Corporate Guidance

The Management of Work-Related Stress

1. Aim

The aim of this corporate guidance document is to express the council's commitment to supporting its employees with work-related stress. This guidance complies with the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 relating to work-related stress.

2. Scope

This guidance applies across all areas of service throughout the council wherever services are delivered including schools but excluding West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service who must make additional specific arrangements for managing work-related stress.

3. Who can help?

Health and Safety Service - healthandsafety@westsussex.gov.uk, 01243 752025

If you require this document in an alternative format then please contact the HR Policy Queries email: HRPolicyQueries@westsussex.gov.uk

Date	Document created	Author
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Glossary	
The council	West Sussex County Council
HSS	Health and Safety Service
SRP	Site Responsible Person
HR&OD	Human Resources & Organisational Development
FM	Facilities Management

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5. Related policies, procedures and guidance

The council has a number of related Human Resources policies, procedures and guidance, and Health and Safety policies, procedures and guidance, to help managers, head teachers and staff on the design, organisation and management of staff, work and workplaces. These are published on The Point or WSSfS. They provide useful information and guidance from absence management through to whistle-blowing. Managers, head teachers and staff should refer to these when managing work-related stress.

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6. Definition of Stress

There is a difference between pressure and stress. In life, in general, pressure is a motivating factor and is often essential to help people achieve their goals and perform better. Stress occurs when this pressure becomes excessive. Stress is a natural reaction to too much pressure.

In the workplace, well-designed, organised and managed workloads and good individual / team relationships can motivate staff but when insufficient attention is given to job design, work organisation and management, manager / employee relationships become strained, which can result in work-related stress. The Health & Safety Executive's (HSE) definition of work-related stress is: -

"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work."

This means that work-related stress develops because a person is unable to cope with the demands being placed on them at work.

Stress, both work-related and non-work-related, can be a significant cause of illness and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as presenteeism[1], absenteeism[2].

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7. What are the risks?

Stress affects different people in different ways, and everyone has a different way of dealing with it. The hormones (e.g. cortisol, adrenaline) that are released by your body as a result of stress can build up over time and cause various mental and physical ill-health. Signs can include: -

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[1] **Presenteeism** - the act of staying at work longer than usual, or going to work when you are ill, to show that you work hard and are important to your employer.
[2] **Absenteeism** - the practice of regularly staying away from work or school without good reason.

- Anger;
- Depression;
- Anxiety;
- Changes in behaviour;
- Food cravings;
- Lack of appetite;
- Frequent crying;
- Difficulty sleeping (mental);
- Feeling tired;
- Difficulty concentrating;
- Chest pains;
- Constipation or diarrhoea;

- Cramps or muscle spasms;
- Dizziness;
- Fainting spells;
- Nail biting;
- Nervous twitches;
- Pins and needles;
- Feeling restless;
- A tendency to sweat;
- Loss of interest in sex;
- Breathlessness;
- Muscular aches;
- Difficulty sleeping (physical).

Experiencing one or more of the signs outlined above could be an indication that you are stressed. See NHS Stress website for more details.

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8. Managing Stress

Managing Non-Work-Related Stress
The council recognises that, unlike many other issues at work, there is an inevitable cross-over between home life and the workplace. Stress manifested at work may be caused, wholly or partly, by something happening in the home, and vice versa. Line managers, head teachers and staff at all levels must be aware of the possibility that an employee's personal circumstances may negatively affect their work and/or behaviour.

Managing Work-Related Stress
The HSE has published a set of Management Standards for employers to follow to help minimise the risk of staff experiencing work-related stress. These standards define the characteristics or culture of an organisation where the risks from work-related stress are being effectively managed and controlled. WSCC is guided by these Management Standards. See Appendix A for more detail on the HSE's Stress Management Standards.

Climate for Managing Work-Related Stress
To comply with the HSE's Stress Management Standards, there should be a climate in which staff have the confidence to seek assistance and discuss their work-related problems and their managers have the right tools to support them. Therefore, the council will: -

- Create an environment and management culture which is supportive to staff and managers who encounter difficulties in the workplace.
- Ensure HR&OD policies and procedures support the prevention, identification, control and reduction of work-related stress. It is especially important to maintain policies regarding discrimination, aggression, bullying and harassment that can cause work-related stress. This must create and support a climate which provides staff with confidence to report such incidents and, once reported, ensures fast and adequate management of the situation.

- Identify and implement training programmes to ensure managers and staff are competent in all aspects of their job, particularly people management and communication skills.
- Ensure the completion of risk assessments and preparation of appropriate safe systems of work to control risk factors intrinsic to the job, for example the physical working conditions, workstation design, computer-based tasks, or exposure to chemical and / or biological hazards.
- Ensure effective consultation regarding identified risks and hidden factors such as the need for working irregular hours and the requirement to take work home on a regular basis to meet routine workloads.
- Establish and manage a staff member's workload and capacity and fully understand their role in a supportive, non-punitive manner. Performance indicators must not be relied on as a guide to managing stress.
- Maintain a supportive approach to managing attendance at work and to rehabilitating staff back into full and gainful employment wherever reasonably practicable.
- Support the nomination, training and utilisation of Mental Health First Aiders (information about MHFAs).

9. Responsibilities for Managing Work-Related Stress

Line Managers at all levels and Head Teachers:
Line managers and Head Teachers are expected to: -

- Understand and put in place any recommendations and adjustments that have been identified as part of any risk assessments, in particular stress risk assessments.
- Communicate and consult with staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes, by sharing information appropriately.
- Ensure staff are sufficiently trained and informed to enable them to carry out their duties.
- Enable staff to access opportunities to develop within their role.
- Routinely monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded and develop co-produced management plans if they are.
- Monitor working hours, overtime and flexitime to ensure that staff are working according to relevant council policies.
- Monitor annual leave entitlements to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment are not tolerated within their area(s) of jurisdiction.
- Be alert to the possibility that staff maybe be hiding their stress, particularly if they work remotely.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to any member of staff who is experiencing stress outside of work, e.g. bereavement or separation.
- Ensure that safe and healthy working environments are provided and maintained, so far as is reasonably practicable.

- Support a timely stress risk assessment for any staff member who reports to be suffering adverse health effects from work-related stress or who has been absent from work because of work-related stress.

Employees:
As an employee, your role is to: -

- Consider a stress risk assessment, either: -
  - o Voluntarily, if you feel it might help you, or
  - o If your line manager / head teacher or other colleague / representative suggests that it might be beneficial.
- Speak to your line manager / head teacher as soon as possible if you have any concerns or need more support, alternatively speak to your HR business partner or Health & Safety Service (as appropriate).
- Consider accepting opportunities for counselling or specialist advice offered by the council's Occupational Health provider or the [Employee Assistance Programme](#).
- Follow appropriate safe systems for work laid down for your health, safety and wellbeing.

Human Resources & Organisational Development (HR&OD):
The HR&OD department will provide support by: -

- Giving guidance to managers at all levels on stress management.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.
- Conducting periodic voluntary, confidential and anonymous forms of engagement with staff to help establish the extent of work-related stress.
- Gather information on work-related stress from exit interviews and return to work, discipline and grievance interviews.
- Advise Executive Directors, Directors, Heads of Services and Line / Team Managers on training requirements.
- Provide continuing support to Executive Directors, Directors, Heads of Services and Line / Team Managers and staff in a changing environment.
- Refer staff to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required, e.g. the Occupational Health contractor or the [Employee Assistance Programme](#).
- Support staff who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.

Facilities Management (FM) and Site Responsible Persons (SRP):
FM and SRPs will provide support by: -

- Ensuring council workplaces are properly managed, maintained and cleaned according to relevant UK legislation, British Standards, industry guidance and relevant WSCC Corporate Guidance, to ensure that staff and volunteers are working in a safe and healthy working environment, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Health & Safety Service:
The Health & Safety Service will provide support by: -

- Providing advice and guidance and, working with Learning & Development, ensuring stress awareness and management training is available.
- Providing support to line managers in implementing stress risk assessments.
- Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of measures to reduce work-related stress.
- Informing directorate health and safety representatives of any changes and developments in the field of work-related stress.

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10. Stress Risk Assessment

Guidance for staff:
Where staff are experiencing signs of work-related stress, have been absent from work due to work-related stress or stress is impacting on their work, they are invited to complete a stress risk assessment to help them to identify and deal with the causes. If they choose to complete the stress risk assessment, they are not obliged to share its contents with anybody, however it may help if they share it (or parts of it) with their line manager / head teacher so that they can receive appropriate support.

If a staff member doesn't feel able to talk directly to their line manager / head teacher about a work-related concern (e.g. that person might be the cause of their stress), they should ask a colleague or other representative (e.g. trade union) to raise the issues on their behalf. The staff member can also choose to follow the council's Grievance Policy if they so wish.

Guidance for managers / head teachers:
Managers / head teachers should offer their staff the opportunity to complete a stress risk assessment: -

- When a member of staff has been off sick with work-related stress (as part of the return to work interview).
- Where it is believed that an individual or team are likely to be suffering from work-related stress;
- During regular performance management conversations;
- To plan for major change.

The stress risk assessment can be given out as a survey, or used as a guide during a meeting with an individual or a team.

When the stress risk assessment has been completed, an Action Plan/s can be developed with staff to address any areas of concern; this should be reviewed regularly.

A template for the stress risk assessment can be found on the Corporate stress management page on The Point and for schools on WSSfS - stress management page (head teachers should share this information with staff who do not have access to WSSfS).

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11. Training

Training in stress awareness and management and other aspects of mental health and wellbeing is available on the [Learning & Development Gateway](). Search under 'Stress', 'Mental Health' and 'Wellbeing'.

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12. Getting Help, Advice and Support

Where staff are suffering from excessive stress, the council will provide the necessary mechanisms to promote a return to full health as quickly as possible.

To get access to these mechanisms, staff should, in the first instance, talk to their line / team manager or head teacher. Alternatively, they can refer themselves to any one of the following: -

- Their Director or Head of Service;
- HR&OD Business Partners;
- Talk to a [Mental Health First Aider]();
- Health and Safety Service;
- Their Union Representative;
- Their family doctor;
- The [Employee Assistance Programme]();
- An available external counselling service.

All referrals will be dealt with in complete confidence. Employees will be offered any relevant counselling, help with stress reduction techniques and a full appraisal of their work situation.

Note: For more detail, refer to: -
- The [Corporate stress management page on The Point]() and for schools on WSSfS, stress management page (head teachers should share this information with staff who do not have access to WSSfS).

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Appendix A – The Health & Safety Executive's Stress Management Standards

The HSE's Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates. The Management Standards are as follows; open the links for more detail and examples:-

- Demands – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment;
- Control – how much say the person has in the way they do their work;
- Support – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the council, line management and colleagues;
- Relationships – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour;
- Role – whether people understand their role within the council and whether the council ensures that they do not have conflicting roles;
- Change – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the council.

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