



East Herts Council

Stress Management

Policy Statement

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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 advice and guidance set out in this policy.

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.

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 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
- 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.

5. Aims and Scope of the Policy

This policy has been designed to protect the employer and the 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 is based on advice from specialist sources such as the Health and Safety Executive, and in agreement with UNISON. Where an employee has registered a stress related problem our approach 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.

6. Implementation of the Policy

To effectively implement the policy the Council will:

- proactively look at ways to eliminate or control the risks of job related stress for employees.
- respond to individual and work place stressors and undertake reasonable activities to eliminate or control the risks from stress.
- conduct risk assessments where the Council becomes aware of job related stressors, where an individual has cited job related stressors and on new job roles, where appropriate.
- 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 Harassment and Bullying at Work 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

7. 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 Heads of Service 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.

CMT, Heads of Service and Line Managers will:

- respond to individual and work place stressors and undertake reasonable activities to eliminate or control the risks from stress.
- conduct risk assessments where the Council becomes aware of job related stressors, where appropriate on new job roles and where an individual has cited job related stressors within their service areas under guidance from the Health and Safety Officer and where appropriate the expert advice of the Council's Occupational Health Service provider.
- ensure good communication between management and staff.
- have regular 1-2-1's and twice yearly performance development reviews to monitor workload, ensure employees can cope with the demands and responsibilities of their role.
- ensure employees are provided with learning and development opportunities.
- monitor working hours and overtime (where applicable) to ensure that employees 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.
- be vigilant and offer support when required to employees who may be experiencing stress outside the working environment e.g. bereavement, separation.
- follow, when required the Absence Management Policy.

8. 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

9. 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:

- provide advice, guidance and support to managers on process and the Policy.
- ensure managers are aware of employees whose reason for absence could be related to stress.
- ensure sickness absence statistics are recorded, monitored in terms of the effectiveness of measures to address stress and reported upon with recommendations when applicable.
- explore a range of options to assist in the resolution of issues, including return to work plans.
- support managers and employees through the Occupational Health referral process if deemed suitable.
- encourage staff to use the Employee Assistance Programme where relevant.

10. Role of Occupational Health Service

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.

11. Referral to Occupational Health

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 and accompanied by a completed Occupational Health Referral Form located on the intranet.

12. Role of Trade Union Safety Representatives

Safety representatives are appointed by trade unions to represent their members on Health and safety issues. The Safety Representatives and Safety committees Regulations 1977 set out their legal functions, which include:

- representing employees on health, safety or welfare issues and in discussions with HSE or other enforcing authorities;
- being involved with risk assessment procedures;
- having access to relevant health and safety information
- inspecting the workplace;
- investigating potential hazards;
- able to consult with employees on the issues of stress including any workplace surveys.

13. 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)

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>

14. Policy Review and Amendment

This Policy shall be reviewed after two years or sooner if necessary 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.

