

Hawkinge Town Council



Stress Management and Guidance Policy

Date of review -

Version no.	Purpose / change	Author	Date Adopted	Minute No
1	New issue	C Johnson	8 December 2021	2294

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council recognises the importance of identifying and reducing the potential causes of workplace stress to ensure the good health of all staff.

This policy and guidance apply throughout the Council. 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. 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 to cope with different types of pressure. 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, or even too little pressure or challenge, 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. 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 communications, social support, trust and respect. It follows that stress can arise from poor organisational culture, which can be typified by 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 make up.
- 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 which 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 about proposed change 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. 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 so 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. 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. The 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. 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.
- Minimise stress in their areas by reflecting the policy's aims within their own management practices and apply 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 have 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 discharge 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 that bullying and harassment is 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.

7. EMPLOYEES

7.1 All staff are expected to:

- Support the Council's stress initiatives and report their concerns to the Town Clerk, in case of the Clerk to the Chairman of the Council.
- 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 better able to recognise and manage stress.
- Seek and accept opportunities for support and stress relief counselling when recommended.

8. HOW TO RECOGNISE THE SIGNS OF STRESS

8.1 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, and 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.

8.2 Managers should also be aware of the following possible signs:

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

9. THE BUSINESS CASE: TACKLING STRESS BRINGS BENEFITS

- 9.1 Research has shown work-related stress to have adverse effect 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
- 9.2 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 a 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.

10. ACTIONS

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

10.2 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.

10.3 Pre-employment health screening

No person should be offered an employment start date before a health questionnaire has been completed and health clearance 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.

10.4 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.

10.5 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 at Appendix A.

10.6 Sickness absence and ill 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 or if for the Clerk the Chairman of the Council.

10.7 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.

10.8 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

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 absence	Initial telephone consultation
Council's OH Assessor contacts employee	After four weeks absence	Assess, support and advise
Confidential counselling Offered	When required	Offer must be recorded
Return to work programme agreed by 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
Return to work interview with Town Clerk	Before first weekend break	Discuss any ongoing problems and consider appropriate changes at work
Review with Town Clerk	As agreed with employee	Reviews continue until satisfactory conclusion

10.9 Supporting staff at work

Many staff will continue to work whilst feeling stressed or will feel quite 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 of the 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 Committee if necessary.

Event	Supporting Action
Employee acknowledges that, although they are feeling stressed, they intend to continue working or intend to return to work	Initial chat to offer the opportunity to discuss what assistance they might require. Welcome the opportunity to resolve problems.
Discuss the problems and separate work and personal issues	Use the risk assessment form as a guide and consider completing the form with them. Agree a plan of action
If high workload is a significant factor	Identify outstanding tasks and agree suitable actions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Temporary re-allocation of tasks - Additional hours (with caution) - Review job description
If interruptions are a problem	Try to achieve a quiet period each day by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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.

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?)

Qualitative information - can be gathered by informal discussion, regular team meetings and team briefings, appraisal, working groups, leaving interviews and return to work interviews following a sickness absence.

Quantitative information - can be obtained from sickness records, performance measurement and stress auditing.

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 if appropriate)

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 eg crisis 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.

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; and

Psychological effects such as anxiety and depression.

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.

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. 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

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

The six risk factors - demands, control, support, relationships, role and change – were previously summarised at 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 must be shared with the staff affected and staff 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. restructure, 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 the 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 at 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 are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and
- 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 are able to have a say about the way they do their work;
- 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; and
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.

Support

Includes 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; and
- 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; and
- 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; and
- 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 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.

Role

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the Council ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles. The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- 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 role and responsibilities;
- The Council 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

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation. The standard is that:

- 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.

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

1 I am clear what is expected of me at work

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

2. I can decide when to take a break from the task

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

3. Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

4 I know how to go about getting my job done

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

5 I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

6 I have unachievable deadlines

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

7 If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

8 I am given supportive feedback on the work I do

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

9 I have to work very intensively

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

10 I have a say in my own work speed

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

11 I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are

Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

- 12 I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 13 I am clear about the goals and objectives for my team
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 14 There is friction or anger between colleagues
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 15 I have a choice in deciding how I do my work
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 16 I am able to take sufficient breaks
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 17 I understand how my work fits into the overall aims of the Council
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 18 I am pressured to work long hours
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 19 I have a choice in deciding what I do at work
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 20 I have to work very fast
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 21 I am subject to bullying at work
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 22 I have unrealistic time pressures
Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5
- 23 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

24 I get help and support I need from colleagues

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

25 I have some say over the way I work

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

26 I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

27 I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

28 Staff are always consulted about change at work

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

29 I can talk to my line manager/supervisor about something that has upset or annoyed me about work

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

30 My working time can be flexible

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

31 My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

32 When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

33 I am supported through emotionally demanding work

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

34 Relationships at work are strained

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

35 My line manager/supervisor encourages me at work

Strongly Disagree 1 Disagree 2 Neutral 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5

Thank you for completing the questionnaire – Please return it to the Town Clerk, or to the Chairman for the Clerk.