Managing Workplace Stress

Policy
Guiding Principles
&
Procedures

Prepared by: **Human Resources**

Date: **October 2015**

For Review: **October 2018**

CONTENTS

Appendices

Policy Statement on Managing Workplace Stress

1.1 Introduction

Chesterfield Borough Council (CBC) is committed to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees. CBC recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of not only identifying workplace stressors but of tackling them at the earliest opportunity.

This policy document aims to provide relevant comprehensible information on how the council will deal with work-related stress and the procedures in place to protect staff from the effects of excessive pressure. The council aims to create an environment where, if workplace stress does occur, it can be dealt with openly and fairly by managers and staff.

The council has identified the following aims for the effective management of stress;

1. To take action to identify and so far is reasonable, eliminate or reduce workplace stressors;
2. To conduct risk assessments to obtain this information which will be reviewed regularly;
3. To develop working practices that reduce the factors which may lead to excessive pressure in the workplace;
4. To develop procedures to manage problems that do occur and to support individuals who are stressed;
5. To monitor procedures and outcomes, and to assess the effectiveness of the policy, to increase general awareness of stress and the methods available to combat its damaging effects;
6. To provide a safe working environment that is free from harassment and victimisation;
7. To provide sound management practices that are based on equality of treatment;
8. To ensure effective workload allocation and feedback on performance;
9. To provide information and training to enable staff to develop their skills and maximise their contribution to the success of business;
10. To enable adequate rehabilitation of staff returning to work after periods of absence due to stress;

Guidance on Work Place Stress

2.1 Definition of Stress

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure of 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.

The council recognises that dealing with work-related stress is an ongoing process that requires commitment from all levels of staff and that whilst a degree of stress can be a positive force at work, excessive pressures can have a negative effect on health and on performance of individuals and groups at work. All reasonable steps will be taken by the council to ensure factors such as those listed below are addressed;

(a)   job design and lack of control of workload
(b)   working environment
(c)   relationships with others at work

(d)   communication arrangements
(e)   employee's skills, experience and ability to carry out the work

2.2 Individual effects of stress

- Reduced morale / commitment to work
- Physical and / or mental ill-health
- Poor judgement; lack of concentration; poor memory
- Poor relationships with clients
- Tension and conflict between colleagues
- High job dissatisfaction
- Burn out, tiredness, exhaustion
- Escapist drinking, smoking

2.3 Organisational effects of stress

- Increased absenteeism and decreased productivity
- Reduced quality of work and customer care
- Increase in disciplinary cases
- High employee turnover
- Increase in industrial relations problems
- Increase in ill-health dismissals
- Negative impact on organisational culture
- Increased pressure on work colleagues
- Poor use of management time
- Higher costs associated with sick pay, providing cover for absent employees, recruitment costs, training costs etc.
- Loss of knowledge, skills and experience

2.4 Potential Causes of Stress

The list of potential causes of stress in employees is non exhaustive (see **Appendix 1**)

2.5 Mechanism for identifying and monitoring the incidence of stress

There is no one simple mechanism that can be used to identify the risk of stress but those listed in **Appendix 2** are indicators.

Situations at home can combine with pressures at work to make people more vulnerable to stress. Employers have no legal duty to prevent ill health due to stress that is not work related, but the ability to cope at work can be reduced by home pressures such as money worries or relationship problems.   Therefore managers must ensure effective communication with their staff in not only identifying risks that are considered hidden factors such as the home situation, while addressing issues such as working irregular hours, the requirement to take work home on a regular basis to meet routine work loads.

Signs which managers or supervisors may notice include unusual irritability, resentment of advice, unsociable and withdrawn behaviour, absenteeism and poor time keeping, overworking, poor performance, changes in appearance and appetite, increased use of coffee, alcohol or drugs, and accident proneness.

3.0 Organisational Responsibilities

3.1 Chief Executive Officer

The Chief Executive Officer has overall responsibility for ensuring this policy extends to all those likely to be affected by the Council workplace activities.

3.2 Senior Managers & Supervisors responsibilities

It is important to recognise the causes of excessive stress so that they can be avoided or minimised. There are occasions when the source of a problem is unavoidable and in these circumstances, careful management and early intervention is necessary to avoid staff becoming unwell as a result.

Managers at all levels have a key role to play in considering the work load and health implications of decisions involving staff. It is recognised that the style of management adopted has an impact on stress levels amongst staff and tools are available for managers to assess their own style with a view to adjusting accordingly. http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.pdf

3.3 Responsibilities of employees who feel they may be suffering from stress

Employees, who believe there is a factor in the workplace causing work-related stress, must bring this to the attention of their line manager, Health and Safety representative or HR team so that the appropriate measures can be taken.

It is essential that individuals work with their manager to resolve issues and co-operate in minimising, so far as is reasonably practicable, work-related stress. Individuals have a part to play in making reasonable adjustments, where working practices have to change due to circumstances beyond the council's control.

Any occupational health referrals will be dealt with confidentiality, however, it will only be possible for the council to take action to reduce, or eliminate the cause of any work-related stress, or to support someone experiencing stress from external sources, if the individual involved is prepared to discuss it with a manager.

4.0 Managing Workplace Stress

4.1 Assessing risk to employees

Managers/Supervisors are responsible for carrying out yearly team risk assessments and developing actions plans as a result of the assessment. They must also undertake assessments whenever an individual is identified as suffering with work-related stress. This must be done in consultation with union safety reps and staff.

The HSE have identified management standards which look at the six key areas of work that, if properly managed, can help to reduce work-related stress. The questions are based around the six risk factors:

Demands   Includes issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment.
Control   How much say the person has in the way they do their work.

Support	Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
Relationships	Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
Role	Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
Change	How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

4.2 Risk Assessment Process

For the yearly team assessment, Managers/Supervisors must arrange a team briefing including union safety reps and get employees to complete a questionnaire **(Appendix 3)**. The line managers must collate the information and document potential stress risk and include them on the Action Plan **(Appendix 4)** giving current state information a risk rating and actions agreed to lower the risk.

Where an individual stress questionnaire highlights a personal stress issue, the manager should arrange a private meeting using the questionnaire as a starting point for meaningful discussion with the employee. Often an employee will not know what is causing their stress and this checklist helps to guide the conversation. A separate stress action plan must be developed in conjunction with the individual to address their personal issues, seeking advice from HR and H & S as necessary.

Supervisors / line managers must ensure that a copy of the team risk assessment and action plan is passed to the health & safety advisor and their senior manager (CMT).

This process will be followed by each level of management i.e. line management, senior management, executive director etc.

Employees are reminded that if the cause of work pressure is related to their managers/ supervisors then they can go to a higher level of management, the HR Department, Health & Safety Advisor, Safety Representative or approach their Trade Union Representative.

The Risk Assessment/Action Plan should be reviewed if there is a significant change in the work activity, or if employee is known to be absent from work due to a pressure at work related condition (e.g. reactive illness).

Whilst undertaking the risk assessment/action plan, full consideration should be given to any other current risk assessments/action plans relating to this individual's role or workplace, for example workplace and display screen, manual handling, or disability assessments.

The principles of risk assessment for work related stress do not differ from other forms of risk assessment. The review of the documentation will consider the effectiveness of the measures in place to prevent and/or protect staff against the risk of work-related stress, and if necessary recommend appropriate action to be taken.

Appropriate training and guidance will be available for managers who are required to conduct stress risk assessments.

The Health & Safety Executive's (HSE) website holds a wealth of useful information and toolkits relating to workplace stress. Employees and managers are advised to visit

www.hse.gov.uk/stress/ for further information relating to risk assessments and the HSE's management standards for workplace stress.

4.3 Resources to support staff and managers

The council is concerned with preventing ill-health and promoting health and well-being in the workplace. Employees may have access to a range of support including occupational health services, counselling services, training and advice from HR and H & S and Union support.

It is recommended that managers consult HR at an early stage if they believe that formal procedures such as Sickness, Bullying and Harassment, or Grievance might be a consideration. Where this is the case, issues will be dealt with in conjunction with the relevant Council policy.

If the employee has been absent from work due to stress related sickness, a return to work interview should be convened in accordance with the Managing Attendance Policy. During this meeting both the line manager and the member of staff should discuss the measures, which are being put in place.

4.4 Record Keeping

Keeping of records relating to staff is required for competence and proof of compliance with legal requirements. Management will ensure that adequate records are kept to demonstrate that they have taken all reasonably practicable steps in respect of stress prevention.

4.5 Procedures for reporting cases of work-related stress absence

Managers will investigate all reports of work-related stress absence reported to them. This will allow an immediate investigation into the circumstances relating to the injury/illness to take place. This is essential if the employee is to be prevented from returning to the same situation which led to the initial bout of absence. Under no circumstances will a member of staff suffer victimisation as a result of reporting that they are suffering from stress.

4.6 Investigation of Cases of Work-Related Stress Absence

Where cases of work-related stress have been reported, the corporate health and safety advisor may carry out an investigation. With the employees agreement this may involve the union safety representatives to ensure the employee feels supported throughout the process.

The investigation will determine whether there are any work place factors likely to give rise to stressful situations. It will not determine whether the individual is stressed.

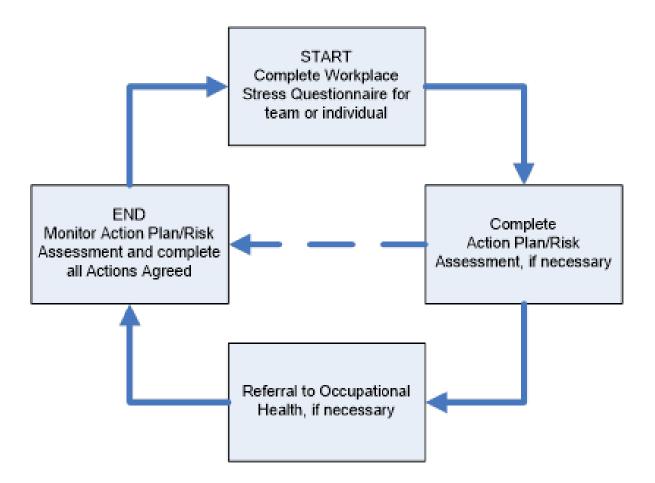The investigation will seek to establish the following points:

- Is the absence genuinely related to stress generated in the workplace?
- What is the nature of the 'stressors' involved? e.g. harassment, environmental, workloads, professional relationships, etc.
- Have existing CBC procedures (e.g. Grievance Procedures etc) been utilised where appropriate?
- Are other people affected or likely to be affected by the absence or the situation causing the absence?
- Are the 'stressors' still at a level where they are likely to cause further injury?

- Have steps been put in place to eliminate, or reduce the 'stressors', to an acceptable level?
- Where this is not practicable has the individual's task been redesigned to remove them from the 'stressors'?
- Alternatively, has the individual received training to enable them to deal with the 'stressors'?

4.7 Policy Monitoring

This Policy will be regularly monitored to ensure that the work-related stress objectives are consistently achieved throughout the Council.

5.0   Process diagram

```
        ┌─────────────────────────┐
        │         START           │
        │  Complete Workplace     │
        │  Stress Questionnaire   │
        │   for team or individual│
        └─────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│         END             │        │        Complete         │
│ Monitor Action Plan/Risk│  ◄---  │     Action Plan/Risk    │
│ Assessment and complete │        │  Assessment, if necessary│
│   all Actions Agreed    │        │                         │
└─────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────┘

        ┌─────────────────────────┐
        │ Referral to Occupational│
        │   Health, if necessary  │
        └─────────────────────────┘
```

Possible sources of stress in the workplace   APPENDIX 1

The following can be sources of stress arising from work;

Work organisation and conditions

continual changes in work, organisations and structures	lack of participation in decision making	complexity and demands of new systems
lack of control over work	inadequate staffing	low pay or low status
job insecurity	lack of recognition or promotion prospects	lack of facilities for rest breaks
unclear reporting lines	over promotion	lone working
excessive working hours	shift working	excessive workload

Work relationships

inconsistent management	poor management communication	customer/client complaints
lack of support or assistance	Bullying	lack of appropriate training
social isolation	harassment	the threat of violence
inconsiderate management	Conflicting demands	tasks inappropriate to ability
boring, repetitive work	surveillance	uncertainty about responsibilities
under use of skills	time pressures	responsibility for others

Physical conditions

excessive noise	poor ventilation	exposure to fumes, chemicals, or other unpleasant substances
poor lighting	poor equipment	exposure to the elements
poor temperature control	poor workstation	

Indicators that there may be a stress problem   **APPENDIX 2**

Managers and supervisors may notice some of the following symptoms occurring within their area of responsibility. Where they feel this may be the case they should contact the Health and Safety Manager and or the Human Resources team to seek further advice. Where the manager, the Health and Safety Manager or Human Resources note an increase in any of the following indicators they should immediately open discussion on the matter with the line manager.

- High levels of sickness absence
- High staff turnover
- Increase in accident levels
- Increase in number of disputes/grievances/complaints
- Noticeable reduction in performance levels

a) For Individuals

Indicators of stress can be:

Emotional – anxiety, anger, resentment, frustration, moodiness, irritability, loss of pleasure and interest, despair, depression and losing sleep through worry, guilt, shame

Physical – could include raised blood pressure, panic attacks, tenseness, tiredness, appetite disturbance, nausea, headaches, light-headedness, disturbed sleep, reduced ability to resist infections and slow to recover from infections

Mental - impairment of perception, concentration, memory, judgement, decisiveness, accuracy, motivation and creativity, reduced belief in ability to cope

Relationships – relationships are likely to be more difficult at work and elsewhere, increased tension or argumentative and quarrelsome atmospheres between the individual, colleagues or other people, fall outs

Behavioural – changes in patterns of behaviour, seeking to avoid or escape from situations, particularly social events, increased alcohol consumption, increased smoking, over the counter drug taking, change in sexual appetite, eating disorders, accident proneness impairment of perception

b) For Managers

Individual members of staff may demonstrate any of the following:

Emotional – moodiness, high state of anxiety, anger, frustration, depression

Physical – Headaches, rise in blood pressure, aggravation of a heart condition, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, weight loss / gain, skin conditions, indigestion, ulcers,
muscular tension, fatigue, insomnia, depletion of immune system, tiredness, disturbed sleep patterns, un-refreshed after sleep

Mental – anxiety, low self-esteem, mood swings, - irritability, memory loss, lack of motivation and creativity, concentration, memory, judgement, decisiveness, accuracy, motivation and creativity

Relationships – increased difficulty between colleagues, tense atmospheres between people

These could result in excessive absence from work or a pattern of absence, such as frequent odd days of absence, long periods of absence through anxiety or depression, poor timekeeping, impaired performance and/or frequent mistakes made, accidents or dangerous occurrences.

General indicators of a problem - high turnover of staff, complaints of harassment or bullying, complaints or grievances

Workplace Stress Questionnaire

APPENDIX 3

Name: **Team / Department:**   **Date Completed:**

		Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Demands					
1.	Do you have unachievable deadlines?				
2.	Do you have to work very intensively?				
3.	Do different groups at work demand things from you that are hard to combine?				
4.	Do you have to neglect some tasks because you have too much to do?				
5.	Do you take sufficient breaks?				
6.	Are you pressured to work long hours?				
7.	Do you frequently take work home?				
8.	Do you have unrealistic time pressures?				
9.	Do you feel guilty about taking your holiday entitlement?				
		Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Control					
10.	Do you have control over when you take breaks?				
11.	Does the job provide a variety of tasks?				
12.	Do you rotate work to minimise repetitive activities?				
13.	Do you have some say over the way you work?				

		Yes	No	N/A	Comments
14.	Is your working time flexible?				
15.	Do you have control over your physical working environment?				

		Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Manager / Supervisors Support					
16.	Are you given supportive feedback on the work you do?				
17.	Can you rely on your manager to help you out with a work problem?				
18.	Can you raise issues for discussion at team meetings held by your manager / supervisor?				

		Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Peer Support					
19.	Do you get help and support from your colleagues?				
20.	Do you have insufficient administration, clerical support?				

		Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Relationships					
21.	Are you subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour?				
22.	Is there friction or anger between colleagues?				
23.	Are you subject to bullying at work?				
24.	Are relationships at worked strained?				
25.	Are team building sessions carried out?				
26.	Are you able to hold confidential discussions with your manager if required?				
27.	Are you aware of the Council's policies on equal opportunities, personal harassment / bullying?				

		Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Role					
28.	Are you clear what is expected of you at work?				
29.	Are you clear about what your duties and responsibilities are?				
Role cont.					
30.	Do you feel a lack of job security?				
31.	Are you clear about the goals and objectives for your team / department?				
32.	Are you made aware of the reasons for setting particular deadlines?				
33.	Do you require additional training for your role?				
		Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Change					
34.	Are you consulted about changes within your department?				
35.	Do you have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work?				
36.	When changes are made at work, are you clear how they will work out in practice?				
Further Comments:					

Risk Assessment/Action Plan arising from Questionnaire Results

Team / Department: **Line Manager:**   **Date:**

Risk Factor	Current State	Risk Rating H/M/L	Actions Agreed	Responsible Person	How will staff receive feedback	Date Action completed
Demands						
Control						
Support						
Role						
Change						
Environment						

Agreed Review Date: _____