

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

MANAGING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

East Ayrshire Council values the contribution made by employees in delivering Council services and recognises that stress is an everyday part of working life, and as a responsible employer needs to ensure that the health of employees is not adversely affected by their work or working environment. Identifying and addressing stress within the employment context supports the “good employer” principle and aids service delivery and the recognition and management of stress are integral to the Council’s responsibilities to it’s employees.

In addition, the Council recognises that personal circumstances external to work may be a significant factor causing stress for employees and shall endeavour to provide support in such circumstances.

In recognising that stress is a feature of everyday life the Council encourages employees who believe they may be experiencing negative stress to seek help and support from the Council’s welfare services.

This document sets out the way in which the Council will manage stress at work. It also provides guidance for dealing with stress in general.

1. POLICY STATEMENT

It is the Health and Safety policy of East Ayrshire Council to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that our employees come to no harm while at work.

In line with our Health and Safety Policy the Council aims to ensure that risks from potentially harmful stress are controlled and minimised.

To achieve this aim the Council shall:

- Identify potential causes of stress
- Minimise exposure to harmful stress
- Ensure that suitable and sufficient protection is provided for those at risk
- Clearly define line managers responsibilities with regard to stress management
- Provide employees with adequate information on the risks and the control measures, consult with them and encourage open dialogue
- Monitor and regularly review the implementation of this policy to ensure that it is up –to- date and is effective in its stated aims

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 What is stress?

At present there is no definitive legal or medical concept of stress, however the Health and Safety Executive have defined stress as the:

“reaction that people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed upon them, it arises when people feel they cannot cope”.

Essentially, stress is an individual reaction to pressure and what constitutes stress for one individual, may not be stress for another. Some stress, even when high, can be beneficial in providing challenges, motivation and job satisfaction. However, pressures at a level that the individual cannot cope with, even in some cases too little pressure or challenge, may result in stress. **This document is concerned with managing the negative effects of stress in the workplace.**

2.2 What causes stress?

Stress may be caused by factors in an individual's personal life or in their working life. On occasions, stress triggered by factors in one area of an individual's life can make matters worse in the other. Research has identified the main sources of stress as follows:

Outside Work

Death of a partner or family member
 Death of a close friend
 Divorce / separation
 Severe financial worries
 Moving house
 Marriage
 Serious illness
 Caring for relatives

At Work

Poor communications
 Poor working environment
 Poor relationships
 Job Design and workload
 Lack of training and development
 Excessive hours
 Coping with Change

3. IDENTIFYING STRESS

3.1 The Council will use the following methods to identify stress within occupations; workgroups and individuals:

3.1.1. Risk Assessment

Some jobs have occasions when employees are put under extreme pressure. This is an integral part of the job and cannot be avoided (Fire Brigade, nursing, crisis management). The employer is, however, still responsible for ensuring that employees have adequate training and support as well as periods of less excessive pressure. Some people may choose to work under excessive pressure, but the employer does still have some responsibility for their health and safety and may have to insist on healthier ways of working in the same way as that they would insist in machine guards being used.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, the Council is required to undertake an assessment of the health and safety risks in the workplace. Significant risks should, wherever reasonably practicable be eliminated, or where they cannot be eliminated, control measures should be put in place to reduce the risk to acceptable levels.

A risk assessment for stress should include:-

- ◆ An investigation into pressures at work which have the potential to cause high and long lasting levels of stress e.g. dealing with difficult or aggressive customers, facing dangerous emergency situations.
- ◆ An assessment of whether enough is being done to prevent the risk of stress related harm.

3.1.2 Organisational Indicators

There are a number of organisational indicators which managers should regularly review to identify whether stress is a problem within their workgroup e.g.

- ◆ Absence levels and reasons for absence
- ◆ Labour turnover and exit interview analysis
- ◆ Feedback from employee surveys
- ◆ Customer complaints
- ◆ Employee complaints (grievance/personal harassment)
- ◆ Accidents in the workplace
- ◆ Employee relations climate
- ◆ Occupational Health and Employee Counselling referrals

3.1.3 Individual Indicators

The following examples of behaviour may indicate stress in an individual which may or may not be work-related:

- ◆ Poor timekeeping
- ◆ Increased level of absence from work
- ◆ Deterioration in work performance
- ◆ Changes in behaviour such as loss of confidence, loss of humour, irritability
- ◆ Deterioration in self-care
- ◆ Increased use of alcohol, nicotine or caffeine
- ◆ Increased level of personal accidents in the workplace

4. MANAGING STRESS – EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 Directors/Heads of Service

As a responsible employer, East Ayrshire Council is aware of its responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of its employees and recognises that their wellbeing is fundamental to the operation and success of the organisation.

Directors and Heads of Service are responsible, so far as is reasonably practicable for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of all employees within their service. In particular, they have responsibility to:

- ◆ Develop and maintain effective communications within their service
- ◆ Encourage and promote effective management and supervision at all levels within their service
- ◆ Ensure the effective departmental implementation of Council-wide strategies aimed at promoting health and providing support to employees, such as Occupational Health Service; Employee Counselling Service; Scotland's Health at Work activities; Independent Financial Advisory Service; Alcohol and Substance Misuse Counselling.
- ◆ Ensure the effective implementation and consistent application of council-wide policies and procedures which may assist in managing stress in the workplace, such as Recruitment and Selection Procedure; Training and Development Policy; Induction Policy; EAGER; Health and Safety Policy; Violence at Work Policy; Equal Opportunities Strategy; Absence Management Procedures; Grievance Procedures; Code of Conduct for Employees; Redundancy and Redeployment Procedures.
- ◆ Regularly monitor and review organisational indicators of stress, taking appropriate action where stress is identified
- ◆ Manage change effectively

4.2 Managers/Supervisors

Stress is of increasing concern for both managers and employees and the effect of stress can be seen in terms of physical and psychological ill health and may result in poor performance, low motivation and job dissatisfaction.

All persons who have a responsibility for managing or supervising others should be trained in recognising signs of employee stress and be able to provide appropriate support to employees suffering from the negative effects of stress. In particular, they have responsibility to:

- ◆ Set up systems which encourage effective two way communication;
- ◆ Manage health and safety risks within the workgroup;
- ◆ Manage job design and workloads;
- ◆ Promote and encourage best practice in recruitment and selection;
- ◆ Ensure effective time management;
- ◆ Ensure employees have the appropriate training to enable them to carry out their duties and responsibilities;
- ◆ Support the Council's East Ayrshire General Employee Review Scheme and ensure that reviews are held in accordance with this Scheme;
- ◆ Support the Council's Equal Opportunity and Personal Harassment policies.
- ◆ Be aware of the individual indicators of stress and be able to discuss the possible causes of stress with employees in a sympathetic and confidential manner;
- ◆ Be aware of the facilities which exist to help employees with health problems, liaising with Personnel where appropriate;
- ◆ Encourage employees to develop their ability to recognise and deal with the factors which contribute to their stress;

Further guidance is available for managers in the “Managing Stress at Work – Managers Guide”.

4.3 Employees

Employees have a responsibility for ensuring their own health, safety and welfare at work. All employees are therefore required to:

- ◆ Ensure agreed objectives are realistic and manage time effectively;
- ◆ Recognise their training and development needs and participate in the Council’s East Ayrshire General Employee Review Scheme;
- ◆ Be aware of the symptoms of stress;
- ◆ Co-operate with managers in dealing with stress;
- ◆ Where job related factors are causing them stress, discuss these with their line manager/supervisor as appropriate;
- ◆ Where pressures external to work are causing them stress, discuss these with their line manager/supervisor as appropriate;
- ◆ Talk to a Personnel Officer, Occupational Health Advisor, Employee Counsellor or Trade Union representative if they do not wish to discuss problems with managers/supervisors.

Further information is available for employees in the “Managing Stress at Work – Employee Guide”

5. TRAINING FOR MANAGERS/SUPERVISORS AND EMPLOYEES

- 5.1** The management of stress in the workplace is largely a matter of effective management in all aspects of the employment context from recruitment to termination. Training is available from the Training and Development Section to help managers develop their people management skills.
- 5.2** Similarly, employees also have a key responsibility in managing any stress they may be experiencing. Like any other health and safety concern every employee has a responsibility to report to management any health issue affecting their performance or safety at work. By doing so, the Council is then able to offer support and guidance including the services of its Employee Counselling and Occupational Health services.
- 5.3** Health and Safety in the Workplace is given a priority within the Council’s training and development plan. Appropriate priority will therefore be given to providing training in the management of stress according to the level of its identification within the Council’s Risk Assessment process. Stress awareness training is also available to all employees, providing information on identifying stress in self/others and dealing with stress in self/others.
- 5.4** The Training and Development Section also provides a range of general courses which may help employees avoid or reduce stress. These include Time Management, Customer Care and Equal Opportunities Awareness.

6. MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 6.1** Corporate Resources (Personnel Services) will be responsible for monitoring and implementation of the Managing Stress in the Workplace Policy. An annual review of the organisational indicators (detailed at 3.1.2) will take place and each department will be required to submit an annual statement demonstrating compliance with this policy together with details of actions taken.
- 6.2** Corporate Resources (Personnel) will submit a report to the Personnel and Property Sub-Committee of Policy and Resources on an annual basis, detailing the findings of the review process and recommending future goals and improvement targets to minimise stress in the workplace.

**Personnel Services
March 2001**

AGENDA