

Human Resources Committee - 8 January 2008

Stress Management Policy – UNISON Amendments

UNISON welcomes the introduction of a stress management policy at East Herts Council and looks forward to its implementation.

Stress is widely recognised as a major workplace hazard and employers, trade unions and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are all keen to tackle stress at work and take steps to prevent it.

Background

A draft policy was produced approximately six months ago and UNISON has been eagerly awaiting sight of the policy with a view to discussing it at our meetings with HR and to working together to produce a good workable document which could be adopted as a jointly agreed policy.

The draft had been discussed at CMT meetings several times and circulated to Heads of Service and the Occupational Health Advisor. However, each time UNISON asked for the draft, we were told that it was not quite ready. We were eventually given a copy of the policy on 13 November, two weeks before the Local Joint Panel deadline for the submission of reports. At no time were we able to discuss the draft with HR officers other than by a single email and phone call.

Working Together

The HSE, ACAS, the TUC, the CIPD and the International Stress Management Association all recognise the value in combining expertise to tackle stress in the workplace. They have produced an excellent guide for employers 'Working together to reduce stress at work'. This demonstrates what can be achieved by combining forces and having shared goals.

The HSE has produced many guides on the management of stress in the workplace, all of which emphasise the importance of involving trade unions.

Amendments to the Policy

In making amendments, UNISON has referred to:

- The many publications of the HSE
- The Labour Research Department booklet 'Stress at Work'
- Guidance produced by UNISON
- A dozen policies of other organisations on the management of stress.

Many of the amendments in the attached revised policy are in respect of the layout or order of headings. This is to ensure that the points are made in the most logical sequence and as clearly as possible.

The introduction is now headed 'policy statement' in order to define clearly and concisely the Council's commitment to reducing stress in the workplace.

There are some additional headings such as the causes and costs of stress, and implementation of the policy, which UNISON believes contribute towards the understanding of stress in the workplace and how it will be managed practically.

There are some deletions of minor points, which UNISON feels are duplicated elsewhere, unnecessary or confusing.

Finally, there is a lot which is unchanged where the points are clearly made and there is no need for change.

Conclusions

UNISON will be disappointed if Council Members allow this policy to be adopted without the amendments. Although, a lot of hard work has gone in to producing the policy, there are a number of improvements required to make the policy easier to follow and more comprehensive. Even if Council Members cannot agree to all the amendments today, UNISON feels it is vital to ensure that the policy the Council adopts is clear, comprehensive and workable. It is for this reason that it is worth spending a little more time enhancing and refining the policy.