



Stress Management Policy

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Document summary

The successful management of stress is vital to the success of the County Council and to the wellbeing of its employees. This Policy seeks to provide guidance on how this can be achieved.

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Stress Management Policy

Key Points:

- This Policy outlines the key aims and objectives for managers and staff throughout the organisation in dealing with stress
- The release of managers and staff to attend stress management and stress awareness workshops within reasonable timescales is essential
- Responsibilities in relation to this Policy fall on Chief Officers, Managers, Personnel and Training staff and employees
- Detailed information and guidance is given in the attached Appendices and links.

1. Introduction

1.1 The County Council is responsible for the health, safety and welfare of its employees at work and recognises that their well-being is important to its performance and service delivery. The County Council therefore, aims to take positive measures to manage stress effectively and to create an environment where stress is managed out of the organisation so far as is reasonably practicable. It also aims to ensure that where stress becomes an issue for individual employees they are encouraged to seek support and guidance.

1.2 Primarily this policy is concerned with stress arising from the working environment, but it also recognises that an employee's personal life may also lead to stress and sometimes an approach has to be taken of helping an employee whatever the cause of their stress, particularly if this has an impact on an employee's ability to work effectively.

1.3 The County Council will deliver this policy through:

1.3.1 promoting the health, safety and well-being of all employees, including the use of risk assessments to identify and manage stressors impacting on health in the workplace

1.3.2 the monitoring of absence levels to identify particular sources of stress as a means of taking action to prevent or reduce such sources in the future

1.3.3 implementing strategies and support mechanisms to prevent and manage work related stress.

2. Responsibilities

2.1 Chief Officers will:

2.1.1 demonstrate their commitment and support to this policy by ensuring that the principles and strategies for managing stress are implemented

2.1.2 reflect the policy's principles and strategies within their own management practice

2.1.3 ensure that resources e.g. management time and commitment, are available to ensure that stress management principles and strategies are implemented.

2.2 LMG and other Line Managers will:

2.2.1 familiarise themselves with this policy and associated documentation

2.2.2 ensure, through good communication, that their staff are aware of the provisions of this policy including the action everyone can take to minimise the risk of stress and of the support services available to them i.e. the staff welfare service and staff counselling network

2.2.3 identify and meet training and development needs including induction training

2.2.4 attend stress management training when needed

2.2.5 using the risk assessment documentation in Appendices 2 and 3, identify individuals, groups of staff or jobs that could be affected by stress and work to eliminate, minimise or reduce the risks

2.2.6 meet with their staff on a planned and regular basis to discuss any concerns they may have and to listen to what they have to say. This could be through formal staff appraisals, supervision, team meetings etc

2.2.7 monitor their staff's workload and working hours and adopt a flexible approach wherever possible, to work schedules, in order to help avoid conflicts between work and personal lives

2.2.8 ensure that staff are provided with clear and realistic objectives and that performance is managed effectively and fairly

2.2.9 involve staff, and their representatives, in issues which affect them and may change their work or work environment

2.2.10 be vigilant towards staff who show signs of stress whether it is work related or related to their personal lives

2.2.11 ensure that staff have access to the appropriate information in order to help them recognise and manage stress, e.g. advice from Occupational Health and access to the Staff Counselling network

2.2.12 effectively and sensitively manage any staff stress related absence as well as their return to work in accordance with the Attendance Management Procedure.

2.3 PAT Health & Safety Advisers will:

2.3.1 provide additional advice and guidance, on request, to assist with the implementation of this Policy

2.3.2 ensure that the Policy is kept up to date in accordance with any changes in legislation and reflecting current best practice.

2.4 Employees will:

2.4.1 inform their manager of any work related issues / difficulties that cause stress, or have the potential to do so, and participate positively in determining solutions. If the stressors have arisen from circumstances outside of work, employees are encouraged, where possible, to discuss these with their manager so that appropriate assistance and flexibility can be considered

2.4.2 where possible, take account of the impact of their lifestyle in terms of controlling stressors, e.g. adopting healthy life style habits

2.4.3 co-operate with their manager in the undertaking of any risk assessments and the implementing of any necessary control measures

2.4.4 be aware of their own well-being and seek advice and support when necessary

2.4.5 be supportive of colleagues through any difficulties they may be dealing with.

3. Monitoring and Review

3.1 Managers should remain vigilant and consistently monitor their work situation and staff in order to anticipate the potential for work related stress, using the risk assessment process as a guide.

3.2 This policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it reflects changes in legislation and current best practice.

Appendix 1: Supporting Information

1. General

1.1 Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them.”

This distinguishes stress from the pressures or challenges that provide the motivation for everyday living. Being under pressure can often improve performance but when demands and pressures become excessive they can lead to stress.

1.2 People respond to pressure in different and individual ways. Much will depend on an employee’s personality, experience, motivation and the support available from managers, colleagues, family and friends. Difficulties faced outside of work can also have an impact on someone’s ability to cope or function well at work.

1.3 If stress is intense and sustained it can lead to mental and physical ill-health and contributes to employee ill-health and sickness absence. It is important that all employees are aware of the factors that can give rise to stress (stressors) so that where possible their causes can be foreseen and appropriately managed before damage/harm is done.

1.4 There are legal obligations as well as ethical and economic reasons for taking positive action to manage stress. This policy guidance contains information, advice and links on how to recognise, reduce and manage stress at work.

1.5 Managers may not always be aware of the problems their staff are experiencing, especially if they relate to situations outside of work. It is therefore important that managers are familiar with the recognisable effects and indicators of stress so they can judge whether there is a need to take action e.g. review work, open up conversation with affected person/s, reinforce the availability of support, the counselling network etc. A brief resume of the key stressors that employees can experience whilst at work is given below.

2. Typical Causes of Work Related Stress

2.1 Listed below are the key factors identified by the Health and Safety Executive as having the potential to cause stress at work. For more information about these factors, to which the HSE have applied management standards, visit the HSE website. Alternatively, a copy of the Managers’ Toolkit can be sent out to those who cannot readily access the Intranet (contact Health and Safety).

- Job demands – either too much or too little to do e.g. having too much work to do in the time available or work that is beyond the capability of the employee due either to a lack of appropriate training or the individual’s capacity, excessively tight deadlines, irregular working patterns (e.g. shift work), inadequate or excessive training for the job, boring repetitive work and noisy, hot or threatening working environment
- Control – issues around the extent of self control over tasks, timing, pace of work or skills used
- Relationships – for example, working in an atmosphere of unacceptable behaviour such as bullying, sexual or racial harassment
- Role conflict – perceived conflicting job demands or being asked to undertake tasks which are not considered part to their job

- Role ambiguity – when an employee doesn't have a clear view of their job and the expectations of them, lack of understanding and leadership from managers
- Organisation change – appropriate communication is vital to prevent uncertainty about what is going on
- Support – the extent of personal support available from managers and colleagues.
- Training – are the training opportunities suitable and sufficient
- Individual factors – pressures from home/personal life e.g. bereavement, relationship or family problems, poor work life balance (home and work related pressures can feed off and reinforce each other).

3. How do I recognise stress in myself or in others?

3.1 Emotional/Behavioural effects include:

- Persistent or recurrent moods, anxiety, frustration, anger, irritability, detachment, worry, depression, guilt, sadness
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things, inability to switch off, loss of creativity, making more errors, apathy
- Increase use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs
- Eating disorders.

3.2 Physical effects include:

- Tiredness, skin or sleep disorders, clumsiness, nervous tics
- Raised blood pressure, ulcers, increased sweating, dizziness
- Migraine, muscular pain and tension.

3.3 There might also be some adverse effects on the County Council if stress levels are not managed effectively. These include:

- Increase in sickness absence – particularly short-term absences
- Poor work performance – less output, lower quality, poor decision making
- Conflict between colleagues, poor relationships with service users
- General loss of motivation or commitment, poor time-keeping, working longer hours but with diminishing effectiveness.

3.4 It is therefore important that stress is pro-actively managed, in accordance with the requirements of the Policy.

3.5 There are a number of pro-active interventions listed below. Risk Assessment is fundamental in identifying and putting in place controls to minimise the risks associated with stressors in the workplace and must be carried out. Other interventions may also apply, depending on the circumstances.

4. Risk Assessment

4.1 Managers have a key role to play in assessing the risk of stress within their teams and for taking steps to control any risk identified. The risk assessment procedure (Appendices 2 and 3) is the primary tool for achieving this and all managers should ensure these assessments are undertaken and reviewed regularly.

4.2 Managers are ideally placed to monitor local conditions and should take a lead role in discussing stress within team meetings and in supervision. Staff should be encouraged to participate in the risk assessment process to identify work factors that may give rise to stress.

4.3 Managers must be vigilant towards staff that may show signs of stress and every effort made to identify such signs at an early stage and immediate supportive action taken to prevent the situation continuing. Also, managers must ensure that risk assessments are monitored and reviewed as necessary.

5. Recruitment and Selection

5.1 The full range of responsibilities and demands of a job, including areas of potential pressure, should be identified and set out clearly in the job description that is sent to all candidates. To ensure that the right candidate is selected for the role, be certain that the policies and guidance available from Personnel and Training are followed.

6. Induction and Promotion

6.1 All new employees must receive induction into their jobs. Starting a new job can be stressful and a planned induction can help eliminate many concerns. The situation could be aggravated if the new employee is also relocating. As part of the induction programme this policy should be discussed and employees advised who will provide them with support. For further information, please consult the documentation on Supported Introduction to Employment.

7. Sickness Absence

7.1 When dealing with concerns related to stress and sickness absence, ESCC's policies on Sickness Absence and Management of Attendance must be adhered to.

8. Training and Development

8.1 Identifying and meeting training needs should not be seen as a one-off exercise but as a continual and evolving process. Managers must ensure that they and their staff are aware of the risks of stress and the measures that can be taken to identify and manage it.

8.2 In management and supervision training and other appropriate skills training courses this policy should be raised as part of a manager's ongoing responsibilities. Managers and supervisors should also consider ways of dealing with their own stress management. Stress management training courses (details contained in the Personnel and Training Services Course Brochure) must be attended by all line managers within the time frame agreed as part of the Departmental Safety Action Plan.

8.3 A general information guide for staff, to support this policy, is available on the intranet and must be brought to the attention of all staff. It will include advice on coping with stress including lifestyle factors and approaches to relaxation.

9. Violence at Work

9.1 The Violence at Work Policy which can be found via the intranet a link to which can be found on the Stress Policies and Guidance page and any departmental guidance must be adhered to. All staff should be made aware of the policy, departmental guidance and of any local arrangements necessary to help ensure a safe working environment. Violence at Work training must be provided to all staff in key areas and they must be made aware of the support which is available to them if they have been involved in a violent incident e.g. counselling.

10. Managing Stress Related Absence

10.1 It is important to manage an employee's return to work after a stress-related absence, whether or not it was related to work. The manager must:

- Follow the Management of Attendance procedures in planning the employee's return to work. A meeting should be held with them, with the opportunity for a trade union representative or safety representative to be present, in accordance with the procedure. If necessary advice should be sought from the relevant Personnel Officer or the Occupational Health Adviser
- Ensure that when an employee returns to work they are not subject to the same pressures, without additional support/safeguards, that are known to have contributed to their absence in the first place
- Complete a risk assessment, take any necessary actions and issue a copy to the employee, put a copy in the employee's personal file and, if agreed by the employee, issue a copy to their agreed representative
- Consider a phased return, for up to a maximum of four weeks, during which time there should be a gradual increase in working towards normal hours. Managers should also consider other flexible working options. Full details are given in the Lifewise Policy a link to which can be found on the Stress Policies and Guidance page. A person may be ready to return to some aspects of their job but not others and workload responsibilities may need to be adjusted accordingly
- After returning to work, continue to provide support to help the employee's full recovery. Meetings with the employee may need to be planned more frequently than would be usual under normal supervision arrangements
- Consider other options and take urgent advice from the relevant Personnel Officer or the Occupational Health Adviser if the employee continues to experience difficulties in managing pressures at work and particularly if as a result the employee is absent from work again.

Appendix 2: Risk Assessment

1. Current research indicates that local proactive management measures based, on suitable and sufficient risk assessments, are the most effective method of preventing harm to employees arising from work-related stress. Risk assessment is an on-going process, particularly in relation to work-related stress and should be continuously monitored. For this reason, the specific Risk Assessment Checklist (Appendix 3) should be completed each time a stressor is identified within your area of control.
2. Managers should take a lead role in raising this issue in team meetings and supervision and encourage staff to participate in the risk assessment process. Managers must be vigilant towards individual staff that may show signs of work-related stress. Every effort should be made to identify such signs at an early stage and immediate supportive action taken to prevent the situation continuing.
3. If a member of staff that you manage is suffering from stress (see Flow Chart at Appendix 4), a specific risk assessment must be carried out. The risk assessment checklist for Workplace Stressors (Appendix 3) can be adapted for this purpose, but all stressors must be explored in a “One to One” confidential discussion with the employee concerned. If preferred, the generic risk assessment form found within the Corporate Policy on Risk Assessments which can be found on the intranet on the Health and Safety Policies pages a link to which can be found on the Stress Policies and Guidance page.
4. This can be used as the basis for recording the stressors identified and any additional control measures which need to be put into place and monitored. It is important that all key stress factors are reviewed. Further specific guidance is given in the Stress Awareness Managers’ Toolkit which can also be found on the main Stress Policies and Guidance page.
5. If managers feel unable to resolve work-related stress issues themselves, they should seek assistance, again at an early stage, from their line manager, a Health & Safety Adviser or from Personnel Services as a follow up to any formal training already provided.
6. Stress risk assessments should be undertaken using the following guidance and format and Managers can contact a Personnel and Training Services Safety Adviser for guidance if needed.

- Step 1:** Using the Risk Assessment Checklist (Appendix 3), and with reference to the key stressors identified in Appendix 1, log any stressor that may be relevant to your staff and give rise to adverse affects on their health. List the work activities where this stressor may be found and remember that stressors may also be caused by external sources
- Step 2:** Identify the people who may be affected, either individually or collectively.
- Step 3:** List any current control measures already in place
- Step 4:** Consider what further action may be necessary
- Step 5:** Develop an implementation strategy which identifies what control measures are required, who will be responsible for them, an appropriate time scale and how this will be monitored and reviewed
- Step 6:** Ensure review takes place at the appropriate time.

Appendix 3: Risk assessment Checklist

Complete steps 1 to 6 of this form for any stressor identified in your area of control. Remember to include your name, department, signature and the date at the end.

		Review Date:
1	Describe the stressor or hazard here:	
2	Circle below which areas of risk the stressor comes under. <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; text-align: center;"> <div>CHANGE RELATIONSHIPS</div> <div>CONTROL ROLE</div> <div>DEMANDS SUPPORT</div> </div>	
3	Consider who might be harmed by this stressor and list them below. Don't list individuals by name (perhaps use job titles) but think about groups of people doing similar work or who might be affected. Keep in mind staff that are disabled, inexperienced, or working alone, plus visitors:	
4	Have you already taken precautions against this stressor? If so, list existing controls/precautions below or where the information about them may be found. Also list what information, instruction or training has been provided about these controls /precautions. If information, instruction or training was given then include date(s) provided.	
5	Consider what further action is necessary to control this stressor. Outline any actions planned below, including who will carry them out and by when:	
6	Set a date for reviewing the actions listed in 5 above. Then insert the date in the review date box top right, diarise it and file this sheet in review date order.	

Name:	Dept:
Signature:	Date:

Appendix 4: Stress Management Flow Chart

