

# MANAGING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

February 2008

## ***Introduction***

The overall aim of this policy is to provide managers and employees guidance on how to deal with 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.

## ***Scope***

This policy will apply to all Council employees including those working within our schools. Governing bodies and head teachers of foundation and voluntary aided schools within Torbay will be encouraged to adopt an equivalent standard for the health, safety and wellbeing of their employees.

## ***Responsibilities***

**The Council** has a duty of care towards all its employees, as well as a legal and moral responsibility to identify and manage work-related stress.

**All employees** have a responsibility to work towards minimising stress within the Council and to co-operate with the policy.

**Line managers** and those with management responsibilities in schools have a responsibility to support the policy and to guide, direct and support employees.

**Human Resources & Health and Safety** has responsibility for advising line managers, schools and all other employees in respect of this policy and how to deal with situations where stress may be affecting individuals at the workplace.

## **Definition of stress**

Stress is the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them.

There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can create a 'buzz' and be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when this pressure becomes too much to cope with.

It may arise when a person feels that they cannot cope with a situation whether at work or home.

When pressure recedes, there is usually a quick return to normal. It is when pressures are intense or prolonged that problems may occur. People may feel trapped or have difficulty maintaining control over their work or home life and addressing conflicting demands on them.

## ***Principles relating to Stress Management***

The Council will:

- Aim for a healthy workforce, working in a safe and pleasant environment
- Aim to identify and manage occupational stress
- Aim to raise the understanding of all employees, including managers and those with leadership responsibilities, of their personal responsibilities at work
- Provide training to raise awareness and to support the policy
- Aim for suitable re-habilitation programmes for employees returning to work, which include appropriate support
- Conduct a consistent, fair and reasonable approach to work attendance
- Provide employees with appropriate levels of support via managers, supervisors, occupational health services and facilities for employee counselling
- Ensure the operation of safe and effective grievance and disciplinary procedures.

The Council will deliver this policy through:

- Promoting the health, safety and well-being of all employees.
- Providing strategic support through the central health and safety forum.
- Adopting the Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards approach to reduce the risks and manage hazards impacting on health in the workplace
- Monitoring absence levels to identify particular sources of stress as a means of taking action to prevent or reduce such sources in the future
- Implementing approaches and support to prevent and manage work-related stress, including provision of training for employees and managers where appropriate.

## ***Guidance on Identifying and Managing Stress in the Workplace***

### ***Support available***

To support this policy, the following services are available to all managers and employees:

**Occupational Health Service** – to provide advice and guidance on the impact of stress on health and what steps the Council and/or employee may take to address any issues arising.

**Counselling Service** - to provide a free and confidential service to employees in order to discuss concerns related to work or personal circumstances (Tel: 01803 207369 with answer phone service out-of-hours, Tel 01803 207349).

**Human Resources** – to provide support guidance and training to managers and employees in dealing with stress and in the use of the Council's related policies and procedures.

**Health and Safety** – to provide guidance and support on conducting risk assessments and what steps can be taken to minimise or eliminate work-related risks.

### ***How do I recognise stress in myself and others?***

We are all likely to experience some sign of stress from time to time. There is no standard set of symptoms, although if you experience one or more of the following on a regular basis, it may indicate you are experiencing a high level of pressure which could lead to stress:

- Being depressed, feeling low, low self-esteem
- Being unresponsive to others
- Being resistant to change
- Unable to make decisions
- Suffering relationship problems
- Under-performance
- Irritability and intolerance
- Sickness absence
- Loss of humour
- Inability to concentrate
- Constant tiredness
- Exhaustion
- Dependency on drugs, alcohol etc

### ***What should I do if I think I am experiencing stress at work?***

If you think you are experiencing an unacceptable level of pressure in your work or you are experiencing personal difficulties at home which could impact on or potentially affect your work, the following options are open to you:

- Inform your manager/your union representative/Human Resources in writing that you feel you are experiencing symptoms of stress and what you think it may be caused by
- Ask for a meeting with your manager to discuss and look jointly at a way forward
- Think about what strategies/actions may help from your perspective to reduce or manage the causes of stress more effectively (e.g. would a temporary reduction in your hours or re-organisation of your duties assist, if these can be effectively arranged?)

- Make contact with the support available from the Council - e.g. the counselling service if you think this may be of assistance
- Discuss with your manager whether attending a Council organised training course on Managing Stress at Work might assist you
- Take advice from your own GP
- Discuss with you manager whether an appointment with the Council's Occupational Health Physician would be beneficial
- Consider whether any changes to your own lifestyle (e.g. taking exercise or adjusting diet) might help alleviate any symptoms you are experiencing.

### ***What should managers do if an employee appears to be suffering from stress?***

If one of your employees approaches you raising concerns that they are becoming stressed or you believe that one of your team may be under stress, although they have not raised any issue directly with you, you should consider the following actions to address the situation:

- Discuss sensitively with the employee at the earliest opportunity, to consider what the potential causes may be and what remedial action can be taken in both the short and longer term
- You must carry out a stress assessment at the annual performance management review (see appendix 1 & 2 – Management and Self- Assessment proformas), eg at RADAR interviews.
- Advise the employee of support that is available to them (the Counselling Service; training programmes)
- Encourage the employee to see their GP
- Consider whether the working environment could be enhanced by promoting more effective working relationships and team working (e.g. team building sessions etc)
- Consider whether any temporary modifications to their duties or hours of work may provide some short term resolution
- Consider whether a referral to Occupational Health would be helpful for both the employee and to provide advice for management. Where an employee has been absent for 4 weeks or more, then a referral would be the normal course of action to take. Where an individual has indicated that in discussion with you, or it has been indicated on a medical certificate that they are suffering from stress attributable to their work, you must discuss this with your HR Advisor/Manager
- Keep written notes of any discussions with the employee
- Where an employee has been off sick which they are attributing to stress, consider a phased return to work (e.g. part days each week) to assist with their rehabilitation. This is particularly important where an individual has been off work for a long period of time. Employees should not normally suffer any financial detriment through this arrangement, which should be managed within the provisions of the Council's Managing Attendance Policy
- Hold regular reviews with the employee to discuss whether they are improving and the issues they have raised are being tackled effectively
- If the employee shows no signs of improvement, then the employee should be referred for a medical opinion from Occupational Health, if this has not previously been sought. Where concerns have been raised about the employee's ability to do the normal duties of the post and

there are no evident other work-related factors causing stress (e.g. temporary increase in workload; covering for absences by other staff) Occupational Health's view should be sought regarding their capability to carry out the duties within the job description.

## ***Assessing risks in the workplace***

An assessment of work-related stress is likely to form part of a wider work-based risk assessment, but the issues highlighted below can be incorporated into an assessment. More detailed guidance on how to carry out a risk assessment is contained in the appendix to this document.

**When completed the results of the assessment should be input into the HSE analysis tool available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm> and strategies to address the findings must be developed from the results.**

The following questions should be considered as part of a risk assessment to enable factors which may cause or contribute to stress in the workplace to be more effectively addressed:

- Is the job basically 'do-able' within the time and with the resources allowed?
  - Is the job description realistic, do they understand what they have to achieve and how it integrates with other Council operations?
  - Does the person specification fit the job?
  - Do individuals have a realistic say in how they carry out their day to day duties?
  - What support is available to them
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- **Remember stress and capability to do the job are different issues and needs to be addressed separately**
    - Has the workload gradually or suddenly increased significantly which may mean the job is no longer do-able?
    - If we are asking people to do more – have we taken account of their ability to cope?
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- **Individuals have a limited number of mental and physical resources and cannot always deal appropriately with the challenges they face. When it comes to pressure – people may react differently. Some individuals are energised and challenged by a heavy workload, whereas others may become overwhelmed and depressed. Also in some circumstances too little or monotonous work can have negative effects. Peoples' reactions may change over a period of time so monitoring by managers is important to ensure that issues are picked up at an early stage.**
    - Is there any conflict or ambiguity in the role?
    - Are the responsibilities and scope of the job clear?
    - Is there adequate information about the role?
    - Are line management arrangements clear?

- Where the jobholder is required to “wear more than one hat” or there is a joint responsibility with other individuals for particular activities – is there potential for conflict and how can it be minimised?
  - Does the working environment cause stress?
  - Are workplaces well lit, adequately heated and well-ventilated?
  - Are layout, facilities, furniture and equipment suitable?
  - Is equipment properly maintained?
  - Are security arrangements sufficient?
  - Have staff had sufficient training in how to deal with difficult or challenging customers/clients?
- **Concerns about physical well-being can be a stressor. Where the job involves contact with members of the public/clients, the physical and mental risks (e.g. from potential bullying and harassment) which individuals may face should be adequately investigated and necessary security or support mechanisms established.**

Do individuals have regular contact with their manager where personal issues can be discussed?

- Is a culture of openness and partnership at work encouraged?
- Are employees kept in the picture about what is going on in the Council e.g. organisational changes are taking place?
- Are employees encouraged to give their views on work-related issues, changes etc without fear of recrimination?

### ***Further Advice/Support***

The Council is committed to ensuring the working environment is safe for its employees and work-related factors that may cause or exacerbate stress for its employees are minimised or removed. If you have any further queries about how the Council can support you in dealing with stress-related issues, speak to your HR Advisor or one of the Health and Safety Officers.

### ***Policy Feedback***

**Should you have any comments regarding this policy, please address them to the HR Policy Feedback mailbox –**

HRpolicy@torbay.gov.uk

### ***History of Policy Changes***

This policy was first agreed by members of the Torbay JCC on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2008

<b>Date</b>	<b>Page</b>	<b>Details of Change</b>	<b>Agreed by:</b>

Policy to be reviewed June 2011

**Appendix 1 –Assessment Form** the results of the assessment should be input into the HSE analysis tool available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm>

		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	I am clear about what is expected of me at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	I can decide when to take a break	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	I know how to go about getting my work done	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	I have unachievable deadlines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	I am given supportive feedback on the work I do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	I have to work very intensively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	I have a say in my own work speed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	I am clear about the goals and objectives of my department	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	There is friction or anger between colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	I have a choice in deciding how I do my work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	I am unable to take sufficient breaks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	I am pressured to work long hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
19	I have a choice in deciding what I do at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	I have to work very fast	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	I am subject to bullying at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	I have unrealistic time pressures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	I get help and support I need from colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	I have some say over the way I work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27	I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	Staff are always consulted about changes at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	My working time can be flexible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31	My colleagues are willing to listen to my work related problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32	When changes are made at work, I am clear how this will work out in practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33	I am supported through emotionally demanding work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34	Relationships at work are strained	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35	My line manager encourages me at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix 2 – Managers Form

	<b>Managers assessment</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Recommended action</b>
1	Have you conducted a risk assessment of the work carried out within your department(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If you have not you should carry out an assessment of the risks to your staff and implement its findings
2	Is Stress one of the risks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you know what the stressor(s) are, if not find out?
3	Is it within a particular area or office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Find out the area of work that stress is a problem
4	Are there people away from work on a regular basis (4+ times within a 12 month rolling basis)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure employees complete the stress self assessment questionnaire when returning to work <u>and</u> refer the person to Occupational Health in line with the managing attendance policy
	<b>Demands</b>			
5	Is the volume of work paced to take into account peaks and lows of volume?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Work should be prioritised to allow for peaks and troughs in volume and extra help provided to cover peak volume.
6	Do people regularly take work home to finish it off?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Work should not be taken home on a regular basis. Employees should be informed to seek assistance if there is too much to do in the normal day.
7	Do people work more than the standard working day (7.4 hours) regularly to finish off work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Employees should be advised that extended working hours should not normally be worked and never on a regular basis.
8	Are there sufficient people for the amount of work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure there is sufficient employees for the tasks in hand, if you can't raise the issue with your manager.
	<b>Control</b>			
9	Can people take breaks as they need to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	People should take at least a 20 minute break after 6 hours of continuous work.
10	Do they have a choice in deciding how and what they do at work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Within reason people should be given the opportunity to work at their own pace and in their own way.
11	Do your people work flexitime?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12	Can they take time off in lieu?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If they work longer than expected they should be allowed time off in lieu.
	<b>Support</b>			
13	Are your people trained to do their work effectively and safely	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Training must be provided as and when necessary, it is a manager's responsibility to ensure employees are trained in the safe working practices of

				their jobs.
14	Do they know what to do if they cannot cope with the amount of work			Advise all employees where to seek help and advice when they cannot cope with the job, hold regular team meetings or reviews out side of the performance management review (eg RADAR for Council employees)
15	Can they get help from colleagues			Encourage people to actively support each other.
16	Do you provide help in times of heavy volumes of work?			Provide help and support where needed.
17	Are you and your people aware of the Councils counselling service?			Make sure you know how and when to use or promote the use of the Counselling service
	<b>Relationships</b>			
18	Does your staff get on with each other?			Encourage positive relationships within groups, develop effective teams, if people do not get on consider changing the group
19	Are they subject to abuse, bullying or harassment from other staff, clients or customers?			Ensure you and all of your people are aware of and know how to use the Bullying and harassment policies, and whistle blowing procedures.
	<b>Role</b>			
20	Do all your people have up to date job descriptions?			Make sure all of your people have up to date job descriptions
21	Do they understand what is required of them?			Make sure they know what the required standards of work and personal performance are.
22	Is their performance regularly reviewed?			Review regularly; it gives you the change to discuss any issues arising from work, or relationships which could lead to stress.
23	Do they receive extra training or support where performance falls below the expected standard			Provide extra support and training as and when necessary.
	<b>Change</b>			
24	Are there frequent changes within your department			Discuss impending changes at the earliest opportunity.
25	Are you and your people consulted prior to changes taking place?			Ensure people are consulted at the earliest opportunity on changes; you have a duty to consult with employees on anything that affects their health and safety.
26	Do you hold regular team meetings?			Hold regular team meetings, be open to feed back and take it back to your managers.