West Dunbartonshire Council

Stress Management Policy

Date of implementation

Human Resources Employment Policies

POSITIVE ABOUT DISABLED PEOPLE

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Quick Reference - Associated Documents and Version Control

Title	Stress Management Policy
Version	1.0
Lead Officer	Melissa Connor - HR Adviser, Policy and Employee Relations
Committee approval date:	
Date reported to JCF:	
Date reported to CMT:	
Consultation with trades unions:	
Supersedes Version	Stress In the Workplace
Driver for change	The Stress Management Policy continues to address the risks of occupational stress as outlined in the Stress in the Workplace 2003 policy but has been developed to ensure the Council continue to follow best practice as determined by the Health and Safety Executive. Following an external inspection by HM Inspector of Health and Safety (Occupational Health) in 2007, it was concluded that the current policy did not provide the necessary framework to underpin the effective management of stress within the Council and a full review of the existing policy was carried out by the Stress Steering group.
Review Date	

CONTENTS

Stress Management Policy:

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 West Dunbartonshire Council (The Council) is committed to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees. The Council recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

1.2 The Council also recognises that employees can be affected by stress outside of the working environment and where possible will offer support, through appropriate resources, to employees to address this.

1.3 The Stress Management Policy will provide a framework to enable managers, employees and trade union representatives to proactively and reactively manage the issues of stress and minimise the impact of stress-related issues within the Council.

2. DEFINITION

2.1 The Council has adopted the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definition of stress, which is,

'*The adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them. There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can create a 'buzz' and be a motivating factor and stress which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive.'*

3. SCOPE

3.1 This policy applies to all employees within West Dunbartonshire Council including, Local Government Employees, Craft Workers, Teaching Staff and Chief Officers.

3.2 The Council will ensure that good equal opportunities practice underpins the operation of this policy and the policy will apply to all employees irrespective of age; disability; sex; gender re-assignment; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership; and pregnancy and maternity.

4. KEY PRINCIPLES

4.1 PRINCIPLES

The aim of this Policy is to establish an effective and consistent approach to the prevention of work-related stress throughout the Council and to

provide supporting services where cases of stress are identified. This will be achieved through the following:

- Ensuring an increase in the general awareness of stress, its causes, and methods of prevention and control through health promotion and training.
- Establishing arrangements for identifying and minimising causes of stress in the workplace through the Stress Risk Assessment Framework.
- Providing support for all employees in managing personal stress levels through health promotion and training.
- Provision of confidential counselling for employees affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
- Sensitive and planned management of return to work, following sickness absence.
- Promotion of joint working between management, individuals and the recognised trades unions, with the aim of eliminating sources of stress.

4.2   Support Resources

The Council provides access to a range of internal support resources for both managers and employees who are dealing with stress.

- Risk Management – assists the Council in meeting its statutory obligations. They can provide advice on how risk assessments should be organised and advise on appropriate training.
- Occupational Health – assists the Council to keep workers healthy and at work by providing medical support and guidance.
- Mediation Service – can be used to resolve disputes between individuals where the dispute is causing stress.

In addition, there are a number of external agencies that can provide support to those individuals suffering from stress.

Details of further support resources can be found at the HR & OD Knowledge Portal on the Intranet.

5.   LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

5.1   Under the Heath and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 employers have a general duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practical, the health and safety and welfare of their employees at work. This includes taking steps to make sure they do not suffer stress-related illness as a result of their work.

5.2 This policy takes into consideration the legal requirements of UK Employment and Health and Safety Law, the relevant provisions of EU Law such as:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

6. APPLICATION OF POLICY AND PROCEDURES:

6.1 To support the application of this policy separate procedures have been developed to support the Stress Risk Assessment Framework.

6.2 Stress Risk Assessment Framework

A stress risk assessment framework will be used to control and manage risks and hazards associated with stress. Risk assessments will be undertaken at 3 levels:

- **General Stress Risk Assessment** – This risk assessment focuses on the entire workforce and is developed as an Organisational Action Plan. Actions identified allow the Council to proactively manage stress at an organisational level.

- **Generic Stress Risk Assessments** – This risk assessment focuses on identifying high risk groups of employees at the departmental level by utilising available management information.

- **Individual Stress Risk Assessment** – This risk assessment focuses on an individual employee identified to be experiencing stress. This can be direct notification from the employee or identified by management. As pressure affects everyone differently tailored control measures may need to be put in place.

Guidance on the Stress Risk Assessment Framework and how to undertake a Stress Risk Assessment can be found in the Stress Management Procedures.

6.3 This policy will work alongside other relevant Council policies as appropriate.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 Council

- Ensuring, so far as is reasonably practical, the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees, as an exemplar employer, through a robust approach to managing stress.
- Providing training for all managers and supervisory employees in recognising, managing and avoiding workplace stress.
- Creating an environment where employees of all levels are able to discuss any personal or work-related issues affecting them.

7.2 Managers/Supervisors

- Knowledge and understanding of the Stress Management Policy and Procedures and utilising when appropriate.
- Conducting Individual and Generic Stress Risk Assessments and implementing recommendations.
- Monitoring and reviewing Stress Risk Assessments to ensure that control measures are suitable and sufficient.
- Ensuring employees are adequately trained to carry out their duties.
- Ensuring employees are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.
- Monitoring workloads to ensure that employees are not overloaded.
- Monitoring hours and overtime to ensure that employees are not overworking and monitor holidays to ensure that employees are taking their full entitlement.
- Ensuring that bullying and harassment is not tolerated.
- Maintaining good communication with employees, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Referring employees to support resources as appropriate.
- Supporting any employees experiencing stress.
- Attending training as required.

7.3 Employees

- Raising issues of concern with their line managers.
- Participating in the Stress Risk Assessment process, where appropriate.
- Seeking support, advice and guidance on how to address stress.
- Accepting support offered to them by the Council to assist in the management of stress.
- Attending training as required.

7.4 Human Resources

- Providing guidance and support to managers and employees on the Stress Management Policy and encouraging referrals/approaches to support resources.
- Conducting General Stress Risk Assessments and developing the Organisational Action Plan.
- Monitoring and reviewing the General Stress Risk Assessment to ensure that control measures are suitable and sufficient.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress through recording and reporting.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the Stress Management Policy and Procedures.

7.5 Trades Unions

- Supporting members through the Stress Management Policy and Procedures
- Providing guidance and support to employees on the Stress Management Policy
- Advising management of any changes to work practices or work design that could contribute to stress
- Be available to provide support to members on the issue of stress and provide support to members by encouraging them to work with management to identify actions to eliminate and reduce stress.

8. REVIEW AND MONITORING

8.1 Human Resources will report the outcomes of this policy to the Corporate Health and Safety Committee every 6 months.

8.2 The policy and procedure will be reviewed 1 year after the implementation and every second year there-after.

8.3 The policy will be updated to incorporate any relevant change to legislation or best practice in partnership with the Trade Unions.

PROCEDURES FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

1.   INTRODUCTION:

1.1   This procedure underpins the Council's Stress Management Policy and details the measures that managers and employees of the Council need to take in order to prevent or reduce the causes of stress within the workplace. It also details actions to be taken by managers when employees report symptoms of stress.
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2.   PROCEDURE FRAMEWORK:

2.1   HSE Stress Management Standards

The HSE have set best practice through the Management Standards and the Council, through the Stress Management Policy and procedures, endeavour to meet its obligation to adhere to the standards. The stress risk assessment framework will enable the Council to identify actions, based on each of these areas, which will both pro-actively assist employees to maintain health at work and support employees in the event that difficulties begin to be experienced.

The Management Standards cover 6 key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and wellbeing, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. The 6 Management Standards cover the primary work elements and characteristics that contribute to stress at work. These are:

- Role
- Demands
- Control
- Relationships
- Support
- Change

Further guidance on the Management Standards can be found within the Stress Risk Assessment Framework available at Appendix 1.

3.2   Stress Risk Assessment Framework

Legislation and Council Policy (see Risk Assessment Policy) requires all managers to undertake assessments of the risks arising from work hazards. This process forms the basis of a pro-active and preventative approach to health risk management and must consider the risks to psychological as well as to physical harm.

Assessments of workplace stress should aim to identify:

- Factors at work with the potential to cause stress
- Whether these factors are currently causing stress
- Existing preventative or precautionary measures
- Action required to eliminate or reduce the risk

The principles of risk assessment for work related stress do not differ from other forms of risk assessment. There is, however, a need to take account of an individual's perceptions of stress as well as objectively assessing work conditions (e.g. excessive working hours), which could cause stress.

3.2.1 General Stress Risk Assessment

The General Stress Risk Assessment will be carried out by Human Resources and Organisational Development through a Stress Audit. The analysis of this audit will inform the development of the Council wide Action Plan which will identify potential hazards under the six Management Standards and steps the Council will take to eliminate or reduce these.

3.2.2 Generic Stress Risk Assessment

Generic Stress Risk Assessments will be undertaken by managers where a group or groups of employees are identified as being at a higher risk of the adverse affects of stress. Hazards will be identified through an audit of the management information available to managers such as:

- Sickness absence statistics
- Employee turnover and Exit Interview feedback
- Performance and Developing Planning (PDP) feedback
- Overtime levels
- Team Meeting feedback
- Feedback from employees
- Stress Audit feedback
- Dignity at Work statistics
- Grievance statistics
- Implementation of Organisational Change

Focus groups of employees will work alongside managers to further identify hazards and determine realistic control measures to either eliminate or reduce the risk of stress.

Further guidance on undertaking a Generic Stress Risk Assessment and the Generic Stress Risk Assessment form is available within the Stress Risk Assessment Framework available at Appendix 1.

3.2.3 Individual Stress Risk Assessment

It is important for managers to recognise when stress may be developing in others, as often the early warning signals of stress can be missed or misinterpreted. Recognising individuals who are experiencing stress can ensure steps are taken to reduce stress at an early stage. This will significantly help to reduce the long-term impact that stress can have on health. If a manager recognises that an employee is displaying symptoms of stress, the manager should request that the employee completes an Individual Stress Risk Assessment. If an employee has a sickness absence in which stress is identified as a contributing factor the Individual Stress Risk Assessment should be sent to the employee, by the line manager, to enable a risk assessment to be carried out prior to the employee returning to work.

Where an employee identifies, as part of an Individual Stress Risk Assessment, that the stressor contributing to the sickness absence is as a result of a work relationship breakdown, the line manager may be able offer the employee the option of temporary re-deployment to another role or location, where a post is available, until the issue has been addressed. This measure should only be taken in full agreement with the employee to support their return to work.

Employees are encouraged to identify if they are experiencing stress at an early stage. Individuals experiencing symptoms of stress are required to complete an Individual Stress Risk Assessment and submit this to their line manager, or other appropriate manager. The Individual Stress Risk Assessment allows the employee to identify the areas which are causing them stress and to suggest ways to either eliminate or reduce the stressor. Where the risk assessment identifies an on-going concern an immediate referral must be made to Occupational Health together with the completed risk assessment documents.

Further guidance on undertaking an Individual Stress Risk Assessment and the Individual Stress Risk Assessment form is available within the Stress Risk Assessment Framework available at Appendix 1.

3.3 Non-work Related Stress

Employees bring non-work related stress into the workplace. Although the Council is not legally responsible for stress that originates out of the workplace there are a number of supports that can be put in place to

enable employees to address this. It can be difficult to identify what stress is caused by issues out of the workplace and what is caused by work itself. The Stress Risk Assessment Framework can help to tease this out.

4. MEDIATION

4.1 Where workplace stress is associated with conflict or relationship issues, employees will be given the option to use mediation as a process to resolve the issues identified.

4.2 Mediation is where an impartial third party, the mediator, works with people who have a disagreement to help them find their own solution and reach an agreement that will sort out their problem and improve the situation. Any agreement comes from those in dispute, not from the mediator. The mediator won't take sides or judge who is right or wrong. The mediator is in charge of the mediation process but not the outcome. Mediation is:

- informal – although there is a structure to be followed.
- Flexible and quick.
- voluntary – you only take part if you want to.
- morally binding but has no legal status – It is generally agreed that discussions and agreements reached through mediation will not be used in any future discussions or actions.
- confidential – nothing you tell the mediators will be passed on to anyone else unless you want it to be.
- (generally) unrepresented. You can choose to bring a representative however this must be discussed with the mediators as all those involved must know who will be attending.

4.3 Mediation seeks to provide an informal, and speedy solution to workplace conflict, and it can be used at any point in the conflict cycle, although it's at its most effective at the early stages. What the process offers is a safe and confidential space for participants to find their own answers. It does this in a number of ways, by:

- exploring the issues, feelings and concerns of all participants and rebuilding relationships using joint problem-solving allowing those involved to understand and empathise with the feelings of those they are in conflict with.
- giving participants insights into their own behaviour and that of others and opening up opportunities for change helping participants develop the skills to resolve workplace difficulties for themselves in future.

- encouraging communication and helping the people involved to find a solution that both sides feel is fair and offers a solution that favours them.
- using energy generated by conflict in a positive way to move things on.

4.4 Anything said during the mediation process is confidential to the parties. Participants may choose to reveal some or all of what has occurred during the mediation to colleagues, or their managers, but only if all parties agree. Confidentiality can be breached by the mediators if, for example, a potentially unlawful act has been committed or there is a serious risk to health and safety.

Further information on Mediation can be found at the HR & OD Knowledge Portal on the Intranet.