Barcombe   Hamsey   Plumpton Skylark Federation

Stress Management Policy

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Signed ....Chair of Governors   Date …..…

Signed ....Executive Headteacher Date …..

Stress Management Policy and Risk Assessment

Date: October 2020

Document summary

The effective management of stress is vital to the successful operation of the County Council and to the wellbeing of its employees. This policy provides guidance on how this can be achieved and makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be positive if managed correctly, and stress, which is likely to be detrimental to physical or mental health if it is prolonged.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 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".

1.2. 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.

1.3. If stress is intense and sustained it can affect mental and physical health and contribute 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.

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

1.5. The County Council is responsible for the health, safety and welfare of its employees at work and recognises that their wellbeing is important to its performance and service delivery. The County Council therefore aims to take positive measures to manage stress effectively and to create a culture where stress is minimised, so far as is reasonably practicable. It also aims to ensure that where stress becomes an issue for employees, they are encouraged to seek support and guidance.

1.6. Primarily this policy is concerned with stress arising from the working environment, but it also recognises that an employee's personal life may contain stress. An approach has to be taken to support an employee whatever the cause of their stress, particularly if this has an impact on an employee's ability to work effectively.

1.7. The County Council will deliver this policy through:

- Promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees, including the use of risk assessments to identify and manage stressors impacting on health in the workplace.
- 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.
- Implementing strategies and support mechanisms to prevent and manage work related stress.

1.8. Stress prevention and management interventions in the workplace can be broken down into three broad groups:

- **Primary Interventions** attempt to eliminate the sources of stress by, for example, implementing this policy, undertaking a Stress Risk Assessment, completing a Wellness Plan etc. A range of tools and resources are available on the Staff Mental Health Webshop page.
- **Secondary Interventions** set out to improve the overall situation in the workplace by implementing the recommendations identified in any risk assessment e.g. raising awareness of stress issues, job competency training, setting up staff communication groups.

- **Tertiary Interventions** deal with the treatment and rehabilitation of those individuals who have suffered ill health as a result of stress e.g. Occupational Health advice, access to the Counselling and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

2. Typical Causes of Work-Related Stress

2.1. Listed below are the key factors identified by the HSE as having the potential to cause stress at work. More information can also be found on the HSE's website (www.hse.gov.uk).

- 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.
- 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 of 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 what is going on.
- 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).

3. How do I recognise stress in myself or in others?

3.1. 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.

3.2. Physical effects include:

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

3.3. There might also be some adverse effects on the County Council 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.

3.4. It is therefore important that stress is pro-actively managed, in accordance with the requirements of this policy and the Attendance Management Policy and Procedure, located on the Attendance Management Webshop page.

4. Responsibilities

4.1. **Line Managers will:**

- 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 managers 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, and signpost to support e.g. Counselling and Employee Assistance Programme.

- Familiarise themselves with this policy and associated documentation and recognise their legal obligation to comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act.

- Ensure that their staff are aware of the provisions of this policy including the action everyone can take to minimise the risk of stress, this may include identifying training and/or development needs.

- Meet with their staff on a planned and regular basis to monitor workload and discuss any concerns the employee may have and to listen to what they have to say. This could be through formal staff appraisals, supervision, team meetings etc.

- Effectively and sensitively manage any staff stress related absence in accordance with the Attendance Management Policy and Procedure (located on the Attendance Management Webshop page), giving consideration to referring the employee to Occupational Health as appropriate.

4.2. **HROD and Health & Safety Consultants will:**

- Provide additional advice and guidance, on request, to assist with the implementation of this policy ensuring that this policy is kept up to date in accordance with any changes in legislation and reflects current best practice.

4.3. **Employees will:**

- 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.

- Where possible, take account of the impact of their lifestyle in terms of controlling stressors, e.g. adopting healthy lifestyle habits.

- Co-operate with their manager in the undertaking of any risk assessments and the implementing of any necessary control measures.

- Be aware of their own wellbeing and seek advice and support when necessary.

- Be supportive of colleagues through any difficulties they may be dealing with.

5. Interventions

5.1. Risk Assessment

5.1.1. 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. 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 assessments are an on-going process and should be monitored and regularly reviewed.

5.1.2. When stress hazards are suspected managers should ask their employee to consider a Stress Risk Assessment (Section 2 of this document). When a stress related absence has occurred, this process must be followed and in both cases Part 2 of the form must be completed. Any actions identified must be implemented, monitored and reviewed as necessary. See the Stress Risk Assessment Guidance Notes (Section 1 of this document) for more information.

5.1.3. If Managers feel unable to resolve work-related stress issues themselves, they should seek assistance at an early stage from their line manager and if further assistance is necessary, contact your dedicated HR Consultant or another member of the HR Advisory Team.

5.2. 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 HROD are followed.

5.3. Induction and Training

5.3.1. All new employees must receive induction into their jobs. Starting a new job can be stressful and a planned induction can help eliminate many concerns. For further information, please consult the documentation on Supported Introduction to Employment located on the Induction and probation Webshop page.

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

5.4. 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.

5.5. 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 should:

- Follow the Attendance Management Policy and Procedure (located on the Attendance Management Webshop page) when planning the employee's return to work. An Occupational Health referral should be considered.

- Explore and where possible implement additional support/safeguards with the employee, that are known to have contributed to their absence in the first place.

- Complete a Stress Risk Assessment (Section 2 of this document), 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.

- Managers should also consider other flexible working options. Full details are available on the Flexible working and Carers Webshop page. 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.

- 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 HR Consultant 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.

Section 1: Stress Risk Assessment – Guidance Notes

The individual Stress Risk Assessment is a tool which enables employees to identify the issues which have caused them to experience stress. The aim is for the employee to work with their Manager in identifying solutions which help reduce these stressors. The circumstances in which this tool must be used are:

- If individuals report difficulties in coping with their work and/or personal life.
- If individuals are absent from work and report experiencing increased stress or stress related illness.
- If a manager identifies a pattern of sickness absence and feels that this may be stress related.
- If a manager is concerned about anyone's performance at work and feels that this may be stress related.

NB: If a manager has concerns that an individual may be experiencing stress, this must be confirmed with the employee before starting a Stress Risk Assessment. If a concern remains, following the assessment, it is recommended that advice is sought from a member of the HR Advisory Team.

Notes for Employees

The overall aim of the Stress Risk Assessment is for employees and their managers to jointly explore the causes of stress. It is an opportunity to reflect upon the situation and the circumstances around it and to help identify how to reduce the stressors moving forward.

The first stage of the Stress Risk Assessment is for the employee concerned to complete Part 1 of the form. Ideally this would be completed with the line manager as this will provide the best opportunity to address the stressors and agree a meaningful action plan. However, if the employee feels unable to do this, the form can be completed by the employee alone or with the support of another person.

NB. It is important that employees using this tool are as specific as possible with the information and examples they provide.

Notes for Line Manager
Summary of actions proposed by employee
Each of the actions identified by the employee need to be summarised and put in order of importance**.**

Actions to be taken by management
All suggestions to reduce stressors should be considered. Commentary should be provided on what action will be introduced to address the concerns raised.

Explanations of reason for any inaction
Identify specific reasons and rationale for any adjustments that are not reasonable.

Review date for each action and details of progress at that date.
Identify a suitable review date for each of the actions identified and then, at the review date, identify the actions that have been introduced.

Section 2: Stress Risk Assessment

Part 1 – For completion by Employees

What is currently causing you to feel stressed? This can be stressors inside or outside of work.

Please can you prioritise these stressors in order of their impact or significance upon you?

Is there anything currently in place to support you with these stressors either at home or at work?

If personal/home related:

- *Would you like to tell me about the personal factors that have contributed to your absence?*
- *What is your support network e.g. GP, family, friends?*
- *Is there anything the organisation can do to support you?*

If work related:

- *Do you feel that any relationships at work with pupils, colleagues or management may have been contributing factors to your symptoms?*

- *Are there any recent changes within the school which you feel are impacting on you?*

- *Do you feel that you have enough clarity with tasks, objectives and your role?*

- *Which elements of your role are you concerned about?*

- *Would you find it helpful to review your work plan and diary together to explore any pressure points and how to mitigate these?*

Are you aware of ESCC Support Measures?

For example…

- *EAP on 0333 212 8382 - free 24/7 advice on; debt management, maintaining a healthy work-life balance, managing relationships, holding difficult conversations, coaching for managers and counselling on long-term ill health, stress, bereavement and relationship and family problems*

- *Training courses and Coaching; various e-learning and courses available around building personal resilience, mental health awareness, managing stress effectively, being your best and knowing your worth and the menopause. If you are having challenges on a project or work issue you may find it helpful to talk to one of our qualified Coaches. Email: Coaching@eastsussex.gov.uk for more information.*

- *Consider flexible working options such as reduction in hours, change in work pattern if viable for service*

- *Look at the Staff Mental Health Webshop page and try some evidence-based tools.*

Can you think of any further support or reasonable adjustments which could be put in place to reduce the impact of these stressors?

What actions are now agreed to address this?

Part 2 – For Completion by Managers

Actions and/or Reasonable Adjustments Agreed:

	1	2	3
Date of next meeting			
Manager signature			
Employee signature			

Completed review forms should be emailed to the employee where possible and a signed copy (physically or digitally) retained on the employee's local supervision file.