

East Devon District Council

Stress Management Policy

Reviewed

Feb 2007

Policy Approval

6 March 2007

Reasons for introducing the policy

Health and Safety legislation requires employers to manage the risks to their employees, and this includes the risk of stress. The purpose of this policy is to prevent work related stress to employees and to maintain their health and wellbeing by recognising and managing stress.

Policy Statement

Stress at work is recognised as a contributor to employee ill health and sickness absence. As an employer East Devon District Council has a duty of care to ensure that the health of employees is not affected by work related stressors.

The Council's Performance Excellence Review framework is supported by regular one to one meetings which give employees and managers a further opportunity to discuss, not only personal development and performance, but also any problems or difficulties relating to work which may result in stress.

Information on the Council's Absence Management Policy is detailed in the Employment Handbook. Advice is available from the Intranet, your Line manager or Human Resources on other related policies, such as, acceptable behaviour, grievance procedures and lone working.

The Council has developed and promotes an Activate programme. This offers a range of health activities for employees with an emphasis on psycho-social health, relaxation and physical activity.

Assistance is available to employees who suffer the effects of stress, through a confidential counselling service.

The Council has attained Investor in People (I.I.P.) status as a means of promoting excellent communications and training for all.

Terms explained

The Health and Safety Executive define stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other demands placed upon them". The definition distinguishes between reasonable pressure at work which can have beneficial effects and can contribute towards job satisfaction and excessive pressure at work which can lead to stress and can have adverse effects on the health and well being of employees, either directly or by contributing to accidents.

How will we go about it?

As part of our Wellbeing strategy we will:

- Provide managers with well being training which includes stress management training
- Provide employees with information regarding well being and this will be particularly promoted through the 'Well Being Week'

- Give guidance to managers on risk assessing issues or environments which may cause stress (Appendix 1) and Control measures to reduce stress (Appendix 2).
- Promote the use of the confidential counselling service.

Specific policy areas

Organisation and arrangements

Councillors will:

- ensure the Council policy and procedures are promoted and followed.

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the policy and will:

- ensure the policy is consistently and fairly applied.

Heads of Service and managers

Heads of Service/managers will:

- have responsibility for preparing job descriptions which will be periodically reviewed so they accurately reflect the work undertaken by the post holder. This will also alert management to any situation where an individual postholder's workload has risen to excessive levels
- ensure that the full range of tasks and demands of the job are clearly set out in the job description and in the objectives and discussed at recruitment interviews
- ensure adequate risk assessments are carried out within their Service, and reviewed at appropriate intervals
- monitor the numbers and duration of vacant posts to ensure that no undue burden is placed on remaining employees.

The Head of Organisational Development

The Head of Organisational Development will:

- ensure that there is a clear and effective process for managing and recording sickness absence including the reasons for absence. Information gathered through self certification and doctors' certificates will be recorded and made available for statistical and monitoring purposes
- ensure early referral to Occupational Health where stress is a factor even if the employee has not been absent from work
- ensure that a system exists for the provision of counselling for employees affected by stress and monitor usage of this service.
- provide de-personalised statistics on cases and consultations for consideration by the Management Team, Central Joint Safety Panel and other Managers, as appropriate

- ensure delivery of programmes for managers and employees which include Wellbeing at work workshops
- liaise with the Health and Safety Adviser to ensure that s/he is aware of the extent of stress-related sickness absence
- ensure stress audits are carried out across the Council and that action plans are developed and monitored.

The Learning and Development Manager

The Learning and Development Manager will:

- provide a corporate “Welcome” session for all employees and an annual portfolio of relevant training to support employees and managers. This training will include stress awareness and stress management, as part of the corporate Wellbeing programme and will:
 - help Managers, Supervisors and employees know the causes of stress, the harmful effects and how to recognise stress in the workforce. Practical measures which can be taken to prevent stress-related ill health and what should be done to assist those suffering from the adverse effects should also be covered
 - help employees recognise and cope with their own stress in order to prevent the development of stress related ill health
- organise Stress Audits to be undertaken of all sections within the council and schedule review dates of action plans.

The Safety Adviser

The Safety Adviser will:

- assist managers and supervisors to develop risk assessments that consider risk of stress-related ill health along with other risks to health and safety
- collate and review the risk assessments for all Services, extract corporate issues and present these to the Strategic Management Team
- provide advice for stress related occupational health referrals if required.

Managers and Supervisors

Managers and Supervisors will:

- carry out risk assessments for their area of responsibility
- ensure that employees know what they are expected to do and that they have the skills, knowledge and opportunity to complete their job successfully
- as appropriate, arrange for employees within their service to undertake job related training, wellbeing at work training and skills training to enhance coping such as communication, time management, assertiveness, handling difficult situations and employee relations
- review flexi-time records and levels of overtime working to ensure that excessive hours are not being worked by individuals
- identify and refer to Human Resources cases of, persistent short-term absence and long-term sickness absence that are four or more weeks long, or earlier if they are stress related (see Employment Handbook).
- notify their Head of Service of any advice (such as Doctor's Statement) received that an employee is suffering stress related ill health OR where s/he has reason to suspect that a member of their team is suffering stress related ill health. This is to allow action to be taken to rectify the cause of the stress related ill health and to allow support to be given to the employee affected and to rectify the cause of any work related stress. The support may be in the form of counselling.
- where the Manager becomes aware of an issue which may lead to stress, either by representation from an employee or some other means, he/she will seek advice from Human Resources, Safety Adviser or other relevant party.
- inform employees of sources of the counselling service and advice within the organisation

All employees

Employees should:

- raise with their Managers or Supervisors on a day-to-day basis, any issues or problems they are experiencing
- raise any more fundamental job related issues which are causing them difficulties at one to ones or review meetings
- if they feel unable to speak with their Manager or Supervisor, raise the issue with their Head of Service, Health and Safety Adviser, service safety officer or HR Officer. If they feel bullied or harassed they should not hesitate to refer to the Council's policy on Acceptable Behaviour.
- review their own lifestyles through the Activate programme or otherwise to ensure that their susceptibility to stress related illness is minimised.
- consider requesting stress counselling if they feel that they are suffering stress related ill-health. Requests should be addressed to the Referral Co-ordinator, on telephone number 01392 383277 (office hours), or 01392 382549 (Answer phone), or through an HR Officer. In certain circumstances employees may, in their own interests, be referred for counselling;

The following risk assessment factors and ideas for control given below are taken from the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) "Tackling Work-Related Stress: A Managers Guide", HSG218, HSE Books, ISBN 0717620506. Please consult this publication, available on loan from the Commercial Section, Environmental Health, Health and Housing Department.

APPENDIX 1

Guidance for Managers undertaking Stress Risk Assessment

The Council will undertake Stress Audits of all sections in each Directorate. For this purpose the HSE stress questionnaire and stress analysis tool will be used. Results of the analysis will be discussed at focus groups. A final report, listing recommendations will be presented to SMT for discussion and action. The audits will be monitored and reviewed.

Steps to take before undertaking an Assessment

- Talk to employees about work related stress; explain you want to find out if there is a problem in the section.
- Consider if you require a group to help you, i.e. union rep, Health and Safety Adviser, Service safety officers and other supervisor/managers.
- Set a date for the completion of risk assessments.

Identify the hazards

The HSE Stress Management standards represent a set of conditions that reflect high levels of health, well being and organisational performance. The categories of risk factors for work related stress that should be considered in the assessment are:

- Factor 1: Demands - such as workload, work patterns and exposure to physical hazards
- Factor 2: Control - how much say the person has in the way they do their work
- Factor 3: Relationships - covering issues such as bullying and harassment
- Factor 4: Change - how organisational change is managed and communicated in the organisation
- Factor 5: Role - whether the individual understands their role in the organisation, and whether the organisation ensures the person does not have conflicting roles
- Factor 6: Support - Support from peers and line management
 - Training - for the employee to be able to undertake the core functions of the job
 - Factors unique to the individual - catering for individual differences

A variety of data may be available to help identify, in broad terms, how much of a problem work related stress is in the Section, and where the source may be.

Qualitative methods of data collection:

- Informal talks to employees
- Annual Appraisals
- One to One meetings
- Focus groups
- Managing attendance- e.g. return to work interviews

Quantitative methods of data collection

- Sickness/absence data
- Using a questionnaire

Decide who may be harmed and how

- Any member of the team could be affected.
- At particular times some employees may be vulnerable, for example if returning to work after stress related illness, or those who have a domestic crisis such as bereavement.

Evaluate the risk by:

(using the corporate Risk Assessment form available on the Intranet, Documents, Health & Safety)

- identifying what action is already being taken
- deciding if it is enough
- and deciding what more needs to be done

At APPENDIX 2 there is a list of control measures which HSE have given as means of reducing stress on employees. Check the action already being taken reaches the standards given, and implement improvements where necessary to reach this standard.

Record the assessment

There must be a written record of your stress risk assessment

Review the assessment at regular intervals

The assessment should be reviewed if there are any changes to the work, the environment or the employee's circumstances.

Control Measures to Reduce the Risk Factors for Work-Related Stress.**Factor 1: Demands**

- ensure that employees are able to cope with the demands of their jobs and there are sufficient resources to do the work allocated
 - if there are insufficient resources seek guidance from management about priorities
 - support employees by helping them prioritise or renegotiate deadlines
 - cover workloads during employee's absences
- if employees are under-loaded, think about giving them more responsibility, but make sure they have been adequately trained
- ensure jobs are within the capabilities of employees
- encourage your employees to talk to you at an early stage if they feel they cannot cope
- talk to your team regularly about what needs to be done, because this can:
 - help you understand the challenges the team are currently facing and any pressures they are under
 - find ways of sharing out the work sensibly and agreeing the way forward with the team
 - gain team cohesion and commitment to the work you have planned. If the whole team is aware of what needs to be done, and by when, they are likely to be more responsive to you. Allocating more work to a stretched team without explanation is not helpful
 - ensure shift work systems are agreed with employees and that the shifts are fair in terms of the workload
 - gain understanding and commitment to unplanned tight deadlines and the exceptional need for long hours
 - help you manage any unexpected absences or losses to the team- everyone knows the key stages of the project and what each other's role is
- lead by example
- ensure a suitable and sufficient risk assessment is completed for the physical hazards and risks. Ensure identified actions are carried out. Senior management may be required to achieve this.
- assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse and take appropriate steps to deal with it. (see Violence at Work policy & Lone Worker policy)

Factor 2: Control

- give employee more control by enabling them to plan their own work, make decisions about how that work should be completed and how problems should be tackled

- enrich jobs by ensuring that employees are able to use various skills to get tasks completed, and that they can understand how their work fits in with the wider aims of the Service.
- ensure reasonable monitoring of employees' output. Regular meetings with employees could be arranged to see how things are going. At these meetings Managers could provide advice and support where necessary, and ensure that employees are coping
- a supportive environment is crucial. Employees need to know that Managers will support them, even if things go wrong or if they find that they are unable to cope with added pressures.

Factor 3: Relationships

- work in partnership with employees to ensure that bullying and harassment never emerge as an issue. Refer to the corporate policy on Acceptable Behaviour for more information
- communicate the policies and make it clear that senior management fully supports them
- communicate the consequences of breaching the policies
- create a culture where members of the team trust each other and can be themselves while they are at work
- encourage your employees to recognise the individual contributions of other team members and the benefits of the whole team pulling together.

Factor 4: Change

The Chief Executive provides regular Staff Awareness seminars to keep employees informed as to any changes occurring to EDDC.

- communicate regularly with your employees, particularly those working remotely and/or away from home, and be honest and open about what is happening at work and how this may affect them. Communication takes many forms, such as employees awareness seminars, published minutes from meetings, team meetings, one to ones and appraisals.
- encourage employees to work with you to tackle work-related stress or any emerging business problem. Encourage people to talk to you at an early stage about work-related stress, mental health issues, and their concerns about work. Create an environment where these issues do not carry stigma
- explain what the organisation wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change takes place. Explain the timetable for action and what the first steps are going to be. Talk about what the change will mean in terms of day-to-day activity and discuss whether there are any new training needs
- communicate new developments quickly to avoid the spread of rumours in the organisation. If the organisation is planning a major change your employees are likely to be discussing job security, whether they will need to relocate and whether their terms and conditions will change
- face-to-face communication is generally best so that people have the opportunity to ask questions and say what they feel, but contact by paper or electronically, would be helpful
- have an "open door" policy where your employees can talk to you about their concerns or any suggestions they have for improving the way the change is managed

- give employees the opportunity to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change;
- involve employees in discussions about how jobs might be developed and changed and in generating ways of solving problems
- supporting your employees is crucial during a change
- help employees who are to be made redundant by giving them the skills they need to find a new job, such as, helping them to write a CV and prepare for interviews
- after the change, think about revising work objectives to avoid conflict and role ambiguity which can cause work-related stress
- revise your risk assessment to see if any changes e.g. a decrease in employees numbers have resulted in increased hazards to employees. Remember that social changes (such as, if employees are now working for a completely different group of people) may have more of an impact on the individual than technological or geographical changes.

Factor 5: Role

- make sure your employees are clear about their current job, what it entails and what is expected of them. This is by setting and agreeing objectives and targets and through their job description. Also explain what they can expect from you.
- encourage your employees to talk to you at an early stage if they are not clear about priorities or the nature of the task to be undertaken
- make sure that new employees receive a comprehensive induction to your section and if any local job specific instruction is required, ensure it covers all relevant material
- if your organisation has undergone change, check with members of your team to make sure they understand their new roles and are comfortable with them.

Factor 7: Support, training and factors unique to the individual

- give support and encouragement to employees, even when things go wrong. Support may be required for personal crisis, such as, illness, bereavement, financial worries, etc.
- listen to your employees and agree a course of action for tackling any problems. It is important for employees to feel that the contribution they make at work is valued
- involve your employees. They need to 'do their bit' to identify problems and work towards agreed solutions
- encourage employees to share their concerns about work-related stress at an early stage
- provide your employees with suitable and sufficient training to do their jobs
- take into account that people's skills and the way they approach the work will differ
- encourage a healthy "work-life balance"
- encourage employees to take their annual leave entitlement and their meal breaks
- encourage employees to participate in the Council's Activate Programme

Outcomes

The Council will comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act, by providing safe places of work and safe system of work for its' employees, which will reduce stress levels. Managers will produce risk assessments which will reduce the likelihood of employees having work related stress. Employees will be aware of all the factors that can give rise to stress so that the causes of stress can be foreseen and the impact minimised.

Who is responsible for delivery?

- ❑ The Chief Executive, the Strategic Management Team and Heads of Service are responsible for upholding this policy within the services.
- ❑ Managers will assess the risk of stress and must monitor stress in their teams.
- ❑ The commitment of all Council employees is essential to make the policy work

Performance Monitoring

This will include:

- ❑ The Head of Organisational Development will ensure that we monitor and report on stress-related sickness absence
- ❑ The Head of Organisational Development will ensure that we monitor and report on other incidents where stress is a factor. For example, any disciplinary or capability actions
- ❑ The Learning & Development Manager will monitor, record and report attendance on relevant Stress management training
- ❑ Heads of Service will monitor performance against and implementation of Stress Action Plans within their service and the Learning & Development Manager will review progress, annually, against the implementation of service Stress Action Plans.
- ❑ The Health & Safety Officer will monitor performance in relation to accidents at work and other Health & Safety issues, where stress is a factor, and report as necessary

Policy Consultation

The policy has been reviewed at various stages. The following groups were consulted and this final version reflects their feedback.

- ❑ Central Joint Safety Panel.
- ❑ Middle Managers Forum
- ❑ Corporate Management Team.
- ❑ Strategic Management Team.

Policy Review

The Head of Organisational Development will review the Policy in April 2009

Related Policies and Strategies

- ❑ Health and Safety Policy
- ❑ Violence at Work Policy
- ❑ Lone Worker policy
- ❑ Acceptable Behaviour Policy

- Well being at Work Policy