



## APPENDIX 1

personnel/stress policy

# STRESS PREVENTION POLICY

Human Resources Section  
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## STRESS PREVENTION POLICY

### INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Policy details the Comhairle's determination to tackle the effects of workplace stress on its employees. The Comhairle recognises that work-related stress is harmful and is committed to take all reasonable and practical steps to prevent stress and where that is not possible to minimise its effects. The Comhairle will ensure that all its employees, at all levels, are aware of the steps that they can take to minimise its effects on themselves and their colleagues.
- 1.2 The Policy will apply to all Comhairle employees with all Managers (including Head Teachers) responsible for implementation of the Policy. The Comhairle is responsible for providing the necessary resources. All Managers must be committed to the implementation of this Policy.

### PURPOSE OF POLICY

- 2.1 The purpose of the Stress Prevention Policy is to:
  - promote an understanding of the risks associated with stress in relation to employees who are potentially at risk or already suffering from stress
  - indicate that the Comhairle views stress as a specific Health & Safety issue that can affect both employees and the whole organisation
  - commit management resources to identifying and assessing the risk of stress and undertaking actions to remove or minimise the stressors involved.

### DEFINITION OF STRESS

- 3.1 The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines 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 can be detrimental to health.

### POLICY

- 4.1 **Managers** will identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed, after six months initially and annually thereafter.
- 4.2 Employers have an absolute duty under the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to carry out 'adequate' or 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessments of hazards that might cause harm to employees. This is an all-encompassing duty, which is related to both the physical and psychological health of employees. The Regulations also apply to any contractor or self-employed persons who are working within the organisation.

- 4.3 A risk assessment for stress is an investigation into what might cause employees harm at their place of work. Its aim is preventative in that it is designed to identify potential stressors and areas that may cause stress to employees or to minimize exposure to potential psychosocial hazards.

In this context, a 'hazard' is defined as anything to which the employee is exposed at work that may possibly present a risk to their health. 'Risk' is the probability (whether great or small) that someone may be harmed by a hazard that has been identified.

- 4.4 The five steps of risk assessment:

- Step 1 – Identify the hazards
- Step 2 – Decide who may be harmed and how
- Step 3 – Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
- Step 4 – Record the significant findings of the assessment
- Step 5 – Review the assessment and revise it at appropriate intervals, in particular it should be revised subsequent to any major organisational change.

- 4.5 **Heads of Department** will consult with Trade Union Safety Representatives on all proposed action in relation to the prevention of workplace stress.

Action in relation to stress at work will be discussed through the appropriate Committees – Joint Consultative Committee for Local Government Employees (JCC) and Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNC) with Policy and Resources Committee looking at the Policy issues. At departmental level issues in relation to stress at work will be discussed initially through the Departmental Safety Committees which all Departments will establish and maintain. Through this method Trade Unions and Staff Safety Representatives will be kept informed of stress-related issues.

- 4.6 Training in good management practices will be provided for all Directors, Heads of Service and supervisory staff. This will include stress management training for Managers. Stress awareness training will be provided for all employees.

If a postholder has health and safety duties and a duty to manage stress in his/her job description then training will be given to a competent level to fulfil this function.

- 4.7 Confidential counselling will be provided through the Occupational Health Service for employees affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.

Occupational health facilities will include occupational health support, employee assistance programmes and in-house counselling support services where applicable.

Staff should be able to talk to Managers about work-related stress and express concerns at an early stage whilst being confident their fears remain confidential and without stigma.

- 4.8 Adequate resources will be provided to enable Managers to implement the Comhairle's agreed stress management strategy.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **5.1 *Managers***

- Conduct and implement recommendations of risk assessments within their jurisdiction.
- Ensure good communication between all levels of Management, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Ensure employees are fully trained to discharge their duties.
- Ensure employees are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.
- Monitor workloads to ensure the employees are not overloaded.
- Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that employees are not overworking. Monitor holidays to ensure that employees are taking their full entitlement.
- Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to an employee who is experiencing stress outside work, e.g. bereavement or separation.

### **5.2 **Occupational Health Adviser/Safety Staff – Human Resources Section****

- Provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress.
- Train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.
- Refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Inform the Comhairle and employees through the Safety Committees of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

### **5.3 **Personnel Staff - Human Resources Section****

- Give guidance to Managers on the stress policy.
- Assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.
- Advise managers and individuals on training requirements.
- Provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to Occupational Health Service where appropriate.

### **5.4 **Employees****

- Raise issues of concern with a Safety Representative, the Line Manager or Occupational Health.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.

## 5.5 Function of Safety Representatives

- Safety Representatives will be consulted in a meaningful fashion on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress.
- Safety Representatives will be able to consult with employees on the issue of stress including conducting any workplace surveys.
- Safety Representatives will be involved in a meaningful fashion in the risk assessment process.
- Safety Representatives will be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from the Human Resources Section.
- Safety Representatives will be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any Trade Union training relating to workplace stress.
- Safety Representatives will conduct joint inspections of the workplace at least every three months to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.

## 5.6 Role of the Safety Committees

- The Departmental Safety Committees will perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented.
- The Departmental Safety Committees will oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the Policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

## MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

### Management Structure

6.1 The Chief Executive is ultimately responsible for ensuring the Comhairle complies with its obligations under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974. All Directors report to the Chief Executive with the Directors having a number of services reporting to them. All services are managed by a Head of Service who is responsible for the operational aspects of ensuring the Stress Prevention Policy is adhered to. Employees can communicate directly with their Line Managers, Safety Representatives or through Occupational Health, Health & Safety or Personnel Officers with regard to any aspects of Stress at Work.

6.2 The Head of Department is the officer who is responsible for:

- taking action if and when a particular stress factor/hazard is identified
- considering the stress impact of any change in working practice
- ensuring the correct management procedure is initiated when an employee either reports work-related stress or has taken sickness absence believed to have been brought about as a result of it
- advising on correct procedure for an employee when reporting instances of work-related stress
- the employer's duties in relation to members of staff who may be suffering from stress due to external factors unrelated to the workplace

- referring to Occupational Health who will develop the steps that individual employees should take to protect themselves against stress and to minimise the effects as far as possible.

6.3 The management systems used to monitor health and safety policy include:

- Human Resources data such as sickness records and staff turnover figures
- compliance with procedures and recommendations
- other audit methods including stress surveys
- percentage of stress-related work related cases returned to work.

## **REPORTING PROCEDURES**

7.1 Data used for monitoring purposes will be produced through the computerised Personnel system and reported to the JCC and LNC. Stress-related incidents will be recorded through the Occupational Health Adviser using the Management Referral System.

## **PROCEDURE IN RELATION TO WORK RELATED STRESS**

8.1 Individual cases of work-related stress, either certificated or non-certificated sickness absence, or stress instances in the workplace must be reported to the appropriate Line Manager and then onwards to the Head of Department. Employees who feel they are under pressure can seek confidential counselling through Occupational Health or can draw it to the attention of the Line Manager who will refer to the Head of Department. Return to work interviews must be conducted by the appropriate Line Manager on the return from sick leave of an employee who has suffered from work-related sickness absence. Prior to an employee's return to work, a phased return can be considered by Occupational Health.

8.2 An Employee Assistance Programme will be developed in order for the Comhairle to support employees with work-related stress. This programme will be tailored for each individual's needs through the Occupational Health Service.

## **INTERVENTION FOR WORKPLACE STRESS**

9.1 Being aware of the likely causes of stress within an organisation, and those who may be affected by it, will clearly help in determining the type of intervention appropriate to create and maintain a healthy working environment. For example, individual employees may feel unhappy about:

- work that is too boring, or difficult
- work that confers too much responsibility or, perhaps too little
- feeling isolated
- constantly having to deal with grievances or complaints from colleagues or customers
- an overbearing management or an unhealthy departmental culture
- poor remuneration, lack of parity or other conditions of employment
- lack of support or poor communications
- having to fulfil an ill-defined role or to deal with conflicting priorities
- an inflexible or inconsistent system of control
- too little job satisfaction
- damaged career prospects, frustration, insecurity, lack of recognition or training
- bullying, harassment or intimidation

- extremes of temperature, bad ventilation, noise or odours
- a management disregard for the ergonomic design of office furniture or equipment
- work related ill-health.

9.2 Interventions that can increase job satisfaction and reduce stress include:

- improved working conditions and environment
- work recognition and reward that are at least equal to those general to a Local Authority setting
- more consultation regarding conditions of work
- greater responsibility and control including involvement in any process of change
- developing a supportive culture
- improving accessibility to management
- establishing clear roles, objectives and priorities
- providing promotional paths and prospects, at all levels.

9.3 The table below summarises some of the possible causes and effects of work-related stress, together with possible interventions.

<b>Cause</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>Intervention</b>
Poor communication	Low morale	Listening skills training
Long hours	Fatigue	Job restructuring/Time management
Poor conditions	Sickness	Remedial action and joint consultation
Bullying	Low self-esteem/ Performance	Performance review and Dignity at Work training
Work overload	Exhaustion	Job appraisal

9.4 Strategies to manage stress at work include:

- prevention, preferably by risk reduction and/or employee education and training
- timely and appropriate action to identify, eliminate or mitigate reported problems as soon as they arise
- provision of contingent treatment facilities for any employee complaining of stress or stress-related illness
- supporting rehabilitation back to work after sickness absence.