



Policy on the Management of Stress in Schools

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Summary

The successful management of stress is vital to the success of schools as well as the well-being of their staff. This Policy seeks to provide guidance on how this can be achieved effectively and outlines the key aims and objectives for governors, headteachers, managers and staff within schools in dealing with stress.

Management Action

- To familiarise themselves with this policy and associated documentation;
- To ensure, through good communication, that their staff are aware of the provisions of this policy including the action everyone can take to minimise the risk of stress and of the support services available to them e.g. the staff counselling service;
- To identify and meet training and development needs including induction training;
- To identify individuals, groups of staff or jobs that could be affected by stress and work to eliminate, minimise or reduce the risks;
- To meet with their staff on a planned and regular basis to discuss any concerns they may have and to listen to what they have to say;
- To monitor their staff's workload and working hours and adopt a flexible approach wherever possible, to work schedules, in order to help avoid conflicts between work and personal lives;
- To ensure that staff are provided with clear and realistic objectives and that performance is managed effectively and fairly;
- To involve staff, and their representatives, in issues which affect them and may change their work or work environment;
- To be vigilant towards staff who show signs of stress whether it is work related or related to their personal lives;
- To ensure that staff have access to the appropriate information in order to help them recognise and manage stress;
- To effectively and sensitively manage any staff stress related absence as well as their return to work in accordance with the Attendance Management Procedures.

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Policy on Managing Stress in Schools

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The County Council is responsible for the health, safety and welfare of its employees at work and recognises that their well-being is important to its performance and service delivery. The County Council therefore, aims to take positive measures to manage stress effectively and to create an environment where stress is managed out of the organisation so far as is reasonably practicable. It also aims to ensure that where stress becomes an issue for individual employees they are encouraged to seek support and guidance.
- 1.2 Primarily this policy is concerned with stress arising from the working environment, but it also recognises that an employee's personal life may also lead to stress and sometimes an approach has to be taken of helping an employee whatever the cause of their stress, particularly if this has an impact on an employee's ability to work effectively.
- 1.3 The County Council will deliver this policy through:
 - 1.3.1 promoting the health, safety and well-being of all employees, including the use of risk assessments to identify and manage stressors impacting on health in the workplace;
 - 1.3.2 the monitoring of absence levels to identify particular sources of stress as a means of taking action to prevent or reduce such sources in the future;
 - 1.3.3 implementing strategies and support mechanisms to prevent and manage work related stress.

2 Responsibilities

- 2.1 The Director of Children's Services will:
 - 2.1.1 demonstrate his commitment and support to this policy by ensuring that the principles and strategies for managing stress are implemented;
 - 2.1.2 provide guidance on the role and responsibilities for Chairs of Governors, headteachers and line managers on the management of stress;
 - 2.1.3 provide a comprehensive training programme for key groups of staff;
 - 2.1.4 monitor the impact of this policy and associated documentation by resurveying schools in two years.
- 2.2 Governors and headteachers will:
 - 2.2.1 ensure that employee well-being is an integral element of all governing body committee or sub-committee meetings and is considered as part of the decision making processes;
 - 2.2.2 ensure that consultation procedures are in place and effective;
 - 2.2.3 promote training on the management of stress and stress coaching for all line managers;

2.2.4 take on responsibilities outlined in 2.3 below when having line management responsibility. It is envisaged that the Chair of Governors will undertake the line management function for the headteacher.

2.3 Line Managers will:

2.3.1 familiarise themselves with this policy and associated documentation;

2.3.2 adhere to the following advice:

- take stress seriously and be understanding towards people who admit to being under too much pressure;
- have an open and understanding attitude to what people say to them about the pressures of their work and to look for signs of stress;
- ensure that people are treated fairly and consistently and that bullying and harassment are not tolerated.

2.3.3 ensure, through good communication, that their staff are aware of the provisions of this policy including the action everyone can take to minimise the risk of stress and of the support services available to them;

2.3.4 using the risk assessment documentation in Appendices A and B, identify individuals, groups of staff or jobs that could be affected by stress and work to eliminate, minimise or reduce the risks;

2.3.5 identify and meet training and development needs including induction training;

2.3.6 attend stress management training when requested;

2.3.7 meet with their staff on a planned and regular basis to discuss any concerns they may have and to listen to what they have to say. This could be through formal staff appraisals, supervision, team meetings etc;

2.3.8 ensure that all members of staff are clear about their role and what is planned for the future;

2.3.9 ensure that staff are provided with clear and realistic objectives and that performance is managed effectively and fairly;

2.3.10 monitor their staff's workload and working hours and adopt a flexible approach wherever possible, to work schedules, in order to help avoid conflicts between work and personal lives;

2.3.11 involve staff, and their representatives, in issues which affect them and may change their work or work environment;

2.3.12 be vigilant towards staff who show signs of stress whether it is work related or related to their personal lives;

2.3.13 ensure that staff have access to the appropriate information in order to help them recognise and manage stress, e.g. advice from the Occupational Health Service and access to the Staff Counselling service;

2.3.14 effectively and sensitively manage any staff stress related absence as well as their return to work in accordance with the Attendance Management procedure.

- 2.4 Employees will:
- 2.4.1 inform their manager of any work related issues / difficulties that cause stress, or have the potential to do so, and participate positively in determining solutions. If the stressors have arisen from circumstances outside of work, employees are encouraged, where possible, to discuss these with their manager so that appropriate assistance and flexibility can be considered;
 - 2.4.2 where possible, take account of the impact of their lifestyle in terms of controlling stressors, e.g. adopting healthy life style habits;
 - 2.4.3 co-operate with their manager in the undertaking of any risk assessments and the implementing of any necessary control measures;
 - 2.4.4 be aware of their own well-being and seek advice and support when necessary;
 - 2.4.5 be supportive of colleagues through any difficulties they may be dealing with.

3. Monitoring and Review

- 3.1 Governors, headteachers and managers should remain vigilant and consistently monitor their work situation and staff in order to anticipate the potential for work related stress, using the risk assessment process as a guide.

Supporting Information to the Policy on the Management of Stress in Schools

General

Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them.” This distinguishes stress from the pressures or challenges that provide the motivation for everyday living. Being under pressure can often improve performance but when demands and pressures become excessive they can lead to stress.

People respond to pressure in different and individual ways. Much will depend on an employee’s personality, experience, motivation and the support available from managers, colleagues, family and friends. Difficulties faced outside of work can also have an impact on someone’s ability to cope or function well at work.

If stress is intense and sustained it can lead to mental and physical ill-health and contributes to employee ill-health and sickness absence. It is important that all employees are aware of the factors that can give rise to stress (stressors) so that where possible their causes can be foreseen and appropriately managed before damage/harm is done.

There are legal obligations as well as ethical and economic reasons for taking positive action to manage stress. This policy guidance contains information, advice and links on how to recognise, reduce and manage stress at work.

Headteachers and managers may not always be aware of the problems their staff are experiencing, especially if they relate to situations outside of work. It is therefore important that they are familiar with the recognisable effects and indicators of stress so they can judge whether there is a need to take action e.g. review work, open up conversation with affected person/s, reinforce the availability of support, the staff counselling service etc. A brief resume of the key stressors that employees can experience whilst at work is given below.

Typical Causes of Work Related Stress

Listed below are the key factors identified by the Health and Safety Executive as having the potential to cause stress at work. For more information about these factors, to which the HSE have applied management standards, visit the HSE website.

- Job demands – either too much or too little to do e.g. having too much work to do in the time available or work that is beyond the capability of the employee due either to a lack of appropriate training or the individual’s capacity, excessively tight deadlines, irregular working patterns (e.g. shift work), inadequate or excessive training for the job, boring repetitive work and noisy, hot or threatening working environment, covering for colleagues.
- Control – issues around the extent of self control over tasks, timing, pace of work or skills used.
- Relationships – for example, working in an atmosphere of unacceptable behaviour such as bullying, sexual or racial harassment.
- Role conflict – perceived conflicting job demands or being asked to undertake tasks which are not considered part to their job.
- Role ambiguity – when an employee doesn’t have a clear view of their job and the expectations of them, lack of understanding and leadership from managers.
- Organisation change – appropriate communication is vital to prevent uncertainty

- about changes that may be on-going.
- Support – the extent of personal support available from managers and colleagues.
- Training – are the training opportunities suitable and sufficient.
- Individual factors – pressures from home/personal life e.g. bereavement, relationship or family problems, poor work life balance (home and work related pressures can feed off and reinforce each other).

The key factors above apply across all work environments and were indicated as being relevant following a well-being survey in a representative sample of schools within East Sussex. However, key factors specific to schools were also indicated and these were:

- Disruptive pupils;
- Preparing for OFSTED;
- Risk of verbal abuse or physical violence and intimidation from pupils, parents and intruders;
- Meetings outside of contracted hours.

How do I recognise stress in myself or in others?

Emotional/Behavioural effects include:

- Persistent or recurrent moods, anxiety, frustration, anger, irritability, detachment, worry, depression, guilt, sadness
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things, inability to switch off, loss of creativity, making more errors, apathy
- Increase use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs
- Eating disorders

Physical effects include:

- Tiredness, skin or sleep disorders, clumsiness, nervous tics
- Raised blood pressure, ulcers, increased sweating, dizziness
- Migraine, muscular pain and tension

There might also be some adverse effects on the school or college if stress levels are not managed effectively. These include:

- Increase in sickness absence – particularly short-term absences
- Poor work performance – less output, lower quality, poor decision making
- Conflict between colleagues, poor relationships with service users
- General loss of motivation or commitment, poor time-keeping, working longer hours but with diminishing effectiveness.

It is therefore important that stress is pro-actively managed, in accordance with the requirements of the Policy.

There are a number of pro-active interventions listed below. Risk Assessment is fundamental in identifying and putting in place controls to minimise the risks associated with stressors in the workplace and must be carried out. Other interventions may also apply, depending on the circumstances.

Risk Assessment

Headteachers and managers have a key role to play in assessing the risk of stress within their teams and for taking steps to control any risk identified. The risk assessment procedure (Appendices A and B) is the primary tool for achieving this and headteachers should ensure these assessments are undertaken and reviewed regularly within their school. Line managers are ideally placed to monitor local conditions and should take a lead role in discussing stress within team or 1:1 meetings. Staff should be encouraged to participate in the risk assessment process to identify work factors that may give rise to stress.

Headteachers and managers must be vigilant towards staff that may show signs of stress and every effort made to identify such signs at an early stage and immediate supportive action taken to prevent the situation continuing.

Recruitment and Selection

The full range of responsibilities and demands of a job, including areas of potential pressure, should be identified and set out clearly in the job description that is sent to all candidates. To ensure that the right candidate is selected for the role, be certain that the policies and guidance available from Personnel and Training are followed.

Induction and Promotion

All new employees must receive induction into their jobs. Starting a new job could be stressful and a planned induction can help eliminate many concerns. The situation could be aggravated if the new employee is also relocating. As part of the induction programme this policy should be discussed and employees advised who will provide them with support.

Sickness Absence

When dealing with concerns related to stress and sickness absence, ESCC's policies on Sickness Absence and Management of Attendance must be adhered to.

Training and Development

Identifying and meeting training needs should not be seen as a one-off exercise but as a continual and evolving process. Headteachers must ensure that they and their staff are aware of the risks of stress and the measures that can be taken to identify and manage it.

In management and supervision training and other appropriate skills training courses this policy should be raised as part of a manager's ongoing responsibilities. Headteachers and managers should also consider ways of dealing with their own stress management and must attend stress management training courses.

A general information guide for all staff, to support this policy, has been developed and

includes advice on coping with stress including lifestyle factors and approaches to relaxation which should be distributed to all staff.

Violence at Work

The Violence at Work Policy and Guidance must be adhered to. All staff should be made aware of the policy and associated documentation and of any local arrangements necessary to help ensure a safe working environment. Personal Safety or Diffusing Violence and Aggression (as appropriate) must be provided to all staff in key areas and they must be made aware of the support which is available to them if they have been involved in a violent incident e.g. counselling.

Managing Stress Related Absence

It is important to manage an employee's return to work after a stress-related absence, whether or not it was related to work. The manager must:

- Follow the Management of Attendance procedures in planning the employee's return to work. A meeting should be held with them, with the opportunity for a trade union representative or safety representative to be present, in accordance with the procedure. If necessary advice should be sought from the relevant Personnel Officer or the Occupational Health Service.
- Ensure that when an employee returns to work they are not subject to the same pressures, without additional support/safeguards, that are known to have contributed to their absence in the first place.
- Complete a risk assessment, take any necessary actions and issue a copy to the employee, put a copy in the employee's personal file and, if agreed by the employee, issue a copy to their agreed representative.
- Consider a phased return during which time there should be a gradual increase in working towards normal hours. Managers should also consider other flexible working options. A person may be ready to return to some aspects of their job but not others and workload responsibilities may need to be adjusted accordingly. When considering a phased return, you may wish to consult with the Occupational Health team for further advice.
- After returning to work, continue to provide support to help the employee's full recovery. Meetings with the employee may need to be planned more frequently than would be usual under normal supervision arrangements.
- Consider other options and take urgent advice from the relevant Personnel Officer or the Occupational Health Service if the employee continues to experience difficulties in managing pressures at work and particularly if as a result the employee is absent from work again.

Risk Assessment

Current research indicates that local proactive management measures, based on suitable and sufficient risk assessments, are the most effective method of preventing harm to employees arising from work-related stress. Risk assessment is an on-going process, particularly in relation to work-related stress and should be continuously monitored. For this reason, the specific Risk Assessment Checklist (Appendix B) should be completed for each job role.

Headteachers and Heads of Department should take a lead role in raising this issue in team meetings and supervision and encourage staff to participate in the risk assessment process.

Headteachers and line managers must be vigilant towards individual staff who may show signs of work-related stress. Every effort should be made to identify such signs at an early stage and immediate supportive action taken to prevent the situation continuing.

If a member of staff that you manage is suffering from stress (see Flow Chart at Appendix C), a specific risk assessment must be carried out. The risk assessment checklist for Workplace Stressors (Appendix B) can be adapted for this purpose, but all stressors must be explored in a “One to One” confidential discussion with the employee concerned. It is important that all key stress factors are reviewed. Further specific guidance is given in the Management of Stress Toolkit.

If managers feel unable to resolve work-related stress issues themselves, they should seek assistance, again at an early stage, from their line manager, a Personnel and Training Safety Adviser or from Personnel Services as a follow up to any formal training already provided.

Stress risk assessments should be undertaken using the following guidance and format and headteachers and line managers can contact a Personnel and Training Safety Adviser for guidance if needed.

- Step 1:** Using the Risk Assessment Checklist (Appendix B), and with reference to the key stressors identified above, log the stressors or hazards that may be relevant to staff groups and give rise to adverse affects on their health. List the work activities where this stressor may be found and remember that stressors may also be caused by external sources.
- Step 2:** Identify the people who may be affected, either individually or collectively.
- Step 3:** List any current control measures already in place.
- Step 4:** Consider what further action may be necessary.
- Step 5:** Develop an implementation strategy which identifies what control measures are required, who will be responsible for them, an appropriate time scale and how this will be monitored and reviewed.
- Step 6:** Ensure review takes place on an annual basis.

Appendix B

Risk Assessment Checklist for Workplace Stressors

Complete steps 1 to 6 of this form for any stressor identified in your area of control. Remember to include your name, school, signature and the date at the end.

Workplace		Department	
Risk Assessor			
Job Role	e.g. headteacher, teachers, teaching assistants, administrative staff, etc		
Date		Review Date	

Description of Hazard/Stressor

Change – e.g. staffing restructure

Control – e.g. lack of self control over tasks, timing, pace of work or skills used.

Demands – e.g. excessively tight deadlines, boring repetitive work and noisy, hot or threatening working environment, covering for colleagues.

Relationships - working in an atmosphere of unacceptable behaviour such as bullying, sexual or racial harassment

Role – perceived conflicting job demands, being asked to undertake tasks which are not considered part to their job, lack of clarity on their job and the expectations of them, lack of understanding and leadership from managers.

Support – personal support available from managers and colleagues.

School specific – e.g. preparing for OFSTED; building works; disruptive pupils

Persons at Risk

Consider who might be harmed by these stressors and list them below. Do not list individual's names but think about groups of people doing similar work or who might be affected. Keep in mind people who are disabled, inexperienced or working alone, plus pupils, visitors, etc.

Current Control Measures

Have you already taken precautions against these stressors? If so, list existing control measures below or where the information about them may be found. Also list what information, instruction or training has been provided about these controls/precautions. If information, instruction or training was given then include date(s) provided.

Recommended Control Measures

Consider what further action is necessary to control these stressors. Outline any actions planned below, including who will carry them out and by when.

Management Action and implementation dates

Set a date for reviewing the actions listed above and insert in the review date box above. This section should be updated as and when the recommended control measures have been implemented along with dates.

Signature of Manager	
Name of Manager	
Date	

Stress Management Flow Chart

