



## MANAGING STRESS AND WELLBEING CODE OF PRACTICE

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## Introduction

1. The Council, as an employer of choice, wishes to ensure the wellbeing and safety of all employees and to maintain a working environment which is free from adverse pressure. The Council recognises its legal duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees whilst they are at work. Undue stress can adversely affect employee health and wellbeing and, as such, it is the Council's responsibility to take reasonably practicable steps to avoid and reduce unnecessary workplace stress.
2. The code of practice is mainly concerned with stress arising from or affecting the individual in the working environment. However, it does recognise that causes of stress may be external to the workplace or be combined with causes within the workplace. Often, no single cause may be identified but where the individual is affected at work, the Council will take the approach of helping the employee. Managers are encouraged to deal sensitively with situations where employees are or report they are under stress. Employees should also attempt to help by recognising the early signs of stress in themselves and to try to manage this stress through their own efforts.
3. The Council acknowledges that:
  - a. any employee could experience stress,
  - b. that no weakness is implied by this and
  - c. that it will encourage employees to seek help and support. The ways in which assistance can be offered will naturally vary in different working environments and situations so the guidance outlined in this Code is not prescriptive.
4. The Council has a range of policies (e.g. Managing Performance, Probationary, Disciplinary, Dignity at Work and Sickness Absence) which deal with issues of misconduct, poor work performance and capability. Managers should not be deterred from using these policies when all reasonable efforts to assist an employee suffering from stress have proved unsuccessful. The code should, therefore, be read in conjunction with other relevant policies where necessary.

## **Scope**

This code of practice applies to all employees of the council. It also applies to agency workers, casual workers, volunteers and contractors who may not be directly employed by the council but are carrying out work on behalf of the Council.

## **Definition of Stress**

The Health and Safety Executive define stress as "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 always has a negative effect and can be detrimental to health if it is prolonged.

## The Case for addressing stress at work

The Council is committed to meeting its legal obligations in regard to the management of stress.

This includes:

- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. These regulations require the Council to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities.
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This act imposes duties on the Council to take measures to control that risk.
- HSE Management Standards that represent set conditions that support employers and employees manage stress

The Council wishes to ensure that staff are supported and recognises that prolonged periods of stress, including work-related stress, have an adverse effect on employee's health. Proactive management of work-related stress can have a positive impact on -

- Employee commitment to work;
- Staff performance;
- Staff turnover;
- Attendance levels;
- Staff recruitment;
- Quality of service provision;
- Organisational image and reputation;

## Causes of Stress

It is recognised that different things can trigger stress in individuals at various times in their working life and that people react differently to stressful situations. It is, therefore, important to recognise that some factors may cause stress for one person but not for another. The following can be sources of stress arising from work: -

- Anxiety about change;
- Coping with rapid change (including information technology requirements);
- Unclear role definition and lack of control of work;
- Conflicting priorities;
- Too much work or insufficient work;
- Work not matched to the individual's skills and competencies;
- Not being able to use skills;
- Lack of job security;
- Crisis management – no long term planning;
- Lack of involvement – isolation, either physical or emotional;
- Poor work relationships;
- Lack of communication;
- Harassment or bullying.

Stress can also arise from the pressures people experience in their home and personal lives (e.g., bereavement, relationship or family problems and financial difficulties); these factors can make people more vulnerable to stress at work. Often the harmful effects of stress are caused by a combination of work and home circumstances.

## Identifying an Individual Experiencing Stress

The following can be indicators of stress at work:-

- Persistent or recurrent moods and mental symptoms such as – anger, irritability, depression;
- Physical symptoms – general non-specific aches and pains including head aches and stomach aches, raised heart rate, dizziness, blurred vision, skin or sleep disorders and high blood pressure;
- Changed behaviours – difficulty concentrating or remembering things, unable to “switch off”, loss of creativity, making errors, double checking everything, eating disorders, increasing use of tobacco, alcohol and/or drugs;
- High/increased levels of sickness absence – particularly frequent short term absences;
- Poor relationships at work – conflict with colleagues, poor relationships with clients;
- Poor work performance – lack of concentration, less output, lower quality of work, poor decision making;
- Attitude and behaviour – low morale, loss of motivation, poor time keeping, working longer hours but with diminishing effectiveness.

When an employee reports they are stressed, the manager should take time to listen and be supportive – a dismissive response will not help and the individual may be deterred from approaching the manager again.

## Risk Assessment

Managers need to carry out risk assessments and, as far as is reasonably practicable, put appropriate and preventative measures into place. Risk assessments need to identify activities which may lead to stress or which may place a particular group of staff at risk through stress. <http://insite/people/health-and-safety/hs-templates/>;

The risk assessments will cover the 6 areas identified within the HSE Management Standards:

1. **Demands:** Includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
2. **Control:** How much say do the people have over the way they work?
3. **Support:** Includes encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
4. **Relationships:** Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
5. **Role:** Do people understand their role within the organisation and does the organisation ensure roles are not conflicting?
6. **Change:** How is organisational change (large and small) managed and communicated?

For each Standard there must be systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Managers undertaking risk assessments must ensure that they are fully trained and up to date on health and safety issues which might affect the employees and be aware of the steps which they should take to guard against health risks. Further information on specific hazards such as violence at work is available on SBC Insite and advice and support is available from the Health & Safety Team.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Council, managers and employees have roles and responsibilities under this code and have a responsibility to take steps to eliminate or reduce stress or the causes of stress in the workplace once identified

### **The Council will:**

- take all reasonable steps to protect employees against the harmful effects of stress, although no employer can guarantee its employees a stress free existence
- arrange to carry out risk assessments to reduce stress at work to identify all workplace stressors and eliminate or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will
- be regularly reviewed; <http://insite/people/health-and-safety/hs-templates/>;
- provide training in stress management for managers and individuals.
- provide confidential counselling and mediation services;
- provide occupational health advice;
- monitor stress related performance data through HR monitoring information and periodic reviews of attitude surveys
- develop plans and improvement targets in relation to stress and will consult with Trade Unions regarding these.
- provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the company's agreed stress management plans and targets

### **Managers will:**

- need to be aware of and responsive to work pressures and the effects which they might have on employees;
- ensure all new starters are properly inducted and that their staff receive appropriate training and development to ensure that they have the competencies and knowledge to carry out their job;
- ensure suitable and sufficient risk assessments are carried out (taking into account factors which may cause stress) and implement recommendations / actions within their area <http://insite/people/health-and-safety/hs-templates>;
- ensure there is good communication with staff and a supportive environment is fostered within which stress issues can be discussed;
- ensure staff involvement is encouraged including attending team meetings where ideas, problems and solutions can be discussed;
- ensure employees are fully trained, coached and developed to ensure that they can carry out their existing or new roles effectively;
- ensure effective time management is encouraged by monitoring working arrangements/hours, workloads, deadlines, overtime and ensuring use of holiday entitlements; this will ensure staff are not over worked or underutilised,

- speak to employees if they are aware that they are showing signs of stress;
- periodically consider role profiles and the duties and responsibilities of the role to ensure the main accountabilities are achievable
- implement 1-2-1's, team meetings and annual appraisals and operate an open-door policy to allow staff the opportunities to raise concerns
- deal with individual concerns raised
- ensure bully and harassment is not tolerated
- be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff experiencing stress outside work, e.g. bereavement or separation.

### **Employees:**

- will need to recognise the early signs of stress in themselves and others;
- will need to make all efforts to manage their own stress;
- will take an active part in the process of assessing the risk, e.g. completing surveys or providing honest feedback when requested;
- will need to be supportive of colleagues who are experiencing the negative effects of stress. This may mean giving practical assistance or moral support or both, but will always involve listening;
- should discuss matters with their manager and/or accept opportunities for counselling and support when recommended with a member of the Employee Assistance Counselling Team or Occupational Health
- will identify and recognise their training and development needs and take responsibility for their own well-being and development within the job and to discuss these with their manager in supervision and one-to-one discussions.
- will raise concerns at 1-2-1's, team meetings or annual appraisals to allow the Council to implement supportive measures where appropriate.

### **Wellbeing Services and Support to Staff**

Strategies for dealing with work place stress are usually two-fold. As well as putting measures into place to deal with work issues which may be the cause of stress, it is also important to provide the individual with help to identify personal strategies for coping with stress.

#### Time

Employees, who are under stress, need to be able to talk about the problems they are encountering and should be encouraged to discuss what they think would be a good way to deal with the situation. It is important for the manager to set aside some uninterrupted time to allow the individual to talk and to give serious consideration to the suggestions made by the employee. Often, giving the individual the ability to influence how they resolve their problem helps them to feel more valued and in control – this can help reduce stress levels.

#### Employee Assistance Service

The employee should be offered assistance through the Employee Assistance Service and, in situations where there is a health concern and sickness absence, could be referred to Occupational Health. <http://insite/people/health-and-wellbeing/occupational-health/>

For confidential counselling support, information and advice, call the Employee Assistance Service free on: **0800 328 1437**

From a UK mobile: **0800 328 1437**

From outside UK: **+44 (0) 1482 661 814**

Minicom: **01482 661 911**

Visit Employee Assistance Online at: [www.employeeassistance.org.uk](http://www.employeeassistance.org.uk)

Access code: **sloughbc**

#### Management Support

The manager will need to monitor the situation to try to reduce stress where possible once identified. This will include the completion of a stress risk assessment and implementation of actions.

Managers will ensure that individual issues are dealt with and the member of staff has the opportunity to talk through their concerns.

When staff are absent from work, the manager should follow the Council's Managing Sickness Absence Policy <http://insite/people/health-and-wellbeing/absence/> which includes a return to work interview to establish the reason for absence. Return to work interviews can be used as a way of offering support; they provide an opportunity to explore both the impact of work situations on the individual and the impact of the individual's absence on work.

Managers and employees can gain advice from HR and H&S where appropriate.

#### Occupational Health

If patterns of absence develop, or if periods of absence are for reasons of stress, then a referral to the Occupational Health Service should be considered <http://insite/people/health-and-wellbeing/occupational-health/>

Stress related problems are rarely solved by a single action and often take some time to resolve. Even if practical measures have been taken to remove the underlying problems, it is important to continue talking with the individual to give them a chance to work out for themselves a way of resolving the difficulties and the timescale required to do it.

#### Training

Training in the management of stress for managers and employees is available.

#### Processes to Raise Concerns

Staff should raise concerns with their line manager first. If this is not appropriate they can speak with their Group Manager or Trade Union Representative,

#### **Resources to Support Mental Wellbeing**

- The Slough Public Health website has resources to support you with your mental wellbeing at this time: [www.publichealthslough.co.uk/campaigns/mental-health-and-coronavirus/](http://www.publichealthslough.co.uk/campaigns/mental-health-and-coronavirus/)

- East Berkshire CCG '[Coping guides](#)' for different age groups - details of self-help apps and websites together with a range of resources, including helplines, to support mental health. The guides will be refreshed regularly with new age-specific versions (e.g. primary and secondary school age) being launched soon.
- Each month [Action for Happiness](#) produces a calendar with daily suggestions to improve wellbeing for ourselves and others.
- NHS Talking Therapies: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/nhs-talking-therapies/>

There are a number of different resources and support options available to staff and these can be found on <http://insite/coronavirus/coronavirus-information-for-staff/help-and-support-with-personal-wellbeing/>

### The Wellbeing Board

In addition, the Council has a Wellbeing Board made up of staff who volunteer as employee wellbeing champions.

The Employee Wellbeing Board aims to promote good health through:

- increased access to exercise and fitness
- promotion of healthy eating choices
- advice on giving up smoking
- effective support during periods of ill health
- promotion of mental wellbeing.

More information and the Employee Wellbeing Strategy can be found on <http://insite/people/health-and-wellbeing/employee-wellbeing/>

### H&S Board

Issues of stress and pressure are also discussed and monitored at the Directorate H&S Committees and H&S Board.