

# **WORK-RELATED STRESS POLICY**

**Approved by Executive Board July 2010**

## **Introduction**

Great Yarmouth Borough Council is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees. We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

This policy will apply to everyone in the Council. Service Unit Managers are responsible for its implementation within their Services and the Directors and Heads of Departments are responsible for providing the necessary resources.

See also the Attendance and Health Policy regarding work-related ill health or injury.

## **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 and challenge, which can be motivating and stimulating if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. Nobody can be considered to be immune as a person’s response will depend on the amount of pressure and ability to cope at the time and will therefore differ from person to person.

## **Policy**

Great Yarmouth Borough Council recognizes that the well-being of its employees is important to the Council’s performance and service delivery, together with supporting people as valued employees.

Primarily the Council is concerned with stress arising from the working environment, but it also recognizes that events occurring in an employee’s personal life may also lead to stress. Therefore, sometimes an approach has to be taken of giving appropriate assistance to an employee, whatever the cause of their stress, particularly if this has an impact on the employee’s ability to work effectively.

The Council aims to take positive measures to manage stress effectively these include:

- Conducting risk assessments to identify all workplace stressors and to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed by managers.
- Consulting with Trade Union Safety Representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- Providing training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices.
- Providing confidential counseling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
- Providing training to managers and supervisory staff in good management practices
- Providing adequate resources to enable managers to implement the Council's agreed stress management strategy.
- Monitoring and reviewing the stress management approach to ensure that it continues to meet the Council's needs.

## **Supporting Principles**

The following principles apply to the Council's approach to dealing with stress:

- The management of stress will be dealt with in a way that is non-discriminatory and in accordance with our equal opportunities policy.
- Employees will be dealt with fairly and consistently across the organisation.
- The Council will aim to provide a positive and preventative approach to stress rather than a punitive one.
- The Council will be sensitive and supportive, as far as is reasonably practicable, to those experiencing stress.
- The management of stress, including the monitoring of stress-related information will be conducted with respect for individual confidentiality and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection and Access to Medical Reports Acts.
- Open communication will be encouraged and promoted.

## **Responsibilities**

### **Heads of Departments**

- Provide adequate resources, support and training to Service Unit Managers to enable them to be suitably resourced and trained to manage the service effectively
- Demonstrate their commitment to this policy by ensuring that the principles and approaches to managing stress are implemented.

### **Service Unit Managers**

- Conduct and implement recommendations of risk assessments within their Service Unit, using the HSE's on-line stress indicator tools
- Ensure good communication between all staff and managers within the Service, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes
- Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful development opportunities
- Monitor workloads to ensure that staff 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
- Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their service
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work, e.g. bereavement or separation.
- Provide adequate support to line managers in the implementation of this policy.
- Adopt an open attitude, ensuring that they are accessible to employees who wish to discuss problems and anxieties and that the communication methods are effective.

### **Human Resources**

- Give guidance to managers on the stress policy.
- Assist in monitoring 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 counselors where appropriate.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.
- Refer staff to workplace counselors or specialist agencies as required, including independent occupational health physicians to provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress

### **Health and Safety Advisor**

- Provide guidance, training and support to managers in implementing stress risk assessments and the HSE's Management Standards on tackling work-related stress
- Inform Heads of Department, and the Health and Safety Heads of Department Group of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.
- Monitor and Review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress

### **Employees**

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- Support the Council's stress initiatives including using the on-line e-learning and/or completing the HSE's on-line indicator tools
- Recognize that they themselves may be a cause of stress to others, accept responsibility and take action to deal with this.
- Attend appropriate training so that they are better able to recognize and manage pressure and stress in themselves and others
- Communicate openly and honestly with their manager and colleagues
- Identify causes of stress in the workplace and report them to their line manager.
- Take responsibility for their own well-being at work.
- Raise issues of concern with your Safety Representative, line manager or ask Human Resources for a referral to occupational health.
- Accept opportunities for counseling when recommended.

## **Function of Trade Union Representatives**

- Consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress.
- Consult with members on the issue of stress including conducting workplace surveys.
- Participate in the risk assessment process and in inspections of the workplace to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.
- Promote and support stress initiatives in the workplace and encourage full participation by everyone
- Ensure their members are aware of support mechanisms available to them.

## **Role of the Health and Safety (HoD's) Group**

- Perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented and updated to meet the needs of the Council.
- Oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

## **Signs of Stress**

Some common signs of stress are listed below. However, experiencing any of these does not necessarily give an indication of stress and further advice should be sought from HR when concerns are raised.

- Persistent or recurrent moods – anger, irritability, detachment, worry, depression, guilt and sadness.
- Physical sensations/effects – aches and pains, raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin or sleep disorders.
- Changed behaviours – increased absence levels, difficulty concentrating or remembering things, inability to switch off, loss of creativity, making more errors, double checking everything, eating disorders, and covering up mistakes by lying, increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs.

Prolonged or extreme exposure to the possible symptoms of stress is associated with serious chronic disease such as heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal problems, anxiety or depression.

Managers should also be aware of the following possible signs:

- Increase in overall sickness absence – particularly frequent short-term absences.
- Poor work performance – less output, lower quality, poor decision making.
- Relationships at work – conflict between colleagues, poor relationships with clients.
- Staff attitude and behaviour – loss of motivation or commitment, poor time-keeping, working longer hours but with diminishing effectiveness.

Where managers have concerns they must discuss these with the individual concerned, to identify any further actions required.

## Support for Managers and Employees experiencing Stress

The following support mechanisms are available to assist with implementation of this policy:

- **Independent occupational health advisers** – to provide advice and guidance on the impact of stress on work and what steps the Council and /or employee can take
- **Independent counselling service** - a confidential counselling service which is available free to Council employees. The service is provided by an external counselling organisation, with telephone and face-to-face counselling available. Individuals can contact the service with home or work related issues.
- **Human Resources** – to provide support and guidance to managers and employees on issues relating to stress
- **Health and Safety Advisor** – to provide advice and guidance to managers and employees on issues relating to risk assessment, and ways

- to minimise or eliminate risk and provide guidance on potential stressors like physical or environmental factors.
- **Trade Unions** – to provide advice and representation to union members
  - **Great Yarmouth Borough Council Chaplin** - Peter Paine on 077881 11823 or email peter.paine@rjt.co.uk

## **Carrying out the Risk Assessment for Stress at Work**

To assist managers in undertaking the risk assessment for stressors at work the Council has provided an e-learning stress training package for each staff member to undertake as a first step, but where areas of concern are raised Managers should ask staff to conduct the HSE's Management Standards Indicator Tool.

Managers must communicate the findings of the risk assessment to their team/s and line manager. Any actions identified must have the approval of the line manager, and where a corporate action is suggested, the approval of the Head of Department

The manager may like to consider completing the HSE's Line Manager Competency Tool to identify areas where they may be able to help staff in the management of stress, and discuss their findings with their line manager.

All the assessments and actions agreed should be reviewed at least every year or when there has been a significant change in the work environment.

## **Reporting Incidents of Work-Related Stress**

If an employee feels they are experiencing work-related stress, they must report this on the Council's Accident, Incident, Violence and Near Miss Report Form.

As part of the investigation, the line manager should:

- Review any previous stress risk assessments carried out.
- Ask the employee to provide the reasons and examples of why they feel they are experiencing work-related stress
- Draw up an action plan and review the progress with the staff member/s concerned
- Record all of the above on the Accident, Incident, Violence and Near Miss Report Form and pass to the Health and Safety Advisor
- Review the progress with the staff member/s concerned and identify any further actions to be taken and adjust the action plan

Absence from work due to stress (whether work or non-work related) must also be reported in accordance with the Council's sickness absence reporting procedures.

Where the employee is uncomfortable discussing these issues with their line manager then they should contact the HR department for advice.