

Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The main purpose of this report is to present the revised Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy to Policy and Resources Committee, for Committee's approval for implementation of this on 01 October 2016.
- 1.2 The most recent analysis of stress was a National Labour Force Survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), titled "Stress-related and Psychological Disorders in Great Britain 2014", which found that an average of 23 working days were lost per case of stress, depression or anxiety. Further, the industries that reported the highest prevalence rates of work-related stress, depression or anxiety were human health and social work, education and public administration and defence. The research also identified a trend to steadily increasing stress-related absence over the preceding three years.

This trend is reflected in the context of the Council's absence figures as in each of the last three years stress was the main reason for sickness absence among Council employees. In 2015 – 2016, 23.53% of all absence reasons were attributed to stress (mental health / stress / depression / debility / fatigue etc).

The impact of stress-related absence on productivity, effectiveness and service delivery, and the prevalence of stress-related absence in work areas that directly relate to the Council means that there remains a clear need for an appropriate framework and guidance for managers and employees in regard to managing stress.

The review of the Council's Policy position in regard to reducing and managing stress in the workplace, and associated resources, therefore seeks to impact on the above.

1.3 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee recommends the updated Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy to the Council for approval.

Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 As an outcome of the reporting and monitoring of attendance to Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee a Stress Audit was undertaken in 2014. An outcome of this was that the Stress Reduction Policy be reviewed. An updated Policy is attached. The accompanying Procedures are also attached for information, in order that Policy and Resources Committee are aware of current resources in regard to this Policy.

2.2 In reviewing this Policy it was recognised that additional specific intervention was needed within accompanying Procedures to deal with the impact of stress-related absence. Existing resources relating to this were dated and required revision and improvement. Specifically, it was recognised by stakeholders that more guidance was needed for everyone. An updated Stress Risk Assessment was needed, and a process for its use.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee recommends the updated Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy to the Council for approval.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 A Stress Audit was conducted in 2014 and a Stress Audit Action Plan was developed for each Service as a result of this. A corporate outcome of the Stress Audit was to review the Stress Reduction Policy.

Additionally, in each of the last three years stress was the main reason for sickness absence among Council employees. In 2015 – 2016, 23.53% of all absence reasons were attributed to stress (mental health / stress / depression / debility / fatigue etc). There remains, therefore, a clear need for an appropriate framework and guidance for managers and employees in regard to managing stress.

4.2 In terms of the external context, the National Labour Force Survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), titled “Stress-related and Psychological Disorders in Great Britain 2014” found that an average of 23 working days were lost per case of stress, depression or anxiety. Further, the industries that reported the highest prevalence rates of work-related stress, depression or anxiety were human health and social work, education and public administration and defence. The research also identified a trend to steadily increasing stress-related absence over the preceding three years.

It is, therefore, vital that the Council addresses stress in the workplace and does so through a proactive, positive and purposeful approach.

The Council’s approach to managing employees who are experiencing stress is consistent with much of public and private sector approaches and at its core it is correct as it is acknowledged by Employment Tribunals that no job in itself is inherently designed such as to cause stress to the postholder. The purpose of the revised Policy, Procedure and supporting materials is to assist the Council in reducing stress in the workplace by supporting employees who are experiencing stress, and by supporting managers in their interactions with employees who are experiencing stress.

The resources relating to stress were, therefore, fully and critically reviewed, leading to creation of a new Policy, Procedures, Stress Risk Assessment and Stress Action Plan. These were discussed with stakeholders across Council functions and amended accordingly as a result of these discussions.

All stakeholders have agreed the undernoted underlying principles to reduction of stress in the workplace: -

- Employees must be supported at times when they are experiencing stress
- Managers actively manage stress and are supported by senior managers in doing this
- The Council creates a culture where stress is not considered a sign of weakness and employees are not subjected to unreasonable demands, and ensure that this is demonstrated by all, through actions and interactions

It was agreed that everyone has a responsibility in managing stress. It was also agreed that we are going through a time of change and while this will inevitably create anxiety for employees, what we can do at this time is support employees through the Service Choices process.

Employee engagement is a pivotal mechanism to facilitate reduction of stress. The draft People Strategy recognises that effective engagement with employees has a direct impact on stress in the workplace and

therefore specifically addresses mechanisms for involving and engaging with our employees.

To support the reduction of stress – and specifically absence as a result of stress –we have introduced a number of additional interventions: -

- Mandatory Stress Awareness Training has been rolled out across the Council.
- A management report which highlights every instance of absence due to stress has been added to the suite of monthly management reports.
- Stress-related absence is a trigger for an automatic referral to Occupational Health.
- The Council's Healthy Working Lives group is actively taking forward the preventative elements of the Council's Wellbeing agenda in relation to stress.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 In order for our interventions to be successful, management of stress in the workplace requires to be: -

- Supported by senior managers and stakeholders
- Clearly linked to other activities
- Embedded within the culture of the Council

Managers and employees must be given the time to deal with stress issues and adequate resources must be made available for any necessary interventions to enable employees to return to their normal levels of engagement, productivity and attendance following episodes of stress.

In this way we can address the sickness absence levels attributable to stress, improve employee wellbeing, and develop an engaged workforce.

Policy and Resources Committee is therefore requested to approve adoption of the revised Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy as recommended in section 2.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policy	Update to existing policy
6.2 Financial	No direct financial implications
6.3 Legal	Will help prevent successful tribunal challenges relating to stress / disability
6.4 HR	Failure to address stress-related issues will impact

	on employee engagement and productivity
6.5 Equalities	This complies with the Council's Equalities policy
6.6 Risk	High levels of stress-related absence present risk to organisational efficiencies
5.7 Customer Service	High levels of stress-related absence will impact on customer service

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy and Procedures