

Ealing Council

Managing Work-Related Stress Policy and Guidance

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MANAGING WORK-RELATED STRESS POLICY

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MANAGING WORK-RELATED STRESS POLICY

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Ealing Council is committed to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all its employees, and others who work on or visit its sites. Workplace stress is recognised as a health and safety issue and the Council acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing unacceptably high levels of workplace stress.

It is the Council's policy to support employees who raise concerns of stress at work through a risk based approach, so that appropriate steps may be taken to prevent the situation from continuing or escalating. The main emphasis of this policy is to manage work-related stress through the Health and Safety Executive Management Standards and through the principles of a five-step risk assessment process.

This policy and accompanying guidance provides a constructive framework for both managers and employees, who are jointly responsible for the management of work-related stress. The main aim of this policy is to ensure work-related stress is identified and managed to ensure employees are at work and are performing to the highest standard, which in turn can bring about improved services, better productivity and greater customer focus.

Therefore any employee who believes that a particular aspect of his or her job or an element in the workplace is causing an unacceptable level of stress should, in the first instance, raise the matter with his or her line manager. The line manager will discuss the matter with the employee with a view to jointly identifying the specific workplace factors that are causing the stress, and wherever possible, taking into account operational requirements, agree appropriate steps to remedy the problem and reduce the stress on the employee.

2. SCOPE AND PRINCIPLES

This policy applies to all employees who have a contract of employment with Ealing Council, except Teaching and Support Staff employed by schools (who are covered by their own arrangements). It does not apply to non-employees such as Agency Workers.

This policy deals with work-related stress. However, the Council recognises that not all stress is work-related, and that some employees may cite personal difficulties as the main reason for their stress, for example, to do with personal, health, domestic or other problems. To ensure all employees are contributing to their full potential, the Council provides access to an independent counselling service. Managers should encourage employees to access this service and consider ways of attempting to assist employees to overcome non work-related difficulties, as appropriate. Equally, it is important

that employees, who experience stress caused outside of the workplace, should share and raise any issues of concern with their manager, so that support can be given where possible and appropriate.

There are various Council policies and procedures that collectively support the aim of this policy and should be read in conjunction with this policy. This policy forms part of the Council's Corporate Health and Safety Policy and Manager's Health and Safety Handbook.

3. DEFINITION OF STRESS

Stress on its own is not recognised as a medical condition, but can lead to a reduced ability to perform at work and have an impact on a person's health and wellbeing.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provide a helpful definition and define stress as **“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them”**. They also state that pressure is part and parcel of all work and helps to keep us motivated, and can improve performance. However, when demands and pressures become excessive and prolonged, this can lead to stress, which undermines performance and has a negative effect on mental and physical health.

Stress is therefore the body's reaction (whether physical or mental) to an actual or perceived imbalance between the demands being placed on the person and that person's individual coping resources. The level of pressure can be inappropriate in two ways:

- Too little pressure – boredom, apathy and a lack of commitment are likely to result; and
- Too much pressure – staff that are overburdened are more likely to make mistakes, fall ill etc.

Individuals are well adapted to cope with short-term exposure to pressure and this can be positive, but there will be greater difficulty in coping with prolonged intensive pressure. A key point to recognise is that individuals will react differently to pressure in different situations and at different stages in their working lives. Therefore when it comes to coping with stress, people may differ widely.

Where work-related stress leads to a mental illness that lasts for 12 months or more or is expected to last for 12 months or more, that illness may be classed as a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Managers should therefore read this policy and guidance alongside the Good Management Guide on the Employment of Disabled People, available on the Intranet as appropriate.

The Council does not treat “work-related stress” as qualifying for an injury allowance.

4. HSE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS FOR WORK-RELATED STRESS

4.1 HSE Management Standards for work-related stress

The HSE launched Management Standards in November 2004, these aim to provide a yardstick which Ealing Council can use to measure their performance in tackling particular causes of stress and set out some indicators of good management practice.

The HSE Management Standards approach places a strong emphasis on employers and employees to work in partnership to develop effective and practicable solutions to relevant stressors identified through a risk assessment of six primary sources of stress at work. These are:

Standards	Primary sources
1. Demands	Made on employees, such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
2. Control	Such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work
3. Support	Such as the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
4. Relationships	Such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
5. Role	Such as whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
6. Change	Such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

The first three standards are concerned with job content; the second three are about job context. They are designed to enable and promote an early and active discussion between managers and employees, in order to decide upon practical solutions that can be made to tackle work-related stress. A full definition of the HSE Management Standards is provided in Appendix 1. For further information on the HSE Management Standards, visit the stress website pages at www.hse.gov.uk/stress.

4.2 Causes of 'stress'

The HSE cite seven factors at work that can cause stress. These are:

Factors	Potential causes
1. Culture	Such as lack of communication and consultation and an expectation to work long hours
2. Job demands	Such as too much or too little work, inappropriate training levels and the working environment
3. Control	In terms of lack of control over work activities

4. Relationships	Such as poor working relationships, bullying or harassment
5. Change	Related to uncertainty about the future and job security
6. Role	Related to uncertainty about the role and what is required
7. Support	Such as lack of support and lack of balance between work and personal life

4.3 Signs of 'stress'

To recognise the impact of stress on employees, managers need to be alert to possible signs of stress and changes in their employees, which may manifest in one or more of the following ways:

Signs	Examples
1. Behaviour	Jumpy, moody, aggressive, drug or alcohol abuse
2. Thinking style	Indecisive, negative, rigid, low concentration, paranoid
3. Emotional reactions	Drained, phobias, depressed, irritable, withdrawn, defensive
4. Physical symptoms	Headaches, infections, back and neck pain, blurred vision, palpitations
5. Actions	Missing deadlines, absenteeism, poor time-keeping, long hours, stockpiling work, low productivity

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Existing legislative framework

The incidence of stress in the workplace can have a number of possible legal implications. The HSE Management Standards approach supports the existing legislation. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 employers are obliged to secure the health (including mental health), safety and welfare of employees whilst at work and to provide information and training. The Act also requires employees to take reasonable care of their own health and that of others, and to co-operate with their employer in discharging their duties under the Act.

In addition, under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers are required to carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment of the health and safety risks to which their employees are exposed whilst at work. This includes the requirement to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities and to take measures to control the identified risk.

5.2 The role of managers

Managing work-related stress is a management responsibility. The onus is on managers to proactively deal with individual cases of stress, to discuss

symptoms and offer support where possible and appropriate (see section 6, stress risk assessment guidance).

Managers also have a responsibility to recognise the signs that may indicate stress within themselves and others and be aware of the sources of help and advice available to provide support to employees who are, or are likely to be affected by stress.

The top ten responsibilities for managers in applying this policy to reduce or prevent work-related stress effectively are:

1. Working pro-actively with their employees to review existing risk assessments and if a risk assessment has not been completed, to undertake this as a priority;
2. Conducting new stress risk assessments whenever necessary, identifying and evaluating work-related risks and discussing potential measures to reduce or control risks to a reasonable level;
3. Taking action and implementing reasonable steps to address work related stressors and monitoring solutions;
4. Keeping and maintaining confidential records;
5. Making a management referral to the Occupational Health Unit for medical advice, if appropriate;
6. Making employees aware of the employee helpline service and positively encouraging them to access the helpline, and/or to make a management referral;
7. Ensuring that whenever work-related stress is identified during the normal managerial process, for example, as a result of one to one meetings, performance appraisal, managing sickness absence, through grievances or bullying and harassment complaints, that it is managed early using the stress risk assessment approach;
8. Seeking advice from Corporate Health and Safety, designated HR Advisors and/or Occupational Health Unit;
9. Keeping in regular contact with an employee who is absent from work due to stress, ensuring a return to work plan is agreed before the employee's return and a return to work meeting is conducted on the employee's return to work in line with the Council's Managing Sickness Absence Policy and Guidance for Managers;
10. Discussing whether there are any specific needs and implementing any reasonable adjustments in the workplace that could help persons with disabilities.

5.3 Employee responsibilities

Any employee who believes that a particular aspect of his or her job, or an element in the workplace is causing an unacceptable level of stress should, in the first instance, raise the matter with his or line manager.

The responsibilities of all employees include:

- Taking reasonable care of himself/herself and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work, cooperating with the Council on health and safety, correctly using work items and not interfering with or misusing anything provided for their health, safety or welfare (Legal duties under the Health and Safety At Work etc. Act 1974);
- Complying with all of Ealing Council's Health and Safety policies and procedures;
- Recognising signs of stress and notify their manager at an early stage if they believe to be suffering from work-related stress, which they consider is affecting their health or safety, or other person, to enable early support or intervention;
- Accessing and seeking professional advice from the employee helpline service;
- Attending medical examinations or health assessment interviews with the Occupational Health Unit, if requested;
- Recognising their own training and development needs and taking responsibility for their well-being and development;
- Cooperating with managers to undertake stress risk assessments, to avoid or reduce work-related stress, including supporting colleagues;
- Ensuring they do not put other employees under undue pressure, which might affect work performance.

5.4 Role of representatives

Employees have the right to seek advice and guidance from a trade union or work colleague representative. It is expected that an employee would discuss any issues of stress with their line manager in the first instance through the normal managerial and supervisory process. (See section 2.6 on the role of representatives in relation to the Managing Sickness Absence Guidance for Managers)

5.5 Good management practice to prevent stress

The HSE Management Standards approach is based upon good management practice. There are a number of ways in which managers can better manage issues of work-related stress as follows:

- Good two-way communication; being approachable and encouraging open discussions with all employees (for example, through induction and probation, regular 1-2-1s, performance appraisal and team meetings);
- Ensuring adequate training and development needs and plans are matched to all employee's roles;
- Ensuring employees have clear roles and responsibilities as laid out in the Ealing competencies;
- Providing ongoing positive feedback and constructive criticism to pick up issues at an early stage or relevant procedures;

- Reviewing working demands and activity so that they are not excessive;
- Proactively managing and supporting employees through organisational change, unsatisfactory performance, conduct and/or attendance issues in order to prevent pressure transferring to other team members;
- Ensuring people are treated fairly and consistently and complaints are dealt with appropriately in line with the Council's Grievance Policy and Procedure or Dignity at Work (Bullying and Harassment) Policy and Guidance.

6. STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

If despite measures to prevent work-related stress, an employee becomes stressed the manager should undertake a stress risk assessment.

When to assess

Managers should approach an employee to discuss undertaking a stress risk assessment in the following circumstances:

- When an employee has approached them and raised work-related stress;
- As part of managing sickness absence where a review meeting is arranged, for example, as a result of stress being specified on a sick note, or where the review of an attendance record shows concerns about attendance levels;
- When the manager observes possible signs of stress and changes in an employee's behaviour, morale or productivity.

Undertaking the stress risk assessment

To start the process, the manager should:

- Set up an informal confidential meeting with the employee
- Prepare for the meeting, for example, by reviewing the history of the employee's attendance
- Seek advice from the HR department as required
- At the meeting, use the five steps to risk assessment approach (see below) to identify what is causing the problem and any specific workplace factors
- The risk assessment should be based on the job and work activities and take into account the individual doing the job.
- Demonstrate support for the employee and make it clear the aim of the discussion is to help the employee
- Take into account operational requirements and review ways of reducing or removing the cause of work-related stress through joint discussion to assess the risk of harm

- Consider whether it may be appropriate to suggest the employee undergoes a medical examination through referral to the Occupational Health Unit
- Seek to reach agreement on specific action points to support the employee and remedy the problem wherever possible
- Keep matters confidential
- Set a review date so that the employee's health and wellbeing can be monitored

A suggested pro-forma for managers to complete and record the stress risk assessment is given in Appendix 2.

Five step risk assessment

Step 1 – Identify the hazards

Identify any work-related stressors against each of the HSE Management Standards using open questioning techniques and active listening.

Step 2 – Determine who might be harmed and how

Consider if the employee is potentially affected and any others. Consider any existing controls and assess whether there is a high, medium or low risk of harm against each stressor so that action can be prioritised.

Step 3 – Evaluate the risks and take action

For each of the stressors identified in Step 1, answer the following three questions:

- What action are you already taking?
- Is it enough and,
- What more do you need to do and by when?

Measures may include encouraging the employee to contact the employee helpline; providing training; considering changes to the work and/or the work pattern; providing job related support; considering whether it is appropriate to refer the employee to the Occupational Health Unit and/or encouraging them to seek further help through their own doctor. If the employee is off sick, keep in regular contact to agree a return to work plan before they are ready to return to work and ensure a return to work meeting is conducted.

Step 4 – Record your findings

Having undertaken the stress risk assessment, the findings and proposed actions should be recorded and communicated to the employee for agreement and implementation. The suggested pro-forma for managers to complete and record the stress risk assessment is given in Appendix 2. A copy should be sent to Corporate Health and Safety to enable overall monitoring statistics to be compiled.

If unsure on how to proceed, adjourn the meeting and seek advice from the Corporate Health and Safety team or Human Resources department before concluding the stress risk assessment.

Step 5 – Monitor and review

Ensure a date is set to monitor and review the stress risk assessment against the action plan with the employee. It may however, be necessary to undertake a review before this date as circumstances may have changed, for example, following significant changes in working practices, or if the employee provides new information to the manager. The manager should provide a copy of the stress risk assessment to the employee concerned and any revision thereafter.

Following the completion of a stress risk assessment if the manager feels unable to reduce or control the stress to a reasonable level, s/he should notify their own manager of the issues and review with their manager what has been outlined to control the risk. Where necessary, this may require advice being sought via Occupational Health and/or Corporate Health and Safety. This should assist in seeking possible solutions to ensure any issues are recognised and dealt with at an appropriate level.

If the measures adopted to reduce stress are not effective, the manager, following a review of all action taken to date, may conclude that all reasonable steps have been taken to reduce stress and to support the employee. In these circumstances, managers are advised to seek advice from the HR department to determine whether it would be appropriate to consider further action under another Council procedure. For example, it may be that the employee is not capable of performing the duties of their role effectively and the manager may decide that it is appropriate to make a referral to the Occupational Health Unit to determine whether there is an underlying medical reason/condition that is preventing satisfactory recovery and to take action under the Council's Managing Sickness Absence Guidance and/or Medical Capability Procedure.

7. EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

The Council provides free access to a 24-hour confidential employee helpline service. An independent company called Care First Counselling and Information currently provides this. Employees and their immediate family members can ring the employee helpline for information and advice on a wide range of issues. Care First services may include face-to-face counselling, critical incident management and support, and support for managers. Care First can help in the following ways:

1. Self referral to Care First	Where the employee contacts the confidential, free phone helpline 0800 174 319, available 24 hours a day
2. Care First	By the manager talking to Care First, if the employee's

Management Support	problem is unfamiliar, complex or if the employee is denying a problem or resisting the opportunity to seek help
3. Management Referral	By the manager making a Management Referral by calling 0800 174 319, if the situation is unusually sensitive, or the employee's extremely distressed

8 MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Corporate Health and Safety team will review this policy after one year and thereafter every two years in consultation with relevant representatives, including officers from the Human Resources department, the Occupational Health Unit, Legal Services and recognised Trade Unions.

Appendix 1 - The HSE Management Standards for Work-related Stress

1 Demands	2 Control	3 Support
Includes issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment	How much say the person has in the way they do their work	Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
<p>The standard is that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and • Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns. 	<p>The standard is that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and • Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns. 	<p>The standard is that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and • Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
<p>What should be happening/states to be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work; • People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands; • Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and • Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed. 	<p>What should be happening/states to be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work; • Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work; • Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work; • The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills; • Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and • Employees are consulted over their work patterns. 	<p>What should be happening/states to be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees; • Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff; • Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues; • Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it; • Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; • Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

4 Relationships	5 Role	6 Change
Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour	Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have any conflicting roles	How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation
<p>The standard is that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and • Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns. 	<p>The standard is that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and • Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns. 	<p>The standard is that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and • Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
<p>What should be happening/states to be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness; • Employees share information relevant to their work; • The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour; • Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and • Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour. 	<p>What should be happening/states to be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible; • The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities; • The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and • Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities. 	<p>What should be happening/states to be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes; • The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals; • Employees are aware of the probable impact of any change to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs; • Employees are aware of timetables for changes; • Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

Appendix 2 – Guidance Stress Risk Assessment template

NB: This form is for completion by the manager and can be adapted to suit local needs. A copy should be provided to the employee concerned and a copy sent to the Corporate Health and Safety team for confidential monitoring purposes.

POTENTIAL HAZARDS	CONTROL	ACTION NEEDED (State High, Medium or Low risk)	DATE AGREED
1. CULTURE			
Lack of communication and consultation	Provide opportunities for staff to contribute to ideas, especially in planning and organising their own jobs		
A culture of blame when things go wrong, denial of potential problems	Introduce clear business objectives, good communication and close involvement, particularly during periods of change		
An expectation that people will regularly work excessively long hours or take work home with them	Avoid encouraging people to work excessively long hours		
2. DEMANDS OF THE JOB			
Too much to do, too little time	Prioritise tasks, cut out unnecessary work, try to give warning of urgent jobs or important jobs		
Too little /too much training for the job	Make sure individuals are matched to jobs, provide training for those who need more, increase the scope of jobs for those who are over trained		
Boring or repetitive work, or too little to do	Change the way jobs are done by moving people between jobs, giving individuals more responsibility, increasing the scope of the job, increasing the tasks, giving a group of workers greater responsibility for effective performance of the group		
3. CONTROL			
Lack of control over work activities	Give more control to staff by enabling them to plan their own work, make decisions about how that work should be completed and how problems should be		

	tackled		
4. RELATIONSHIPS			
Poor relationships with others	Provide training in interpersonal skills		
Bullying, racial or sexual remarks	Set up effective systems to prevent bullying and harassment (refer to Ealing Council's Code of Conduct and other policies)		
5. CHANGE			
Uncertainty about what is happening	Ensure good communication with staff		
Fears about job security	Provide effective support for staff throughout the process		
6. ROLE			
Staff feeling that the job requires them to behave in conflicting way at the same time	Talk to people regularly to make sure that everyone is clear about what their job requires them to do		
Confusion about how everyone fits in	Make sure that everyone has clearly defined objectives and responsibilities linked to business objectives, and training on how everyone fits in		
7. SUPPORT TO THE INDIVIDUAL			
Lack of support from managers and co-workers	Support and encourage staff, even when things go wrong		
Not being able to balance the demands of work and like outside of work	Take into account that everyone is different, and try to allocate work so that everyone is working in the way that helps them work best, i.e. flexible working/working from home		
8. OTHER			
Name / post of employee		Service / Directorate	
Name / post of manager		Service / Directorate	
Date			