



# Work Related Stress Policy 2009

## **DEFINITION OF STRESS**

The Health and Safety Executive define 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 stress which can be detrimental to health.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This is a supporting document to the Health and Safety Policy.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires us to take reasonable steps to look after our employees’ mental health and welfare. This means that we need to ensure that staff do not have excessive demands placed on them by their job. However, we are entitled to assume that all staff can cope with the normal day-to-day challenges of their job. If this is not the case, staff have a duty to inform us.

Pressure is not always bad, as a certain amount of pressure and stimulation can be a positive force that motivates particularly when there are deadlines or targets to be met. It is when an individual feels that they cannot cope and can see no end to the pressures they are feeling that signs of stress may occur.

The Council recognises that there are occasions when pressures at work and/or home can affect people’s behaviour and their ability to cope. When an individual is suffering from stress both the health and performance of the individual is adversely affected which in turn has an adverse impact on colleagues and the organisation.

## **STATEMENT**

The Council recognises that

- anyone can suffer from stress;
- that stress is not a mental illness, but the natural adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures and demands imposed on them;
- That there can be beneficial effects of *reasonable* pressure and challenge.
- People have a varying ability to deal with the pressures encountered in life and some people are particularly vulnerable but if the emotional and physical demands on a person are greater than their capacity to cope, ill health may occur.
- That ill health can often be caused by stress due to problems outside work which may then affect the employee’s performance and relationships at work.
- Individuals who are suffering from stress *for whatever reason* must have support and access to help.

### **Our Commitment to You**

*The Council recognises work-related pressure and stress as a genuine health and safety issue.*

*The Council is committed to fulfilling its health and safety duties by reducing the causes of work related pressure and stress. We will achieve this by working together with staff to minimise stress in the workplace and through working with individuals affected by stress - whether work related or of a personal nature - to mitigate the adverse effects of stress. The Council believes all staff can participate in this process by doing whatever they reasonably can to reduce work-related stress.*

## **ORGANISATION**

### **Responsibilities of Corporate Management Group:**

Corporate Management Group are key to promoting individual and organisational, health and well-being. The beliefs and attitudes of directors and the senior management team will set the cultural attitude of the organisation especially when sensitive issues are addressed such as stress and mental health.

It is the responsibility of Corporate Management Group to:

- Ensure that the policy is understood and implemented within their areas of responsibility.
- Ensure that the Business Areas for which they have been designated as responsible perform the responsibilities outlined in this document.
- Ensure that adequate resources are included in budgets, business plans and staffing levels to reduce potential stressors, in particular, demands.
- Ensure that stress risk assessments are completed, the risks being eliminated where practicable or reduced to acceptable and manageable levels in order that little potential for harm exists.
- Ensure that effective means of communication are established and maintained.
- Support the application of this policy and set an effective example to others by positive action and compliance with the agreed procedures.

### **Responsibilities of Managers**

To prevent and manage work-related stress, you need to:

- Accept that work-related stress might be a problem for your staff.
- Understand what work-related stress is and the relationship between work and home stress.
- Listen to your staff, both individually and as a team, and take action on what you find out.
- Set expectations with your staff, so that they understand what you can and cannot do for them.
- Make time to tackle stress properly, ensuring that you are approachable and available to discuss issues of concern with individual members of staff.

It is the responsibility of Managers to ensure that:

- They set clear objectives, have good communication channels, involve staff in decision making, provide management support and appropriate training.
- They set realistic deadlines, plan and agree working hours, look at flexibility in work schedules.
- Tasks and responsibilities are well defined, ways of avoiding boring repetitive jobs are considered, skills are used appropriately, suitable training is provided.
- Staff are treated with respect and dignity, training is available in interpersonal skills, effective systems are in place for dealing with interpersonal conflict e.g. bullying or harassment.
- They assess the risk of stress to their staff and implement recommendations of risk assessments.
- Measures are put into place to address jobs with high demands/pressures.

- They discuss with the employee the findings of the risk assessment. If appropriate, make changes to their role in order to reduce the levels of stress experienced, referring to HR where appropriate.
- They attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety.
- There is good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Staff are fully trained to discharge their duties and workloads are monitored to ensure that people are not overloaded.
- Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking. Monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.
- They are vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work e.g. bereavement or separation.
- They seek help/advice when required – support and advice are available from HR and the Senior Health & Safety Officer.

### **Responsibilities of Employees**

It is each employee's responsibility to:

- Take a share in the joint responsibility of management of health and stress hazards in the workplace.
- Raise issues of concern about anything that may lead to stress or other health related hazards with their line manager, Human Resources, Senior Health & Safety Officer or UNISON Health & Safety Representative.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.
- After a period of absence from work with stress related illness, cooperate with their manager and/or HR on a planned return to work.
- Take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing by:
  - working healthily
  - taking regular breaks, rest and holidays
  - Supporting one another.

### **Responsibilities of Human Resources**

- Help monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.
- Advise managers and individuals on training requirements.
- Provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to occupational workplace counsellors where appropriate.
- Refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.

## **ARRANGEMENTS**

The Council will:

- Identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- Provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in the management of stress.
- monitor stress ( see below )
- Provide initiatives which have various health benefits and may help to reduce stress and help staff relax.
- Provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress.
- Consult with UNISON Safety Representatives via the Health & Safety Committee on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- Continue to provide training for all managers in good management practices.
- Provide training for all managers in spotting symptoms of stress in themselves and in their staff.
- Provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the Council's agreed stress management strategy.
- Provide access to confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.

The Senior Health & Safety Officer will:

- Give guidance to managers on the stress policy.
- Provide advice on stress and stressors ( things that give rise to stress ).
- Advise and support managers in undertaking stress risk assessments.
- Advise managers on a planned return to work for any staff who have been off sick with stress.
- Inform the employer and the health and safety committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

### **The HSE's Stress Management Standards**

As an employer, we have a duty to ensure that risks arising from work activity are properly controlled. The HSE's Management Standards approach was designed to help employers work with their employees and their representatives to undertake risk assessments for stress and give managers the help they need to achieve these aims.

The HSE's Management Standards highlight the six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, may be associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness other absence. In words, the six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work ( stressors). If we can achieve these standards, there is a lower likelihood that our staff will be adversely affected by stress.

The stressors are:

- Demands – such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- Control – such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- Support – such as the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- Relationships – such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- Role – such as whether people understand their role within the Council and whether the Council ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.

- Change – such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated.

More detailed explanations of the six standards can be found in Appendix 3, which can also be used as a checklist.

Woking Borough Council accepts these standards and will work with them.

### **MONITORING STRESS**

Taking action to reduce stress can result in better health, reduced sickness absence, increased performance and output, better working relationships and lower staff turnover.

Human Resources will monitor stress levels within the Council to assess if we are achieving the standards set by the HSE and uniformity of application of Council policy. This will involve looking at:

- § long and short term sickness absence levels relating to stress
- § patterns of sickness absence which could indicate symptoms of stress
- § stress related ill health retirements
- § staff turnover rates
- § feedback from exit interviews
- § staff surveys

This information will be referred to Corporate Management Group as part of the regular staff statistics submitted.

### **What to do if you feel you are suffering from work related stress**

Should any member of staff feel that they are suffering from an unacceptable level of work-related stress, they should inform their line manager, who will treat the matter with sympathy and in confidence. If you prefer, Human Resources advisors are available throughout the week to listen and to discuss with you any concerns you have. Contact with HR can be made by email or telephone, as usual.

If you have been off work with a stress-related illness, talk about it with your manager when you return. Say how you feel, explain what led to the event and what you would like to see happen. Take a colleague or a UNISON representative with you if you do not feel you can do this on your own.

### **Additional Sources of Help**

There is a Listening Officer who is available to listen to your problems. UNISON offers a confidential welfare service which is open to UNISON members. Current contact details can be found in Appendix 5.

External counselling services are available; you need to be referred by HR. If appropriate, counselling provided externally is funded by the Council and is entirely confidential.

### **Non-work problems**

Whilst we are not responsible for causes of stress outside the working environment, we recognise that it can impact on an employee's attendance and work performance. Therefore, we would encourage employees to raise any problems which are causing them concern to their line manager, Human Resources, Senior Health & Safety Officer or UNISON Health & Safety Representative.