
- Supporting any colleague experiencing poor mental health by encouraging them to speak to their line manager;
- Notifying their line manager as early as possible when they have recognised the symptoms of stress in themselves and discussing how this can be managed at work;
- Seeking appropriate support at the earliest opportunity from their GP or other appropriate agencies if they have health problems;
- Recognising the importance of achieving a work-life balance;
- Effectively managing their workload in conjunction with their line manager to ensure that the demands placed upon them are appropriate and achievable;
- Taking a pro-active approach to their workload and taking advantage of aids available to self-regulate work demands such as training in Project Management and Time Management available through the council's Learning and Development Team.

10. LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The Employee Mental Well-Being Policy should be viewed in the overall context of the council's [People Strategy](#). In this regard, managers should be aware of the links with the council's other key employment policies, in particular those relating to Occupational Health and Safety, [Workforce Management](#), [Supporting Attendance at Work](#) and [Dealing with Complaints of Bullying and Harassment at Work](#).

11. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed regularly in light of changing advice, research and legislation and at least once every 5 years.