



Managing Stress At Work Policy

Stress at Work

Introduction

In common with all employers, East Dunbartonshire Council has responsibilities under statutory and common law, to safeguard the well-being of its employees.

It is recognised that occupational stress poses a risk to the success of our business and to employees' health and well-being. It is important to meet this challenge by dealing proactively and effectively with excessive and long-term causes of stress, as well as short term causes, such as critical incidents. It is well recognised that stress reduces employee well-being, and that excessive or sustained work pressure can lead to stress and illness.

East Dunbartonshire Council, as a health-promoting organisation, is committed to exercising its Duty of Care to protect the health, safety and well-being of its employees and provide them with a healthy, safe working environment. It recognises that stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of recognising and reducing workplace stressors and supporting affected employees.

The Council seeks to promote a culture and environment where issues relating to stress are managed effectively; taking appropriate action to eliminate or reduce stress where possible and managing stress positively in circumstances where opportunities to reduce or eliminate stress are limited.

The principles of the policy

The policy takes account of current legal guidance on dealing with work-related stress and reflects the Council's acceptance of its legal, ethical and economic responsibilities to address workplace stress. It is complemented by the Maximising Attendance Policy.

The Council is committed to the introduction and development of procedures, training and support to help managers and employees understand and recognise the nature and causes of stress and take appropriate measures to manage stress effectively.

A partnership approach across the organisation is key to the effectiveness of this policy.

What is stress?

There is sometimes confusion between the terms pressure and stress. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advise that some pressure can be a good thing while the reverse can have the opposite effect. It is often the tasks and challenges at work that provide the structure for the working day, keep individuals motivated and are key to a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. It is excessive pressure and the stress arising from this which is harmful.

The HSE define stress as “the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them”. It arises when they worry that they cannot cope.

Causes, signs and consequences of stress

Stress can result when demands are too great or expectations are not met. Stress may also be present in the lives of employees outside of work. The Council recognises that personal stress may render an employee more vulnerable to workplace pressure or have a temporary effect on work performance. A combination of personal and workplace stress may produce a greater threat to an employee’s health, and, as such, should also warrant attention and support.

Stress which has origins in circumstances unrelated to work may be caused by:

- Relationship problems
- Financial difficulties
- Illness of a family member
- Bereavement
- Addiction problems
- Domestic abuse

Work-related stress may be caused by:

- Poor communication
- Inappropriate management style
- Lack of training, support or development opportunities
- High workload, unsocial hours
- Uncomfortable or unsafe working environment
- Lack of feedback on performance and feeling undervalued
- Organisational change and lack of job security
- Interpersonal conflict
- Spikes in work levels
- Unrealistic work targets
- Poor planning of work
- Lack of ownership
- Inappropriate culture

Trauma related stress may result from:

- Personally experiencing or witnessing a catastrophic or threatening event, especially involving death or serious injury to self or others, for example, serious vehicle accident, serious assault, natural or man-made disasters and violent crime.
- Learning about such an event affecting a family member or close associate
- Prolonged or repeated exposure over time to a threatening or dangerous situation(s), especially those involving human suffering, distress or confrontation

Signs

It is recognised that stress affects different people in different ways and it may not always result in an employee's absence from work

There are certain signals however which may indicate stress. These include such things as:

- Headaches, indigestion, aching muscles
- Disturbed sleep and fatigue
- Change in appetite, increase in alcohol consumption, smoking or drug taking
- Loss of concentration, shortened temper, loss of self esteem, feelings of anxiety

Individuals also react in different ways following exposure to traumatic events and although the response is normal, the symptoms may be unpleasant and frightening for those affected. Trauma related stress is frequently characterised by:

- Mentally and emotionally re-experiencing the traumatic event(s) through flashbacks and nightmares
- Avoiding situations or things which are reminders of the event(s)
- Hyper-vigilance, such as an exaggerated startle response and being on constant alert
- Feeling mentally and emotionally numb or detached

Symptoms persisting for more than a month after a traumatic event, are grounds for concern and referral for support.

Consequences

Clearly there are personal consequences for the individual suffering from stress. At an organisational level the consequences of stress can result in a cycle of poor performance, low morale, decreasing productivity, increased sickness-absence rates, high staff turnover and increased retraining costs.

In addition to the costs related to the above, there is the risk of legal action with associated poor publicity and substantial settlements.

The causes, signs and consequences listed above are not exhaustive.

Working in Partnership

For this policy to have real effect a partnership approach will be required across the organisation and beyond to link internal and external partners including employees and their managers, elected members, trades unions, professional associations, Health and Safety Executive and the Health Board.

There are humane, economic and legal reasons for the Council to adopt a proactive approach to dealing with stress. In short, under the terms of this policy, managers have a duty of care for those within their work group and employees and managers have a responsibility to work together to manage stress.

By working together a healthier working environment will be created.

Employees

The role of employees will be to:

- raise issues of concern with manager/supervisor or Safety Rep
- consider opportunities for accessing employee counselling services including the telephone out of hours service or other health support initiatives when recommended.

It is important that an employee lets their manager know that they are experiencing symptoms of stress. Only then is the manager in a position to be able to assess what reasonable steps may be taken in the circumstances. If this is not an appropriate first step then the employee should talk to Human Resource Services or their trade union. Additionally, teachers can contact the Teachers' Welfare Officer.

There will be instances where employees' ideas and assistance may help managers improve situations. There will be others that may be less easy to resolve or which may be outwith the control of the Council. It is important however to establish dialogue to discuss the situation and listen to views.

Managers

The role of managers will be to:

- ensure risk assessments are carried out within the workplace and recommended control measures are developed and implemented
- ensure good communication with employees particularly when there are organisational changes
- ensure employees are fully trained to carry out their jobs
- monitor workloads to ensure people are not overloaded
- monitor hours, overtime and holidays to ensure that employees take sufficient breaks and are not overworking
- follow the guidelines within the Maximising Attendance Policy for managing stress related absence
- where required, seek assistance from Human Resources Services or other appropriate agencies
- Head Teachers can seek advice from the Teachers' Welfare Officer.

Human Resource Services

Human Resource Services will promote the principles of this policy when developing corporate policies and procedures and in providing management development and training.

Human Resource Services including Health & Safety will:

- give advice, guidance and training to managers on the stress policy
- give advice and training on implementing risk assessments
- advise managers and individuals on training requirements
- provide support to managers and individuals in a changing environment
- arrange referrals to occupational health, workplace counsellors, addiction services and other external agencies as appropriate
- advise on support for individuals returning to work
- arrange to contact Access to Work in relation to equipment, aids and disability issues
- provide consultancy services to Departments/ Services to conduct stress audits

- encourage ownership of the issue by managers and employees.

Human Resource Services will encourage and support activities which promote health and a healthy lifestyle and will develop, with departments and other partners, a wide-ranging occupational health service.

Chief Executive and Directors

The Chief Executive and Directors will support, promote and implement the principles of this policy when developing departmental practice and guidance and will support appropriate training within departments.

The Chief Executive and Directors will brief members of committees on the likely effect of committee decisions on pressures of work and employee morale. The existing standard section in committee reports on human resource implications should be used for this purpose.

Policy and Resources Sub Committee

Policy and Resources Sub Committee will take an overview of the operation and effect of this policy across the organisation.

Information will be made available to the Policy and Resources Committee, on an annual basis, via a statistical return which will consider the effectiveness of measures to deal with work-related stress at corporate and departmental levels including training, support and the analysis of sickness absence statistics.

Trades Unions

From time to time this policy will be reviewed with the trades unions.

An approach to deal with stress at work.

The following approach has been identified to allow managers and stakeholders to reduce risks and manage stress within the organisation.

1. Raising awareness, gaining and demonstrating commitment and working in partnership

Communication - raise awareness of the Council's policy and procedures on handling stress via dialogue, guidance leaflets and training for managers and employees, including information at employee induction.

Involvement - involve employees via partnership forums which already exist - unions, ethnic minorities forum, disability forum, women's forum and any other appropriate channels of communication.

Commitment - commitment from senior management by recognising that work -place stress is an issue which has humanitarian, economic and legal implications, - provide facilities, resources and initiatives which promote positive mental and physical health.

2. Benchmarking: assess the current situation

Assess information such as sickness absence, turnover of staff and general morale. Establish a set of benchmarks against which to conduct a review. This should be done at Service level and the information collated by Human Resource Services for the organisation as a whole e.g. employee surveys, stress audits.

3. Identifying the causes and assessing the risks

Provide managers with training and support to allow them to be able to identify situations where employees may be exposed to situations which could cause stress and assess risks.

4. Supporting the Individual

Provide a climate where individuals feel able to discuss concerns with their manager or other relevant individual and have access to appropriate and confidential support services.

5. Avoiding and reducing any risks identified

Provide training and guidance for managers on how hazards may be avoided or risks reduced and how to involve employees in solutions.

6. Reviewing the situation

At Service level managers should consult employees as to whether solutions are working.

On an annual basis Human Resource Services will carry out an audit across the organisation using agreed indicators e.g. sickness absence, turnover of staff and morale. Revisit the benchmark at Service and organisational level.

Human Resources Services Action Plan

To support the approach to be taken by managers which is set out above, Human Resources Services will put in place the following action plan :

1. A training programme to develop managers' skills to identify the signs and causes of stress and take appropriate action.
2. An in-house consultancy service based on Work Positive; a process developed by the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS) to identify and reduce the potential causes of stress within a work situation.
3. A programme of small workshops on coping with stress, delivered in-house.
4. Referrals, where appropriate may be made via Human Resource Services to an employee counsellor or occupational health adviser. Employees may contact the Employee Counselling Service telephone help line direct.
5. The effective operation of the Maximising Attendance Policy will play a key role in assisting managers identify and deal with stress related issues. All managers will be made aware of the provisions of this policy.
6. A system of monitoring, reporting, reviewing and developing of organisational action plans will be put in place. Where this process identifies a problem or difficulty, measures will be put in place to deal with the issue and review the effectiveness of the action.

Policies and procedures which relate to the Stress Policy are listed below:

Addiction Related Policy	Training and Development Policy
Equal Opportunities in Employment	Violence in the Workplace
Job Sharing Scheme	Disciplinary Procedure
Maternity Scheme	Grievance Procedure
Paternity Provisions	Code of Conduct for employees
Smoking in the Workplace	Flexitime Scheme
Maximising Attendance	Trauma Policy
Employee Complaints Procedure	Domestic Abuse Policy

Managing Stress Guidance for Managers

Communications

- ★ Set up systems which encourage two-way communication with employees.
- ★ Check that communications with employees have been received and understood.
- ★ Listen to, and give appropriate consideration to, comments from employees and trade unions.

Managing Health and Safety risks

To successfully manage health and safety in the workplace and comply with the Health and Safety at Work, etc., Act and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999, management must undertake the following:

1. Carry out risk assessment to identify and evaluate risk(s) associated with activities
2. Where stress is identified as being a risk, a specific assessment must be undertaken to identify and evaluate the source, i.e. home or workplace, and the extent of the issue
3. To ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that the risk(s) from stress is controlled, management must prioritise that risk into a high, medium or low category to develop and implement realistic risk control measures.

These risk control measures may include the following:

- ★ Reduced or shared workload
 - ★ Realistic prioritisation and distribution of workload
 - ★ Monitoring of workload
 - ★ Encouragement of communication with manager/ supervisor
 - ★ Referral to counselling service (internal/ external)
 - ★ Raising awareness of employees to recognise symptoms of stress.
4. Review risk assessments on an annual basis or where a change in procedure or process occurs or where a failure has occurs
 5. Develop safe systems of work to effectively control the risk(s) of stress in the workplace.

Job design and managing workloads

- ★ Analyse jobs to make sure employees have a reasonable degree of variety and control
- ★ Ensure opportunities to discuss performance and development issues through the Performance Management and Development Planning (PMDP) Process are utilised
- ★ Avoid placing unreasonable demands on employees, by prioritising workloads and delegating appropriately.
- ★ Respect others' time and try to negotiate an efficient and effective solution to workload problems.
- ★ Make sure that employees take annual leave and work breaks in order to avoid becoming tired.
- ★ Human Resources Services can provide guidance on the scope and nature of job activities

Recruitment

- ★ Provide enough information for candidates on working conditions, including special features of the job such as tight deadlines or dealing with difficult or aggressive customers.
- ★ Ensure that the job description and person specification are accurate. Use them to choose employees who have the ability to meet any special requirements of the job.
- ★ Recognise and manage stress related to redeployment situations

Induction

- ★ Provide enough information to new recruits, including details of emergency procedures and staff facilities, and put forward a colleague as a reference point.
- ★ Make time available to meet new recruits promptly when they start and at regular intervals during their initial few months.

Training and Development

- ★ Make sure that employees have suitable training and development to carry out their duties and responsibilities.
- ★ Provide training in dealing with possible health and safety dangers of the job.
- ★ Encourage employees to develop stress management techniques.

Supervision

- ★ Agree clear aims with reasonable time scales, taking care to explain how duties and responsibilities fit into your employees wider work.
- ★ Make sure you regularly supervise employees so you can respond promptly to any problems.
- ★ Provide positive feedback and recognition of good performance when appropriate.
- ★ Discuss poor performance promptly, honestly and constructively to agree appropriate action.

Performance Management and Development Planning

- ★ Carry out regular Performance and Development review meetings according to the Council's Performance Management and Development Planning Process.

Managing Incidents

- ★ Provide training for employees who are likely to witness or deal with critical incidents.
- ★ Arrange to take appropriate action in line with the Council's Trauma Management Policy.
- ★ Ensure appropriate referrals of employees where necessary

Employee counselling service

- ★ Make sure that employees know about the counselling service.
- ★ Be aware of your own limitations in counselling employees with problems.
- ★ Refer employees for professional counselling to a Human Resources Adviser or Teachers' Welfare Officer.

Occupational health screening monitoring and advice

- ★ Get advice on any health issues at work from Human Resource Services.
- ★ Refer employees with health problems which affect their work to a Human Resources Adviser.
- ★ While it may be advisable that an employee receives professional counselling or support, attendance is on a voluntary basis. However, failure to take up such opportunities could have implications in terms of limiting how you as the manager and the Council as the employer can further the employee.
- ★ Make sure that any employees you refer realise the reasons for their referral and the nature of the service.
- ★ Make sure that you tell the Human Resources Adviser about any special physical and psychological demands of the job which should be considered and on the health problems of employee referred. You should include how these affect the employee's ability to carry out his or her duties and responsibilities

Maximising Attendance Policy

- ★ Where an employee's absence is stress-related the guidelines within the Maximising Attendance Policy should be followed.