People and Transformation

Guidance on Managing Stress at Work

August 2017

V2

Introduction
The overall aim of this guidance is to provide managers and employees with guidance on how to manage stress in the workplace. It both supports and extends the Council's health and safety policy and provides good advice on keeping our employees happy, healthy and here.

It should be emphasised that the Council does not regard stress as an inevitable consequence of employment or as a sign of individual weakness or incompetence. Employees suffering from stress and stress related illness will be fully supported and encouraged to seek help and will not be subjected to discrimination in any way.

This guidance covers
- What is stress?
- Responsibilities
- Risk Assessment
- Training
- Prevention: management standards
- Prevention: management measures
- Prevention: management competencies
- Assisting staff who have work related stress
- Stress: self help

Stress – Background
Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed upon them. There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive.

Pressure occurs in most jobs - each job brings its own set of tasks, responsibilities and day to day problems. It is these tasks and challenges at work that provide structure, improve motivation and are the key to a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. The ability to deal with pressure however, is not limitless.

Stress is the physical, emotional and behavioural response to an inappropriate level of pressure. Excessive workplace and/or domestic pressures, leading to stress, can be harmful, undermining the health of employees and damaging business performance. No-one is exempt from stress and it can vary from person to person.

Stress in itself is not an illness however it can become a serious health issue (physical and/or mental health) and the importance of managing it as part of an overall approach to occupational health, safety and wellbeing cannot be overstated

The cost to the employee and the Council can be measured in terms of absenteeism, poor motivation and staff turnover. This in turn will create additional stresses and workload for colleagues, who may then enter the vicious circle.

People may come to work against a background of bereavement, family sickness, marital or other interpersonal problems or exhausting travel.

Although these factors are beyond management responsibility, managers should try to be aware of them since they could make employees more vulnerable to stress at work as well as affecting their performance and judgement.

In general, harmful levels of stress are more likely to occur where:
- pressures pile on top of each other or are prolonged
- people feel trapped or unable to exert any control over the demands placed on them
- people are confused by conflicting demands made on them.

Problems can be triggered or made worse where:
- there is a high degree of uncertainty about their work, their objectives or their job and career prospects
- work schedules are inflexible and over-demanding
- there is prolonged conflict between individuals i.e. harassment, discrimination
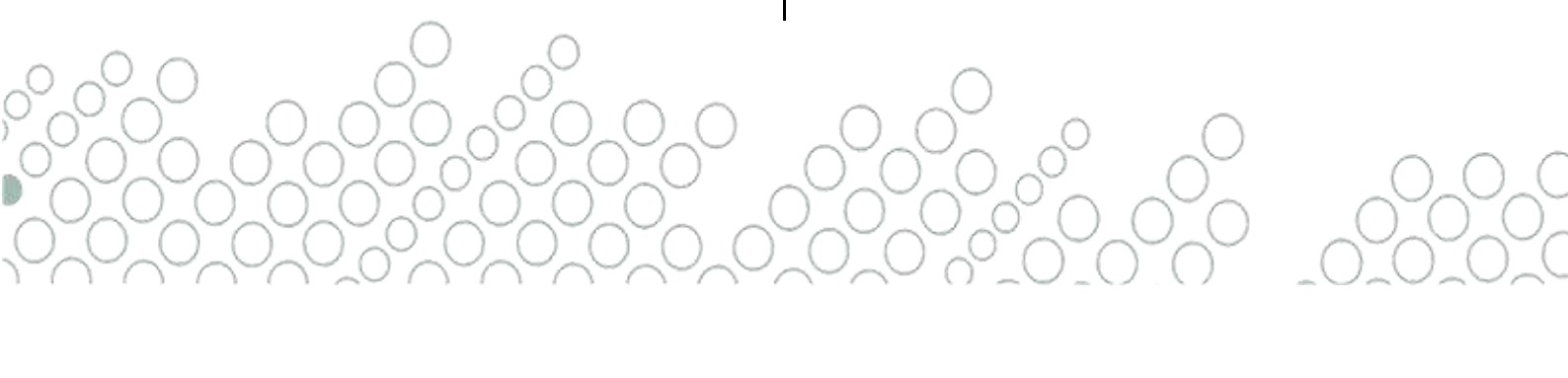- there is a lack of understanding and leadership response from managers or supervisors

Stress – Signs and Symptoms
The main thing to be aware of is change in behaviour. This includes:

Psychological signs

- Inability to concentrate or make simple decisions
- Memory lapses
- Becoming rather vague
- Easily distracted
- Less intuitive and creative
- Worrying
- Negative thinking
- Depression and anxiety

Emotional signs

- Tearful
- Irritable
- Mood swings
- Extra sensitive to criticism
- Defensive
- Feeling out of control
- Lack of motivation
- Angry
- Frustrated
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of self-esteem

Physical signs

- Aches/pains and muscle tension/grinding teeth
- Frequent colds/infections
- Allergies/rashes/skin irritations
- Constipation/diarrhoea/ IBS
- Weight loss or gain
- Indigestion/heartburn/ulcers
- Hyperventilating/lump in the throat/pins and needles
- Dizziness/palpitations
- Panic attacks/nausea
- Physical tiredness
- Heart problems/high blood pressure

Responsibilities

Health, safety and wellbeing responsibilities are set out in the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy. Additional responsibilities in relation to the management of stress are:

Service Director
- Monitor Service risk assessment progress (including action plans and reviews)
- Promote supportive management and behaviours

Managers
- Communicate this guidance to work teams
- Attend appropriate training courses
- Conduct stress risk assessments for work teams/individuals and manage subsequent action plans

Behavioural signs

- No time for relaxation or pleasurable activities
- Prone to accidents, forgetfulness
- Increased reliance on alcohol, smoking, caffeine, recreational or illegal drugs
- Becoming a workaholic
- Poor time management and/or poor standards of work
- Absenteeism
- Self neglect/change in appearance
- Social withdrawal
- Relationship problems

- Refer any employee reporting stress to occupational health as soon as possible. The employee does not have to be off work to be referred.
- Take practical steps to implement management measures for the promotion and maintenance of employee wellbeing at work.

Employees
- Co-operate with the implementation of this guidance
- Report matters of concern to line manager/supervisor
- Be aware of sources of help.

Trade Unions
- Support the implementation of this guidance and encourage members to seek appropriate support.

Training

A number of courses are available from Learning and Development. These include:

- **Workshops**:
  - Mentally Healthy Workplaces
  - Stress Awareness

- **E-learning**
  - Mentally Healthy Workplaces
  - Management of Stress

- **Development**
  - Time Management
  - Assertiveness Training
  - Dealing with Change
  - Mentoring

Risk Assessment

An individual stress risk assessment is also available which can identify causes and areas of stress and guide the development of an action plan.

Action plans should be compiled following the risk assessment and their progress managed until completion. Risk assessments should be reviewed following major change or the stress indicators reveal any increase in stress behaviour.

Access to the stress risk assessment toolkit is available [here](#).

Management Standards

The Health and Safety Executive has developed six management standards which define the characteristics, or culture, of an organisation where the risks from work related stress are being effectively managed and controlled.

These standards are:
- 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 organisation, 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 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.

Further detail on each of these standards is included in Appendix 1.

Consistent application of the Management Standards, along with Management Measures and Management Competencies will aid the prevention and management of workplace stress.

Management Measures

The following management measures should be used in the promotion and

maintenance of employee well-being at work.

Recruitment
- Provide adequate information for candidates on working conditions including special features of the job such as tight deadlines or dealing with disturbed or aggressive clients
- Ensure the person specification reflects the job and takes into consideration the ability to meet any special requirements

Induction
- Provide adequate information using the Highland Council Induction pack

Supervision
- Agree clear objectives with reasonable time scales, taking care to explain how duties and responsibilities fit into the wider work context
- Ensure regular supervision of employees in order to respond promptly to problems
- Provide positive feedback and recognition of good performance when appropriate
- Discuss poor performance promptly, honestly and constructively to agree appropriate action

Communications

- Establish systems which encourage two-way communication with staff
- Check that communications with staff have been received and understood
- Listen and give appropriate consideration to comments and representations from staff
- Involve staff as far as possible in decisions that affect them
- Establish systems which encourage employees to report stress in themselves and seek support to alleviate it.

Health and Safety Management
- Undertake risk assessments of hazards which may cause stress, e.g. violence, poor working conditions, heavy workload
- Ensure employee involvement
- Recognise that stress at work can result from a single incident or an accumulation over time, and seek to minimise both types of risk

Job Design/Workload Management
- Analyse jobs to ensure plenty of variety avoiding short work cycles whenever possible
- Ensure jobs have well defined tasks and responsibilities

- Avoid placing unreasonable demands on employees, e.g. constant demand for long hours by prioritising workload and delegating appropriately
- In consultation, seek to negotiate an efficient and effective solution to workload problems
- Ensure that employees take annual leave and work breaks (e.g. lunch breaks) in order to avoid fatigue
- Promote flexible working arrangements
- Match the job with the abilities and motivation of the person

Training
- Ensure that employees are adequately trained to undertake their duties and responsibilities
- Provide training as appropriate in dealing with the potential health and safety hazards of the job
- Encourage employees to attend training in stress and time management and practice the techniques learned

Management Competencies
The HSE also produce a list of management competencies, or behaviours, which when applied can prevent and reduce stress at work.

These include managing workload, accessibility, managing conflict, integrity, and communication. Managers can self-assess their competencies here and identify areas for development.

A full list of the competencies is included in Appendix 2.

Assisting staff who have work related stress
Staff who report stress issues or who are absent because of stress should be referred to the Occupational Health Service as soon as possible. Early intervention and application of reasonable adjustments are the key to getting staff back to effective working as soon as possible. (See Appendix 3 for examples of reasonable adjustments)

The medical report will identify which of the management standards apply in each individual case. This report, along with the completion of an individual stress risk assessment, will help to construct a focussed conversation about the individual's situation.

A Counselling Service is also available for staff to have confidential support away from the office environment.

A stress mind map is also available as a tool for initiating a discussion on stress with staff. (Appendix 4)

Stress: self help
Everyone is responsible for looking after themselves. This includes:

- Healthy eating/drinking habits
- Regular exercise
- Regular sleep pattern
- Work life balance
- Socialising with friends/family.

Anyone suffering with work related stress should talk to their manager – with the support of HR or Trade Union Representative, if required.

Stress can affect any one and should never be seen as a sign of failure.

Monitoring

The Council will, in conjunction with relevant trade unions, monitor and evaluate its policy and practice of stress management. This will be achieved through service monitoring of employee absence via the attendance management process and the monitoring of referrals to the occupational health service.

Management should ensure that the implementation of this guidance is actively promoted and monitored within their service.

This guidance will be reviewed annually by the OHSW Manager.

HSE Stress Management Standards

Standard	Definition	What should be happening/state to be achieved
Demand	• employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• the organisation 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	• employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• 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; and • employees are consulted over their work patterns.
Support	• employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• the organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees; • 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; and • employees receive regular and constructive feedback
Relationships	• employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and • systems are in place locally to respond to	• the organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness; • employees share information relevant to their work; • the organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable

	any individual concerns.	behaviour; • systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and • systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.
Role	• employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible; • the organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities; • the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and • systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.
Change	• employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• the organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes; • the organisation 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; and • employees have access to relevant support during changes.

Management Competencies for Preventing and Reducing Stress at Work

Management Competency	Description
Managing workload and resources	Monitoring and awareness of team's workload, having reasonable expectations on delivery
Dealing with work problems	Effective problem solving, e.g. developing action plans, being decisive
Process Planning and Organisation	Planning and reviewing both present and future workloads
Empowerment	Trusting employees to do their job
Participative approach	Listens to and consults with team; manages on a team basis
Development	Helps employees develop within the role
Accessible/visible	Keeps an open door policy, in regular contact with team
Health and Safety	Takes health and safety of team seriously
Feedback	Shows gratitude, provides praise and rewards good work
Individual consideration	Provides regular one-to-ones with employees, flexible with regard to work life balance issues
Managing conflict	Deals with workplace bullying, seeks to resolve conflict fairly
Expressing and managing emotions	Remains calm under pressure in front of team; rarely loses temper
Acting with integrity	Keeping promises; keeping personal issues confidential
Friendly style	Relaxed, easy going approach
Communication	Keeps staff informed of what is happening in the organisation, communicates clear goals and objectives
Taking responsibility	Leads from the front, taking a hands on approach
Empathy	Sees each employee as a person
Seeking advice	Seeks advice when required, e.g. from OH, HR, H&S

Suggested reasonable adjustments/management support
(Note: this list is not exhaustive and will not be applicable to all posts)

Working hours or patterns
- Take a flexible approach to start/finish times and/or shift patterns
- Phase the return to work
- Equal amount of break time, but in shorter, more frequent chunks
- Allow someone to arrange their annual leave so that is spaced regularly throughout the year
- Allow the possibility to work from home at times
- Temporary reallocation of some tasks

Physical environment
- Minimise noise – e.g. providing private office/room dividers/partitions, reducing pitch or volume of telephone ring tones
- Provide a quiet space for breaks away from the main workspace
- Allow for increased personal space
- Move workstation – to ensure for example that someone does not have their back to the door.
- Change of work base

Support with workload
- Increase frequency of supervision
- Support someone to prioritise their work
- Allow the individual to focus on a specific piece of work
- Consider job sharing

Support from others
- Provide a job coach
- Provide a buddy or mentor
- Provide mediation

Other
- Redeployment
- Reduced travel
- Training

Stress and other guidance/polices

Standard	Definition	What should be happening/state to be achieved	Where further information can be found
Demand	• employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• the organisation 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.	• Job and Person Specification • Contract of Employment • Employee Induction • Employee Review and Development. • Recruitment and Selection Process. • Job Evaluation • Central, Service and Area Health and Safety Committees
Control	• employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• 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	• Flexible Working • Flexible Retirement • Flexitime Scheme • Staff Forums • Employee Survey • Courses through Learning and Development • e-Learning • Management Development • Mentoring Scheme • Informing and Consulting

		breaks can be taken; and • employees are consulted over their work patterns.	Employees • Internal Communication Standards • Engagement and Partnership Working Framework
Support	• employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• the organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees; • 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; and • employees receive regular and constructive feedback	• Employee Induction • Employee Review and Development • Managers Toolkit • Absence Management Toolkit • Grievance and Harassment Policy • Occupational Health (including physio) • Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit • Maternity, Paternity and Adoption • Special Leave • Pension scheme • Stress Management (including access to Counselling) • Substance Misuse Guidance • Staff Forums • Indemnity for Employees • IT Service Portal (Wipro) • Procurement

Relationships	• employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• the organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness; • employees share information relevant to their work; • the organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour; • systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and • systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.	• Code of Conduct • Grievance and Harassment Policy • Mediation • Engagement and Partnership Working Framework • Staff Forums • Informing and Consulting Employees • Employee, Review and Development • Equalities in Employment • Whistleblowing • Disciplinary Procedures
Role	• employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible; • the organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities; • the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and • systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any	• Job and Person Specification • Equalities in Employment • Gender Pay Gaps • Grievance and Harassment Policy • Whistleblowing Policy • Employee Induction • Employee Review and Development. • Staff Forums

		uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.	
Change	• employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and • systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.	• the organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes; • the organisation 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; and • employees have access to relevant support during changes.	• [Engagement and Partnership Working Framework](#) • Staff Forums • [Informing and Consulting Employees](#) • [Redeployment and Redundancy Policy](#) • [Employee Review and Development](#)