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STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDANCE

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Minute 318/20

GOVERNING BODY: HYTHE TOWN COUNCIL, TOWN COUNCIL OFFICES, OAKLANDS, 1 STADE STREET, HYTHE, KENT. CT21 6BG



STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDANCE

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council recognises the importance of identifying and reducing the potential causes of workplace stress to ensure the health of all staff. All employees are expected to participate in the stress management process with the aim of minimising stress-related ill-health. The Council will provide the necessary resources to implement an effective stress control strategy.
- 1.2 Primarily this policy is concerned with stress arising from the working environment. The Council recognises that an employee's personal life may also lead to stress and sometimes it will be appropriate to help an employee whatever the cause of their stress, particularly if this has an impact on their ability to work effectively.

2.0 WHAT IS STRESS?

- 2.1 Stress is experienced when people cannot cope with the pressures and demands placed upon them. All work has its pressures and people vary in their capacity on how they cope. Some levels of pressure, even when high, can be motivating and challenging. Pressures that can be responded to effectively are likely to lead to job satisfaction. However, pressures at a level where an individual cannot cope can result in stress.
- 2.2 The Health and Safety Executive defines 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.

3.0 POSSIBLE SOURCES OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

- 3.1 For work-related stress to be adequately addressed the organisational culture must facilitate and promote good communication, social support, trust, and respect. It follows that stress can arise from poor organizational culture, which can be typified by a lack of communication and consultation with staff, a blame culture when mistakes are made, and an expectation of regularly working long hours and taking work home. The key indicators are:
 - Job demands, typified by either too little or too much to do, excessively tight deadlines, inadequate or excessive training for the job, boring repetitive work, and a noisy, dirty, hot, or threatening working environment.
 - Control over the work, typified by no control over the tasks, the timing, pace of work, or skills used.
 - Support, training, and individual factors, typified by lack of support from managers or colleagues, inadequate or inappropriate training opportunities, reprimanding instead of supporting when things go wrong, poor work-life balance, and poor team makeup.
 - Relationships with co-workers, typified by poor working relationships with colleagues and an atmosphere of unacceptable behaviour such as bullying, sexual or racial harassment.



- Role within the organisation, typified by role conflict, where there are conflicting
 job demands or being asked to undertake tasks that are not considered part of
 their job and role ambiguity, where the person does not have a clear view of
 their job and expectations of them.
- Organisational change, typified by poor communications with staff regarding changes and the reasons for it, lack of consultation, uncertainty about what is going on and the future, possible job losses, and lack of support for staff.
- 3.2 Stress can also arise from the pressures people experience in their home and personal lives, e.g., bereavement, relationship or family problems, and financial difficulties. These factors can make people more vulnerable to stress at work or reduce their ability to perform effectively.

4.0 PROCEDURES

4.1 The Council will:

- Identify all significant causes of stress in the workplace (stressors) and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress as far as possible. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- Consult with trade union safety representatives (as appropriate) on the prevention of workplace stress.
- Provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices.
- Provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
- Allocate adequate resources to enable managers to implement the council's agreed stress management strategy.
- Where possible, assist staff in resolving stress arising from personal matters.

5.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 5.1 The Health and Safety Executive expects organisations to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments for stress and to take action to tackle any problems identified by those risk assessments. Stress Management Standards are intended to help us to do this and to show that we have done so.
- **5.2** Everyone is expected to share the responsibility for identifying and reducing work-related stress. Full participation is the key to ensuring that work is a meaningful and generally enjoyable challenge. Some responsibilities are specifically allocated to managers, although staff involvement is vital for success.

6.0 COUNCILLORS AND TOWN CLERK

- **6.1** Elected members and the Town Clerk are expected to:
 - Demonstrate their commitment and support to this policy by ensuring that appropriate stress management practices are implemented.
 - Reflect the policy's aims within their own management practice.
 - Ensure that resources are available for suitable stress management controls.



7.0 LINE MANAGERS

- 7.1 Line managers can minimise stress in their areas by reflecting the policy's aims within their own management practices and applying the following measures:
 - Carry out risk assessments leading to effective control measures.
 - Present an open attitude and develop good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes or when staff has problems or anxieties.
 - Provide staff with clear and realistic objectives and ensure that performance is managed effectively and fairly.
 - Ensure staff are fully trained to perform their duties and, where possible, are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.
 - Adopt a flexible approach to work schedules and monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded. This can be achieved by:
 - Checking working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking.
 - Encouraging staff to take their full entitlement of holidays.
 - Adopting flexible working practices.
 - Attend training in good management practice and health and safety.
 - Ensure bullying and harassment are not tolerated.
 - Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work e.g., bereavement or separation.
 - Conduct return-to-work discussions with staff returning after a period of sickness. This may lead to a return-to-work interview as detailed in the absence management policy.
 - Provide staff with appropriate training in order that they can recognise and manage their stress and assist in achieving the aims of this policy.

8.0 EMPLOYEES

8.1 All staff are expected to:

- Support the Council's stress initiatives and report their concerns to the Town Clark
- Recognise that they may be a source of stress to others, accept responsibility and take genuine action to deal with this.
- Attend appropriate training so that they are able to recognise and manage stress.
- Seek and accept opportunities for support and stress relief counselling when recommended.



9.0 HOW TO RECOGNISE THE SIGNS OF STRESS

- **9.1** Some common signs of stress are listed below. However, experiencing any of these does not necessarily give an indication of stress and advice should be sought from the occupational health service 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, increasing use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs.
- **9.2** Managers should also be aware of the following possible signs:
 - Increase in overall sickness absence
 - 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 timekeeping, working longer hours but with diminishing effectiveness.

10.0 THE BUSINESS CASE: TACKLING STRESS BRINGS BENEFITS

- **10.1** Research has shown work-related stress to have adverse effects in terms of:
 - Employee commitment to work
 - Staff performance and productivity
 - Staff turnover and intention to leave
 - Attendance levels
 - Staff recruitment and retention
 - Customer satisfaction
 - Organisational image and reputation
 - Potential litigation
- 10.2 It is also worth thinking about the impact that work-related stress could have on your team. For example, losing one colleague for an extended period with stress-related illness can have a dramatic impact on the workload and morale of the rest of the team. By taking action to tackle the causes of stress in your workplace, you can prevent or reduce the impact of these problems on the whole of the organisation.



ACTIONS

11.0 The following actions should be taken to help alleviate stress in the workplace.

11.1 Recruitment and Selection

The full range of responsibilities and demands of the job should be identified and set out clearly in the job description. The emphasis should be on the range and responsibilities – if too much detail is given then any apparent deviation may create the potential for stress arising from conflict. The candidate's ability to deal with the requirements and potential pressures of the job should be investigated and assessed as part of the selection process.

11.2 Pre-employment Health Screening

No person should be offered an employment start date before a health questionnaire has been completed and health clearance is given. This will ensure that the candidate is matched to the requirements of the job and any support they require to perform effectively is identified and provided. When seeking advice the Town Clerk must ensure that the occupational health advisor has sufficient information related to the job's requirements and potential demands such as the job description and risk assessment results.

11.3 Induction and Promotion

Planned induction helps to eliminate many concerns that a new job may create for new recruits. All new employees must receive corporate and local induction into their jobs.

Relocation can be an additional temporary source of stress, although relocation may be a chosen option to reduce stress. As part of the induction programme the stress policy should be briefly discussed, and employees advised who will provide them with support.

11.4 Risk Assessment

All existing jobs should be risk assessed for stress and those risk assessments should be reviewed regularly, particularly when circumstances change (such as during a restructuring exercise). The risk assessment will normally apply to groups of staff and an assessment of an individual post will rarely be required. Managers should ensure that appropriately trained risk assessors are available within teams and actions are taken to deal with any issues raised during the risk assessment process. Risk assessment guidance is provided in Appendix A.

11.5 Sickness Absence and III Health during Employment

When dealing with concerns related to stress and sickness absence or ill health the Council's absence management policies should be followed.

The first telephone call from staff on sick leave should initiate positive and supporting involvement from the Town Clerk. If the Town Clerk is unable to deal directly with an absent member of staff, their secretary or the Finance Officer will telephone the employee and discuss an appropriate assistance programme.



11.6 Training and Development for the Post

Employees may experience stress if they are not adequately trained for their job especially when moving into a new or changed role. Training needs analysis must feature in all cases where restructuring of individual jobs or sections takes place. Identifying and meeting training needs should not be seen as a one-off annual exercise but as a continual process, although annual appraisal and mid-year review are useful opportunities for emphasising training requirements.

Specifically, the Council will aim to ensure that managers and staff are aware of the risks of stress and the measures that can be taken to identify and manage it.

In all management and supervision training and other appropriate skills training courses the stress policy should be raised as part of the manager's ongoing responsibilities. Managers and supervisors should also discuss and address their own stress management approach.

11.7 Supportive Counselling

Employee assistance programmes such as counselling and occupational health advice will be provided as appropriate.

Table 1 – Record of Stress Support

Action	When	Comment
Employee telephones the Town Clerk to report sickness absence	At the start of the first day of absence and on the fourth day	Call to include nature and expected duration of sickness absence
Town Clerk contacts employee for referral to Council's OH Assessor	After two weeks of absence	Initial telephone consultation
Council's OH Assessor contacts employee	After four weeks of absence	Assess, support, and advise
Confidential counselling Offered	When required	Offer must be recorded
The return-to-work programme agreed upon by the employee and Town Clerk	For longer absences	With medical guidance if appropriate
'Welcome back' discussion initiated by Town Clerk	First day back at work	To consider the need for a planned meeting, interview, and any immediate issues



	weekend break	Discuss any ongoing problems and consider appropriate changes at work
Review with Town Clerk		Reviews continue until a satisfactory conclusion

Supporting Staff at Work

Many staff will continue to work whilst feeling stressed or anxious when they return to work. This is perfectly normal behaviour and staff should be fully supported if possible. Staff may discuss their concerns with their line manager or the Town Clerk and they may also display some signs of stress. Assisting staff to achieve a reasonable workload, whilst they are feeling less effective, is beneficial to them and strengthens team working. There are a few simple measures that could help the situation.

The Town Clerk should seek support from the Chairman of the Personnel Sub-Committee if necessary.

Event	Supporting Action
Employee acknowledges that, although they are feeling stressed, they intend to continue working or intend to return towork	Initial chat to offer the opportunity to discuss what assistance they might require. Welcome the opportunity to resolve problems.
Discuss problems and separate work and personal issues	Use the risk assessment form as a guide and consider completing the form with them. Agree on a plan of action
If the high workload is a significant factor	Identify outstanding tasks and agree on suitable actions such as: - Temporary re-allocation of tasks - Additional hours (with caution) - Review the job description
If interruptions are a problem	Try to achieve a quiet period each day by: - Providing a quiet office - Diverting telephone calls
If lack of task knowledge is a problem	Offer additional training (including on-the job training)
Where anxiety is not resolved	Offer confidential counselling



Appendix A

Risk Assessment Guidance

- The factors that place employees at risk from work-related stress should be assessed in the same way as physical or biological hazards within the workplace. The risk should then be avoided or, where this is not possible, reduced to as low as reasonably practicable. The risk assessment will be complemented periodically by a corporate stress audit.
- 2. Managers should ensure that risk assessments are carried out using normal procedures. The following factors should be considered:

Step 1 – Identify the Hazard (Is there a Stress Problem?)

- 1. Qualitative information can be gathered through informal discussion, regular team meetings and team briefings, appraisal, working groups, leaving interviews and return to work interviews following a sickness absence.
- 2. Quantitative information can be obtained from sickness records, performance measurement, and stress auditing.
- 3. The auditable stress management standards look at six key work issues that, if properly managed, can help to reduce work-related stress. Each of the six standards provides simple statements about good management practice. The Health and Safety Executive does not expect every employer to meet all the standards at their first attempt. The standards are goals that employers should be working towards through an ongoing process of risk assessment and continuous improvement.

Step 2 – Identify who might be Harmed and how (Groups and Individuals)

- 1. No one should be considered immune from the effects of stress and no job is totally stress-free. If the pressure exceeds the ability of a person to cope then they will be stressed to some degree. Most people have periods of vulnerability at certain times in their lives e.g., crises in their private life, during organisational change, or when returning to work after a period of absence. The effect of stress can lead to mental and/or physical illness.
- 2. There is now convincing evidence that prolonged periods of stress, including work-related stress, have an adverse effect on health.

 Research provides strong links between stress and the following health issues:

Physical effects such as heart disease, back pain, headaches, stomach disorders, or various minor illnesses

Psychological Effects such as anxiety and depression.

1. Stress can also lead to other behaviours that are harmful to health, such as skipping meals, drinking too much caffeine or alcohol, or smoking. Tackling the causes of stress before they lead to ill health can prevent this from happening.



- 2. Exposure to the six areas covered by the stress management standards can affect staff in different ways. For example, some employees may feel anxious about the amount of work they have to do, or the reaction if they admit they cannot cope.
- 3. Finding out how the factors are affecting employees requires a partnership approach, based on openness, honesty, and trust, which explores what the main effects of work are on staff and what areas should be targeted first.

Step 3 – Evaluate the Risk

- 1. At this stage in the risk assessment process each of the six potential risk factors should be evaluated by determining:
 - If there are preventive measures in place to control the risk
 - Whether this is enough to control the risk to an acceptable level
 - If the risks are still too high, what more can be done to reduce the risk to an acceptable level
- 2. The six risk factors **Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role, and Change** were previously summarised in paragraph 3.1. These factors form the basis of the risk assessment.

Step 4 - Record the Findings

The significant findings of the risk assessment must be recorded and the assessment should be signed and dated. The assessment is shared with staff affected and they must actively participate in the assessment process.

Step 5 - Review

A review should be carried out (and recorded) periodically and when significant changes occur - e.g., restructuring, change in working patterns or workload, recruitment, ill-health associated with stress or if staff are perceived to be unhappy.

An initial review at six months can be extended if indicators show an improvement in the potential for work-related stress.



Appendix B

Auditing Stress Management Standards

A key part of the stress assessment process is to carry out a stress audit and adopt suitable solutions to workplace stressors. Each of the six management standards needs to be achieved.

Staff Questionnaire

The audit is carried out using the 'indicator tool' provided by the Health and Safety Executive. This is a confidential staff questionnaire shown in Appendix C. The returned data is analysed using a spreadsheet. The results are collated within the six management standards. The 'support' standard is split between managers' support and peer support. Every team will be included in the audit.

Demands

Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment.

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they can cope with the demands of their jobs
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening - states to be achieved:

The Council provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work.

- People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands.
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

Control

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

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they can have a say about the way they perform the role.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening - states to be achieved:

- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work.
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work.
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work.
- The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills.
- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken.
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.



Support

Defined as the encouragement and resources provided by the Council, line management, and colleagues.

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening - states to be achieved:

- The Council has policies and procedures to support employees adequately.
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff.
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues.
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it.
- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job.
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

Relationships

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g., bullying at work.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening - states to be achieved:

- The Council promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness.
- Employees share information relevant to their work.
- The Council has agreed to policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour.
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour.
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.



Role

Ensuring people understand their role within the organisation and that the person does not have conflicting roles.

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening - states to be achieved:

- The Council ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible.
- The Council provides information to enable employees to understand their roles and responsibilities.
- The Council ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear.
- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their roles and responsibilities.

Change

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated.

The standard is that:

- Engaging employees frequently when undergoing an organisational change.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The Council provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes.
- The Council ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals.
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs.
- If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs.
- Employees are aware of timetables for changes.
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.



Appendix C

HSE Indicator Tool for Work-Related Stress – For Full Audit Use Only

I am clear about what is expected of me at work				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
I can decide wh	en to take a b	reak from the task		
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
Different groups	at work dema	and things from me that	are hard to co	mbine
Never □	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
I know how to g	o about gettin	g my job done		
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
I am subject to լ	personal hara	ssment in the form of ur	nkind words or	behaviour
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
I have unachiev	able deadline	S		
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
I am given supportive feedback on the work I do				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
I must work very intensively				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
I have a say in my own work speed				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
I am clear about what my duties and responsibilities are				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5
I must neglect some tasks because I have too much to do				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often □ 4	Always □ 5



I am clear about the goals and objectives of my team				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
There is friction	or anger betw	een colleagues		
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I have a choice	in deciding ho	w I do my work		
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I can take suffic	ient breaks			
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I understand ho	w my work fits	s into the overall ai	ms of the Cour	ncil
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I am pressured	to work long h	nours		
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I have a choice	in deciding wh	nat I do at work		
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I must work ver	y fast			
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I am subject to bullying at work				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I have unrealistic time pressures				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I can rely on my line manager/supervisor to help me out with a work problem				
Never □ 1	Seldom □ 2	Sometimes □ 3	Often 🗆	4 Always □ 5
I get the help and support I need from colleagues				
Strongly	Disagree □ 2	Neutral □ 3	Agree □ 4	Strongly agree □ 5
Disagree □ 1 I have some sages			⊔ ⊣	agree 🗆 J
Strongly Disagree □ 1	Disagree □ 2	Neutral □ 3	Agree □ 4	Strongly agree □ 5



I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work							
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				
I receive the respec	I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues						
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				
Staff are always co	nsulted about ch	anges at work	ζ				
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				
I can talk to my line manager/supervisor about something that has upset or annoyed me about work							
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				
My working time can be flexible							
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				
My colleagues are	willing to listen to	my work-rela	ted problems				
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				
When changes are made at work, I am clear about how they will work out in practice							
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				
I am supported through emotionally demanding work							
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				
Relationships at work are strained							
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				
My line manager/supervisor encourages me at work							
Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree □ 5			
Disagree □ 1	□ 2	□ 3	□ 4				

Thank you for completing

