



# **CORPORATE POLICY ON MANAGING STRESS**

**Human Resources & Equalities Division**  
**Directorate of Learning & Development**  
**Cabinet Date 21<sup>st</sup> September 2005**  
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## **CORPORATE POLICY ON MANAGING STRESS**

### **1. POLICY STATEMENT**

The Vale of Glamorgan Council is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees. It recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

This policy applies to everyone in the Council. A separate policy provides more specific details for school based employees. Neither policy applies to foundation school employees. Managers are responsible for implementation and the Council is responsible for providing reasonable resources in respect of its implementation. Appropriate training/information will be provided as part of the management training.

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.

The Council considers that excessive stress and the resulting ill-health to which it can lead should not be seen as a personal problem but an issue which Council Members, Directors, managers, staff, Trade Unions and the Council as a whole are committed to addressing.

The Council wishes to create an environment where individuals are not blamed for suffering stress and where they are encouraged to seek practical help and support. Whilst recognising that the emphasis is on dealing with the causes of occupational stress, the Council recognises the need to support staff who are suffering from stress. This may include redeployment or further training. The Council also encourages all staff who feel they are experiencing stress to make use of existing policies and procedures in respect of workplace issues of concern, and to benefit from the support mechanisms such as access to the Counselling Services which are already in place.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

## **2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The aims and objectives of this policy are:

- To reduce the problems relating to stress at work through stress risk assessment;
- To encourage managers to take an early intervention approach to managing stress through return to work interviews and monitoring notifications on self certificates and GP medical certificates;
- To ensure managers and staff identify and seek to reduce the potential for stress in the workplace through appropriate training;
- To encourage staff to seek support at an early stage and work with managers to resolve problems;
- To provide information on the causes, effects and ways of reducing stress (see appendices 1-3)

## **3. RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **3.1 Managers**

- As part of their ongoing managerial training, undertake training in managing stress, including how to conduct stress risk assessments in conjunction with the HSE's Stress Management Standards;
- Listen to staff and attempt to address any concerns raised by them, particularly in one to one situations i.e. PDRS, return to work interviews etc;
- Conduct and implement risk assessments (which may include groups or individuals) within their area of responsibility;
- Ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes;
- Ensure staff are sufficiently trained to discharge their duties;
- Investigate all instances of work-related stress, and where necessary, liaise with Human Resources and Equalities over such issues;
- Ensure that staff have access to the Council's Stress Information Guide and the Corporate Policy on Managing Stress.

### **3.2 Employees**

- Have a legal duty to inform their line manager, Trade Union Safety Representative or a member of the Corporate Occupational Health and Safety Section of any concerns/issues relating to stress;
- Inform their line manager, confidentially, of concerns that other members of staff are experiencing the effects of stress;
- Co-operate with managers, Personnel Officers & Corporate Occupational Health & Safety staff with regards to recommendations relating to stress;
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended;
- Recognise and take steps themselves to minimise (where possible) stressors by reading the Council's Stress Information Guide.

If an employee is concerned that a line manager may be the cause of stress, he/she should approach a more senior manager, Trade Union Representative or Personnel Officer as determined by the employee and in full confidence, for support in relation to his/her concerns.

### **3.3 Corporate Occupational Health & Safety Section**

- Promote the health and wellbeing of employees through regular health promotion, health fairs, links with external organisations etc;
- Support managers in conducting their stress risk assessments in accordance with training, and offer advice regarding implementation of remedial actions, taking into account any medical advice provided;
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their manager on a planned return to work;
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of this policy and measures to reduce stress;
- Inform senior management and the Health & Safety Committee of any significant changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

### **3.4 Human Resources Officers**

- Give guidance to managers on the Corporate Policy on Managing Stress;
- Assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.

### **3.5 Trade Union Safety Representatives**

- Recognised Safety Representatives should be consulted on major changes to work practices or work design where potential stress issues could prove problematic, either via individual managers who are making changes in their sections/divisions, or via Health and Safety Committees on Council-wide issues.

### **3.6 Role of the Corporate Occupational Health and Safety Committee**

- The Corporate Occupational Health & Safety Committee will perform a pivotal role in monitoring and the implementation of this policy.

## **4. THE LEGAL POSITION**

There is no legislation which specifically refers to stress. However, there is legislation which is applicable to stress in the workplace:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all employees. Health means mental as well as physical health;
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers to assess the risks to health of employees and to take appropriate preventative or protective measures to remove or reduce the risks. Risk assessments must take into account risks of stress in the workplace;
- Employers have a Duty of Care not to act negligently in relation to an employee's physical and mental health. When there is a foreseeable risk of mental or physical injury to an employee arising from stress at work, the manager must act reasonably and prudently giving positive thought to the safety of employees in the light of what is known about the employee's

state of health. This may include referring to the Councils' **Redeployment** or **Capability Procedures** in the case of redeployment or a reduction in responsibilities issue. The **Management of Attendance** and anti-harassment and bullying policies will also need to be considered;

- Employees have a legal duty to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and other persons who may be affected by their acts or omissions, to co-operate with their employer to carry out certain duties/requirements and not to intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything provided in the interests of health, safety or welfare.

## 5. **KEY REMINDERS FOR MANAGERS**

- Undertake training in managing stress & conducting stress risk assessments;
- Provide staff with the Council's Stress Information Guide;
- Listen to staff and take action where possible;
- Conduct risk assessments;
- Implement control measures;
- Record your findings;
- Monitor situations;
- Review risk assessments.

## 6. **MONITORING**

A short questionnaire will be sent to all staff on an annual basis in order to highlight any emerging stressors. Stress management interventions and this policy will also be monitored via health and safety audits, sickness absence records, exit interviews etc.

## 7. **REVIEW**

This Policy will be reviewed every four years.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **CAUSES OF STRESS**

There is no simple way of predicting what will cause harmful levels of stress. Different people respond to different types and levels of pressure in different ways. In general, harmful levels of stress are most likely to occur where:

- People are under excessive or prolonged pressure;
- People feel unable to exert any control or influence over the demands placed on them;
- People are confused by conflicting demands made on them at the same time.

In the workplace stress may be caused by:

- Organisation:
  - Overall culture and climate
  - Overall management style
  - Poor communications
  - Unclear work objectives/tasks
  - Lack of training
  - Poor leadership from managers
  - Poor career prospects
  - Uncertainty caused by change
  - Poor staff involvement
  - Lack of motivation
  - Failure to meet motivational aspirations
  - Lack of recognition
- Work demands:
  - Workloads (too much or too little)
  - Difficult work tasks
  - Pressure to meet deadlines
  - Poor job satisfaction
- Relationships:
  - Emotional demands
  - Prolonged conflict between individuals
  - Sexual or racial harassment
  - Bullying
  - Harassment
  - Staff treated with contempt or indifference
  - Perceived favouritism
  - Lack of communication
  - Inequitable distribution of work
- Physical conditions:
  - Excessive noise, heat, humidity or vibration
  - Poor ventilation
  - Poor lighting
  - Poor equipment
  - Poor workstation design
  - Poorly maintained buildings

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **EFFECTS OF STRESS**

Individuals need a certain amount of pressure to remain alert and healthy but when the pressures exceed a person's coping capacity, this can become harmful. Different people react differently to the same level of pressure and it is important that it is recognised that people are individuals and what causes stress to one person may not to another. The experience of stress can involve both physical effects and behavioural effects. They might include any of the following:

- Physical Effects:           Increased heart rate  
                                  Gastrointestinal conditions  
                                  Skin conditions  
                                  Headaches  
                                  Lowering of resistance to infection  
                                  Dizziness  
                                  Blurred vision  
                                  High blood pressure
  
- Behavioural Effects:    Increased anxiety and irritability  
                                  Impaired sleeping and concentration  
                                  Verbal or physical aggression  
                                  Competitiveness and impatience  
                                  Reduced attention span  
                                  Impaired memory  
                                  Apathy  
                                  Withdrawal

Individuals may also show a tendency to consume more alcohol, smoke more and use excesses of caffeine, or other stimulatory drugs such as amphetamines.

The physical and behavioural effects of stress are usually short lived and cause no lasting harm. When the pressures recede, there is a quick return to normal. Intense, prolonged or cumulative exposure to pressures can lead to individual and organisational effects as detailed below.

Effects of prolonged stress on the individual may include any of the following:

- Reduced morale/motivation/commitment to work;
- Physical and/or mental ill-health e.g. heart disease, ulcers, depression or migraines;
- Poor judgement;
- Poor relationships with clients;
- Lack of confidence;
- Tension and conflict with colleagues;
- Reduced work performance;
- Increase in sickness absence, in particular frequent short periods of absence.

Organisational effects of stress may include:

- Increased absenteeism and decreased productivity;
- Increased overtime levels compensating for absent colleagues;
- Reduced quality and customer care;
- Increased industrial relations or disciplinary problems;
- High staff turnover;
- Increase in early retirements due to ill-health;
- Further stress on colleagues in work.



## **APPENDIX 3**

### **REDUCING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS**

#### **Staff Support**

A confidential, independent counselling service is available to any member of staff. Access to this counselling service is normally by an individual self-referring via the telephone hotline **(029 20468565)**. Counselling enables a person to have a chance to talk about any issue, home or work-related, without being interrupted or criticised, to a trained counsellor who will try to help without making decisions or being judgemental. Support is also available from the Corporate Occupational Health & Safety Section, the employee's line manager and Personnel Officers.

#### **Training**

Training has a major part to play in the management of stress. A stress management training programme is available for managers and supervisors. Details of this course are available on the Council's Intranet site and from the Corporate Training Section.

#### **Risk Assessment**

Managers will receive training on how to undertake risk assessments on individuals and groups of staff. Managers will, where possible, involve relevant staff in this process and implement effective control measures. Managers may request assistance from the Corporate Occupational Health and Safety Section.

The following are some of the ways in which the likelihood of stress can be minimised and a positive culture with regard to stress can be established wherever possible and practicable within the scope of the relevant role and within available resources:

#### **General Management**

- Employees should be given specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-related objectives by their managers (as part of the PDRS process);
- Good two-way communication;
- Consultation with employees and Trade Unions in accordance with existing Council procedures, particularly during periods of change;
- Good management support and appropriate training and development of staff including those with high levels of responsibility for the welfare and well-being of people;
- Opportunities for staff to contribute ideas (including, where possible within the scope of their role, the planning and organisation of their own jobs);
- Ensuring staff 'appraisal' is used to identify and to address problems of stress e.g. examining workload, ensuring tasks can be done, looking for any imbalance between demands, skills and resources.

## **Organisation of Work**

- Ensuring that objectives and other people's expectations are clear;
- Ensuring that, where possible, individuals are involved in the setting of objectives;
- Providing training and information, where required, for staff to perform at least to satisfactory levels;
- Trying to ensure individuals have work tasks which contain a variety of pace, method and skill;
- Trying to ensure work tasks provide feedback on performance;
- Being flexible enough to allow individuals a degree of control in their own jobs;
- Ensuring a systematic approach to planning and time management;
- Addressing peaks and troughs in workload where possible.

## **Relationships at Work**

- Encouraging and promoting mutual trust and respect between employees and Councillors where each acknowledges the other's roles, rights and responsibilities;
- Requiring acceptable standards of behaviour;
- Training, where necessary, in interpersonal skills;
- Ensuring Council's requirements with regard to dealing with interpersonal conflict, bullying, racial and sexual harassment are followed and complaints are appropriately and properly investigated.

## **The Job**

- Ensuring tasks are well defined and responsibilities clear;
- Providing as much variety as possible;
- Ensuring proper use of skills;
- Providing appropriate training for all staff and particularly those dealing constantly with the public or client groups;
- Setting targets that are challenging but achievable;
- Matching the job and the person through appropriate recruitment and selection procedures and training.

## **The Work Environment**

A work environment that is uncomfortable, unsafe or unhealthy can cause stress or add to the stress caused by other factors. To help minimise such problems, ensure:

- High standards of health and safety are achieved;
- The workplace layout is suitable for the type of work;
- There is a good working environment including good lighting, ventilation, enough space, thermal comfort and noise is controlled;
- New work equipment is introduced with staff consultation, where necessary, and that it is suitable for the job, user and environment.