



Managing Stress in the Workplace

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Contents

	Page Nos
1. Introduction	3
2. Who do these Arrangements Affect?	3
3. What is Undue Pressure?	3
4. What is Stress?	3
5. Why Manage Stress?	4
6. How is Stress Managed Corporately?	4
7. How is Stress Identified and Managed Locally?	5
8. Individual Stress Assessments	6
9. Stress due to Events Outside of Work	7
10. Sickness Absence due to Stress	7
11. Responsibilities	7
12. Confidentiality	8
13. Equality Impact Assessment & Monitoring	9
14. Data Protection	9

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Council firmly believes that its employees are its most valuable asset and to enable all staff to perform at their best it is committed to promoting a positive working environment, free from unnecessary or undue pressures. To help ensure and maintain such an environment the Council will work in collaboration with employees, managers, Occupational Health and recognised Trade Unions. The Council will also, where appropriate work in partnership with external bodies.
- 1.2 The Council will support any member of staff identified as being subjected to undue pressure at work or experiencing symptoms of stress due to events or concerns outside of work. The Council will achieve this by encouraging early reporting of symptoms by employees and ensuring that managers regularly communicate with staff and are aware of the appropriate support mechanisms available.
- 1.3 These arrangements both support and are supported by other Council arrangements, policies and procedures see section 5 of this document.

2. What is Undue Pressure?

- 2.1 Undue pressure is a complex issue that can often involve multiple causes. These causes may be related to events or circumstances in the workplace, may emanate from home life or may result as a combination both.
- 2.2 Most individuals will experience, in their life, times when they feel they are subjected to undue pressure. Such times may occur following bereavements, serious illness, a period of unscheduled unemployment or major upheaval.
- 2.3 In the workplace pressure or challenges can often have a positive effect by motivating individuals and assisting the organisation in its achievement of targets and goals. However persistent undue pressure may result in some individuals experiencing adverse reactions, in other words feeling stressed.

3. What is Stress?

- 3.1 The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them”. This definition makes an important distinction between pressure and challenges at work that keep individuals motivated, and stress which can sometimes be detrimental to health. The link to the HSE Stress pages on the internet can be found [here](#).
- 3.2 The Council aims to ensure that all employees understand stress, particularly occupational (work-related) stress and how to identify, prevent and control it. The Council recognises the potential effects stress may have upon performance and attendance and will therefore deal with such matters sensitively and appropriately.

4. Why Manage Stress?

- 4.1 The Council has implemented these arrangements in order to reduce the likelihood of occupational stress related illnesses and help ensure the continued good health and well being of all Council employees. Prolonged exposure to undue pressure

may significantly increase the risk of psychological and physiological damage, including depression and anxiety conditions.

4.2 These arrangements effectively demonstrate the Council's compliance with current health, safety and employment legislation. Compliance with these arrangements will also help to minimise the likelihood of stress related illness and will therefore reduce the potential for stress related absenteeism and consequently any resulting employee liability claims.

4.3 The benefits of tackling stress are well documented:

- Quality of working life – employees feel happier at work and perform better
- Management of change – introducing change at work is easier when stress is managed effectively
- Employee relations – these can be resolved within work and not escalate
- Attendance and sickness – attendance levels increase and sickness absence reduces

5. How is Stress Managed Corporately?

5.1 Policies and Procedures

The Council has a number of policies and procedures in place that significantly reduce the likelihood of undue pressure (therefore reducing the potential for stress) amongst its employees; these can be found in the Human Resources Section on the [Intranet](#) or available from the HR Team.

5.2 Staff Surveys

Corporately the Council carry out staff surveys on a regular basis which help to identify areas of undue pressure within the organisation. From the results of these surveys action plans will be produced to eliminate or reduce the likelihood of undue pressure occurring in areas identified as at risk.

5.3 Wellbeing Support available for staff

5.3.1 Employee Support Programme (EAP)

The Council provides a free of charge Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to all employees. The EAP can help and support employees with many of the issues and difficulties they face, whether work or home related. The EAP is provided by a company that is completely independent from the Council. The comprehensive service offers guidance on financial, legal, work, personal, stress and family care issues.

The confidential EAP telephone help line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Calls will be answered by a trained and experienced professional who will discuss problems with employees.

Information regarding the EAP is available in the form of leaflets, posters and on the intranet.

EAP can be contacted on 0800 882 4102.

Information is also available on-line at www.pamassist.co.uk using the following details:

Username: Wyre
Password: Council

5.3.2 Listening Service

The Listening Service provides the opportunity for staff to talk to someone independent confidentially about any stresses, worries, concerns etc. that they may have.

Information and videos sent by Karen Openshaw – the provider of the service can be seen on the Wyre Hub and appointments are made by contacting Karen on email karen@karenopenshaw.co.uk or text on 07496 240665.

5.3.3 Wellbeing Champions

The council have trained a number of staff in Mental Health First Aid who are able to provide a Listening Ear to staff who need it.

A list of Wellbeing Champions can be found on the Wellbeing page of the [Intranet](#).

5.3.4 Occupational Health

The Council provides an Occupational Health Service for employees that can be accessed through their line manager or the Human Resources Team. Upon referral, the Occupational Health Advisor will assess the employee and has the option to recommend various treatments, including counselling. A maximum of 6 counselling sessions may be provided, if where appropriate.

5.3.5 Other Activities

Employees are encouraged to access:

- the programme of activities available at the YMCA Leisure Centres. Further information can be accessed on the [YMCA](#) website.
- the wellbeing sessions held by Mindsmatter, Lancashire Care NHS.

6. How is Stress Identified and Managed Locally

- 6.1 The Council's risk assessment – arrangements see [Intranet](#) require that all activities that carry a significant risk are assessed. Where stress and undue pressure are identified as a significant risk, the assessment must determine the controls already in place to manage undue pressure and decide if these controls are adequate or if further controls are required. If further controls are required these must be agreed with the person responsible for managing the activity and once agreed implemented and monitored.

- 6.2 Local monitoring of sickness absence along with the conducting of return to work interviews will further help line managers identify individual employees suffering from signs of undue pressure or the symptoms of stress. The line manager may then use any of the previously mentioned corporate policies to help manage and improve the situation, for example the line manager may wish to offer flexible working or special leave. Line managers may also refer employees to the EAP helpline or the Occupational Health Service if they feel employees may be at risk from or are showing symptoms of stress (for signs of stress see appendix 1).
- 6.3 Line managers must ensure that they have an effective process to facilitate two-way communications between themselves and their team members. Communication processes may include regular My 1-2-1 meetings, team meetings, supervision meetings, informal chats, My 1-2-1 + meetings etc. Employees should be encouraged to raise concerns and discuss any relevant problems.
- 6.4 All employees have a legal duty to report any symptoms of work related ill health (including stress) and must be encouraged to do so at the earliest opportunity. Employees also have a duty to co-operate with line management on issues relating to health and or safety. This duty extends to attending any service offered to reduce, combat or eliminate the likelihood of stress.

7. Individual Stress Assessments

- 7.1 Where there are concerns that a member of staff may be under undue pressure an individual stress assessment must be carried out see appendix 2.
- 7.2 The stress assessment is a systematic process that looks at the detail of a person's role, it should ideally be carried out with the line manager as they are often the people best placed to control the workload and allocation of responsibilities. In situations where the employee – manager relationship may be an issue the process may be carried out by another appropriate manager.
- 7.3 Consideration should be given to the following which are potential causes of stress in the workplace. This should be done jointly between the employee and their manager and carried out privately without interruption.
- 7.3.1 Demands of the Role – how is the employee coping with the demands of their job, this includes work patterns, work environment, skills and their capability?
- 7.3.2 Control of their work – how much say does the employee have in the way they do their work, timing of breaks, control over pace, use of skills and initiative or opportunity to develop?
- 7.3.3 Support in work – this includes support from line management & colleagues and other support structures e.g. resources, networks etc.
- 7.3.4 Relationships – are working relationships with managers and colleagues free from bullying and other unacceptable behaviours?
- 7.3.5 Role in the organisation – do individuals clearly know what their role and responsibilities are? Is there any confusion or lack of clarity regarding what is expected of them?

7.3.6 Managing change – how change is or has been managed and communicated. Are individuals given timely information regarding changes that may affect them?

7.4 Any actions identified as a result of carrying out the stress assessment should be agreed and both the manager and employee should sign the assessment form and any supplementary notes.

8 Stress due to Events/Issues Outside of Work

9.1 Where stress is recognised or cited by an employee the following action should be taken ideally by their direct line manager.

- Discuss the matter fully with the employee ensuring complete confidentiality
- Refer to Occupational Health
- Encourage the employee to contact the EAP service/Listening Service
- Consider if any flexible working options may assist the employee
- Carry out an individual stress risk assessment if appropriate

10. Sickness Absence due to Stress

10.1 Absences should be dealt with in line with the Promoting Attendance Controlling Absence Policy.

10.2 Any employee who is absent from work due to stress should be referred to Occupational Health at the earliest opportunity

10.3 Where Occupational Health recommends that work would be beneficial to the employee consideration should be given to whether arrangements such as home working, flexible working options or phased return can be made to enable the employee to return at the earliest opportunity.

10.4 Where work is cited as a possible cause of the stress absence the line manager or other appropriate person should meet with the employee at the earliest opportunity to carry out the individual stress risk assessment with any actions agreed as an outcome assisting a return to work.

11. Responsibilities

11.1 Human Resources

- Management of the Occupational Health Service.
- Management of the Employee Assistance Programme and Listening Service.
- Facilitation of surveys to help identify areas where undue pressure may be occurring in the Council.
- Facilitation of stress related training as required.
- Provide advice, support and guidance to the Council and its line managers on matters relating to stress management.
- Produce absence reports highlighting incidents of stress related absence.
- Ensure appropriate supporting policies, as previously identified, are in place and regularly reviewed.

11.2 Occupational Health

- Assess those referred and provide or facilitate appropriate treatments.
- Provide advice, support and guidance to the Council and line managers on matters relating to stress management.

11.3 Line Managers

- Ensure that stress issues are addressed in the activity based risk assessments they carry out for their areas .
- Implementing and communicating these arrangements to all relevant employees.
- Ensure that they are able to identify the signs and symptoms of stress in individuals.
- Identify and support members of staff who are experiencing undue pressure or stress.
- Carry out individual assessments with employees when symptoms of stress are identified (see appendix 2).
- Ensure good communication with all staff
- Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties
- Monitor workloads to ensure that staff are not overloaded
- Monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement
- Ensure bullying and harassment is not tolerated
- Direct employees suffering from stress symptoms to the appropriate support mechanisms that are available, eg. EAP, Listening Service, Human Resources, Occupational Health.
- Be aware of policies that address work-life balance, eg. Flexible Working, Special Leave etc.
- Monitor sickness/absence rates within their areas to identify undue pressure or symptoms of stress.
- Make contact with individuals who are off sick with stress and offer support.
- Conduct return to work interviews for all staff who have been off sick.
- Attend stress related training when requested.

11.4 Employees

- Are responsible for bringing to the attention of their line manager issues they feel may be contributing to making them feel under undue pressure.
- Are responsible for co-operating with line management regarding any support offered to reduce or eliminate undue pressure or feelings of stress, including attending awareness training if requested.
- Should access the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or the Listening Service if they would like someone independent to talk to.
- Be receptive to opportunities of counselling and/or other offers of physical and psychological assistance when recommended.
- Attend any Occupational Health or Counselling sessions that have been arranged.
- ~~Attend any training related to stress that is provided~~
- Take individual responsibility for their own health and help to establish and improve a healthy working environment.
- Be receptive to colleagues who may be showing signs of stress, be supportive and report any areas of concern to the manager as appropriate.

- Contribute to team discussions and participate in the action planning.

12. Confidentiality

- 12.1 Any information gathered regarding the mental or physical well being of any employee will be considered of a confidential and sensitive nature, data protection and any other relevant medical codes of confidentiality will be adhered to.

13. Equality Impact Assessment And Monitoring

- 13.1 The operation of this policy will be monitored for its impact on different equality groups in line with the Equality Act 2010. This will enable the Council to assess whether any differences have an adverse impact on a particular group, such that further action would be required.

14. Data Protection

- 14.1 In implementing this policy, the Council will ensure that any personal data relating to the application of this policy will be obtained, processed and destroyed in line with Data Protection requirements.

Recognising the Possible Signs of Stress

The following list is **some possible** signs of stress however these may also be caused by something other than stress. Always seek medical advice if you are worried about your health.

- **Physical Signs**

Decreased energy, constant fatigue.
 Persistently raised pulse or blood pressure.
 Flushing or sweating.
 Headaches, including migraine.
 Sleep disturbance.
 Sexual problems.
 Muscle tension, aches or stiffness (especially neck and shoulders), backache.
 Skin problems (hives, eczema, psoriasis, itching).
 Constant colds, minor ailments or infections.
 Dizziness, disturbed vision.
 Heart palpitations, chest pain.
 Asthma or shortness of breath.
 Digestive problems – nausea, constipation, diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, heartburn.
 Trembling.
 Dry mouth.

- **Psychological Signs**

Increased anxiety.
 Irritability, anger, mood swings, tearful, over-emotional.
 Depression.
 Difficulty concentrating, memory lapses, mind racing, indecisiveness, confusion.
 Low self esteem, loss of confidence.
 Feeling helpless or hopeless.
 Loss of motivation.
 Loss of sense of humour.

- **Behavioural Signs**

Increased smoking or drinking.
 Argumentative (road rage, domestic or workplace conflicts).
 Fidgeting (nail-biting, foot-tapping).
 Reduced interest in appearance.
 Changes to diet – over-eating or loss of appetite.
 Poor time management.
 Withdrawn, isolation from social activities.
 Constantly on the go.

There are various strategies that can be used if you feel that you are suffering from stress:

- Prioritise and deal with the high priority first.
- Think of issues and try to come up with solutions.
- Only try to tackle things you can change.
- Don't be too hard on yourself – there's no need to be perfect every time, keep things in proportion.

- Share a problem and seek advice from others, utilise family, friends, colleagues, manager, HR, Occupational Health, EAP/Listening Service and Mental Health Champions.
- Don't be reluctant to seek medical help if you are worried about your health.
- Make some time every day for yourself and find time to relax.
- Look after your health by taking a balanced diet, avoid excessive drinking and smoking, try to exercise regularly and try to adopt a wide range of interests.
- Learn to delegate or ask for help.
- Have proper breaks for meals.
- Make your manager aware if your job is overloaded or under loaded.
- Take a deep breath and take a step back from the situation before reacting.

	PAM Wellbeing Limited	Palmyra Square Chambers 13-15 Springfield Street Warrington WA1 1BB Tel 01925 22 70 00 Fax 01925 236 289 E-mail: info@pamwellbeing.co.uk
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HSE STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Management Guidance Tool

A manager with direct line management responsibility for the individual is best placed to conduct this assessment. This is a checklist only and notes must be recorded, concerns documented and actions allocated and assigned completion dates. A review date must be assigned where actions are required.

1 Demands

Standard : Employees indicate that they can cope with the demands of their jobs

Demand	Concerns	Action Required
Work pattern		
Work environment		
Skill match		
Within capability		

2 Control

Standard: How much say the person has in the way they do their work

Control	Concerns	Action Required
Timing of breaks		
Control over pace		
Use of skills & initiative		
Opportunity to develop		

3 Support

Standard: Includes relationships with line management and colleagues & support structures in place e.g. learning resources and colleague circles/consultations

Support	Concerns	Action required
Colleagues		
Managers		
Access to resources		
Systems & Feedback		

4 Relationship

Standard: Includes promoting positive working to avoid and manage conflict

Relationship	Concerns	Action required
With management		
With colleagues		
Processes to raise concerns in place		
Positive behaviours promoted within the business		

5 Role

Standard: Understanding the role and responsibilities within the organisation

Role	Concerns	Action required
Clear role definement		
Responsibilities		
Reporting		
Conflicts		

6 Change

Standard: Organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated.

Change	Concerns	Action required
Timely information provided regarding reasons for change		
Adequate consultation		
Probable impact communicated		
Support provided		

To complete the assessment, colleagues should be offered the opportunity to comment on any aspects of their work which they feel has not been covered in the assessment.

Colleagues must be advised that supplementary notes will be filed with this checklist in the employment record

This assessment however is NOT part of any grievance procedure. Where necessary, colleagues should be redirected to the appropriate avenue for resolution of issues raised which are considered outwith of the remit of this assessment.

FURTHER ADVICE

www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards

www.people-am.com

Date of Assessment: _____

Assessor Signature : _____

Colleague Signature: _____