East Herts Council

Stress Management Policy

DRAFT 0.6 - Not for Distribution

1. Policy Statement

East Herts Council is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees and recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue.

In creating this policy the Council acknowledges that stress may be caused by personal or work-related matters. The policy aims to support all employees who suffer from stress, whatever the cause, since it may be detrimental to their health and may affect motivation and performance at work. Whilst the Council has no control over external factors, it is committed to minimising the causes of work-related stress through the risk assessment process.

2. Definitions

Stress

The Health and 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 excessive pressure causing stress, which can be detrimental to health.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a natural emotional reaction to a deeply shocking and disturbing experience. It is a *normal* reaction to an *abnormal* situation.

Pressure

Pressure is part and parcel of all work and helps to keep workers and managers motivated. It is *excessive* or *uncontrolled* pressure which can lead to stress which undermines performance, is costly to employers and above all can make people ill. Stress is therefore a response to pressure. To some degree pressure can be beneficial, when it inspires motivation and commitment, but excessive pressure becomes stress which is harmful and can lead to major illness.

3. The Causes of Work-Related Stress

The HSE has developed six management standards to help assess and tackle the main causes of work-related stress. The standards highlight six overall "risk factors".

- **demands** of the job – includes issues such as workload, work pattern and work environment
- **control** over the work – how much say employees have in the way they do their work
- **support** from managers and colleagues, including encouragement and resources provided by the organisation
- **relationships** at work – includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour such as bullying
- **role** in the organisation – whether employees understand their role and whether the organisation ensures that employees do not have conflicting roles
- **change** and how it is managed and communicated

4. The Costs of Stress

The Human Costs

Reports have shown an association between employees who reported feeling very stressed and ill-health, including high blood pressure, depression, bronchitis and breast cancer. They have also found that high levels of stress were associated with more sleep problems, less exercise, heavier alcohol consumption and smoking and poorer diet. Those who were highly stressed used more medication, visited their GPs more often and took more sick leave.

Other studies found links between stress at work and obesity, hypertension and high cholesterol. This in turn could lead to heart disease and diabetes.

Finally high levels of stress contribute to musculoskeletal disorders, such as back pain and repetitive strain injury.

The Organisational Costs

The financial cost to employers of working days lost due to work-related stress is high. Stress, depression or anxiety are one of the largest contributors to the overall estimated number of days lost from work-related ill-health.

5. The Legal Framework

Although there is no specific legislation aimed at controlling stress at work, employers have legal duties under both statutory and common law that are relevant to tackling the problem.

Statutory duties are listed as follows:

- under the **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**, employers have a duty to ensure so far as is reasonably practical the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees
- under the **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**, employers have a duty to assess the health and safety risks to which their employees are exposed at work. Such an assessment should include an analysis of the risks to employees' health caused by stress at work
- under the **Disability and Discrimination Act 1995**, employers have a duty not to discriminate against employees on the grounds of disability as defined by the Act: "physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities
- under the **Working Time Regulations 1998**, employers have a duty to comply with the regulations with regard to maximum number of hours worked, rest periods and leave entitlement
- under the **Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977**, employers have a duty to give safety representatives extensive legal rights to investigate and tackle workplace stress.

Employers also have a common law duty of care to their employees. This means that victims of stress may be able to take civil action for personal injury at a county court. There are a number of high-profile cases, which now act as case law.

6. Aims and Scope of the Policy

This policy has been designed to help protect the employer and employees from the exposure and danger of work related stress and associated effects and to encourage those who may have a problem to seek help. The policy applies to all employees of the Council.

The Council's approach and response, based on advice from specialist sources such as the Health and Safety Executive, and UNISON, where an employee has registered a stress related problem, will be to provide support and assistance and to first identify and manage the source of the concern, (as far as is possible) outside the capability procedure.

The Council recognises that employees can be helped through counselling and advice. It recognises that stress can affect staff at all levels in the organisation and that individuals have different coping mechanisms. It also recognises that each case must be handled sensitively and that one approach may not suit all individuals.

7. Implementation of the Policy

To effectively implement the policy the Council will:

- respond to individual and work place stressors and conduct risk assessments of job roles and undertake reasonable activities to eliminate or control the risks from stress. Risk assessments must be regularly reviewed and updated.
- provide a support mechanism for Managers to assist with managing work related stress issues.
- provide support procedures that are clear for all employees
- provide an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) open to all employees.
- ensure that accurate information on identified cases is retained and that a detailed record of how cases are managed is kept.
- promote greater awareness of stress
- encourage and support self-referral or intervention at an early stage of stress
- initiate the bullying and harassment policy and procedure where appropriate
- meet the Council's legal obligation to discharge its duty of care to its employees and clients and comply with all statutory duties

8. Responsibilities of Managers

The **Chief Executive** has primary responsibility for ensuring that the Council upholds its duty of care to health and safety in the workplace.

The **Chief Executive** shall execute the duty of care for the management of stress in the workplace through delegated powers to the **Directors of Neighbourhood Services, Internal Services and Customer and Community Services.**

The **Chief Executive**, assisted by the **Directors of Neighbourhood Services, Internal Services and Customer and Community Services** shall support proactive and meaningful approaches to stress management in order to promote, encourage and develop a positive working culture.

They and the **Heads of Service** will:

- read and understand the requirements of this policy and support the aim and intent of this policy.

- recognise the effects of work and non work related stress that they themselves are exposed to.

The Council recognises that for effective and proactive stress management to take place, the Chief Executive, Directors and Service Heads shall be supported through:

- effective training on Stress Management
- the Councils Employee Assistance Programme.
- occupational Health support

The **Corporate Management Team** is responsible for ensuring that Heads of Service implement and use the policy effectively.

Heads of Service willl:

- conduct work activity and job role risk assessments within their service areas under guidance from the Health and Safety Officer and where appropriate the expert advice of the Councils Occupational Health Service provider.
- ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties and are provided with meaningful and effective development opportunities
- monitor work loads to ensure that people are not overloaded
- monitor working hours and overtime (where applicable) to ensure that staff are not building excessive hours. Ensure that employees are taking required rest breaks and monitor holidays to ensure staff are taking their full entitlement.
- attend training as requested in good management practices and health and safety
- ensure that the Councils Policy on 'Bullying and Harassment' is upheld
- be vigilant and offer support to employees who may be experiencing stress outside the working environment e.g. bereavement, separation.

Line Managers

Line Managers are responsible for delivering the aims and objectives as outlined by the Chief Executive and the Directors and in accordance with instructions from Heads of Service. In their capacity as the operational

manager they are required to keep Heads of Service informed of operational performance and of any issues that arise that may affect or impact on the team.

Line Managers are encouraged to discuss return to work options, e.g. following successful treatment so that the employee returns to the same job they were undertaking (for advice on this, contact the Occupational Health Adviser). Line Managers must also consider if work activities and workloads need reviewing (for support and advice on conducting a work activity risk assessment, contact the Health & Safety Officer).

It is important that Line Managers agree contact arrangements with employees where long term absences arise. For advice on this please contact the HR Team.

9. Responsibilities of Individuals

All employees should avoid the traps of:

- working excessive hours, evenings and weekends
- not taking proper breaks
- not taking leave entitlement
- working when unwell or through periods of ill health

All employees of the Council have a responsibility to ensure they raise issues of concern with their Line Managers.

All employees are required to co-operate with responsible arrangements designed to address and achieve a successful resolution to stress related issues. Such arrangements may include:

- referral to Occupational Health
- self referral to Occupational Health
- phased and planned return to work arrangements
- agree contact arrangements with their manager if absent from work.
- outcomes of work activity risk assessments
- instructions from General Practitioners
- make full use of the Employee Assistance Programme

10. Role of People and Organisational Services

The Team will support and lead on cases involving stress related absence and are available to provide support, guidance and assistance:

The Team will:

- assist and support Service Heads through the process
- provide guidance to managers on the Policy.
- assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.
- explore a range of options to assist in the resolution of issues, including return to work plans etc.
- advise managers through the referral process.
- encourage staff to use the Employee Assistance Programme where relevant.
- alert Line Managers when the team becomes aware that a member of the mangers staff is off due to stress.

11. <u>Role of Occupational Health Service</u>

Occupational Health Service Advisors are trained and professional health care providers and their role is to:

- provide specialist support and advise managers who identify potential work-related stress issues
- advise managers on appropriate referral of employees for support
- support staff referred by managers when stress related problems have resulted in sickness absence or poor performance
- advise on rehabilitation or suitable adjustments to the workplace to facilitate return to work avoiding a recurrence of the problem.

12. <u>Referral to Occupational Health</u>

Upon receipt of self certification or medical certificates from a GP, where the reason for absence is stated as stress and/or depression Line Manager must refer the employee to the Occupational Health Advisor to ensure that appropriate advice and support is made available.

Where employees self refer to Occupational Health, claiming stress and/or depression they should advise their Line Manager to ensure that appropriate advice and support is provided.

Appointments for referral and self referral must be made through the HR Administrator, ext 1632 and accompanied by a completed Occupational Health Referral Form located on the intranet.

13. Role of the Safety Committee

The Safety Committee will oversee the Council's arrangements for the management of stress and will perform a crucial role in ensuring that this policy is implemented.

The Safety Committee will oversee monitoring of the effectiveness of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote health and safety in the workplace.

14. Role of Trade Union Safety Representatives

Safety representatives are appointed by trade unions to represent employees on health and safety issues and must be:

- meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work designs that could precipitate stress
- able to consult with employees on the issue of stress including any workplace surveys
- meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process
- allowed access to collective and anonymous data from HR
- provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any Trade Union training relating to workplace stress
- able to conduct joint inspections of the workplace at regular intervals to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.

15. Support Services and Advisory Bodies

Employee Assistance Programme

The Council has in place an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) that is open to employees and their families. It is a confidential service provided by 'Positive People Company' (PPC)

The EAP is put in place to help employees deal with any issues - at home or work - that if left unchecked could cause stress or affect well-being. This ultimately could result in ill-health and sickness absence which may impact on productivity and service delivery.

The Council encourages employees to take full advantage of the range of services offered by the EAP.

Employees can call the EAP any time, day or night, free and **in confidence.**

Freephone 0800 282 193

'minicom users: **0800 085 4739 hearing/speech impaired only'**

Health and Safety Executive

The Health and Safety Executive has developed a series of guidelines and Management Standards to help employers develop good stress management procedures. These are not mandatory requirements as the role of the HSE is to provide guidance and information on a range of health and safety issues.

To view the advice provided click on the following link

http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm

16. Policy Review and Amendment

This Policy shall be reviewed after six months and thereafter when changes in guidelines, contact details or new information useful to the execution of the policy are made in order to reflect the best possible level of support and management.