ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL

REDUCING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE POLICY

Making Argyll and Bute a place people choose to live, learn, work and do business.

Author:	Improvement and HR
Department:	Customer Services
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Author:	Jennifer Coyle
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v. 2.2	*18/08/2016*	*Considered by Policy and Resources Committee*

Policy Statement

1.0 Introduction

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as: *"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them…"*

They go on to clarify the difference between pressure - which can have a positive impact and help us to perform at our best - and stress - which occurs when pressure becomes excessive. The HSE are clear that stress is not an illness – it is a state. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop.

Employees may, at times, experience stress arising from demands placed upon them from a variety of work-related and external sources. The Council is committed to providing a healthy, safe and supportive working environment and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

The Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy will provide a framework to enable managers, employees and Trade Union representatives to proactively and reactively manage the issues of stress and minimise the impact of stress related issues within the Council.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all employees of Argyll and Bute Council including Teachers, Local Government Employees and Chief Officials.

The Council will ensure that good equal opportunities practice underpins the operation of this policy and the policy will apply to all employees irrespective of age; disability; sex; gender reassignment; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership; and pregnancy and maternity.

3.0 Key Principles and responsibilities

The Council is committed to:

- Monitoring levels of stress across the authority by conducting regular stress audits and developing action plans to reduce any potential areas of risk where stressors have been identified.

- Monitoring and actively managing stress related absence from work in accordance with both the Council's Maximising Attendance and Reducing Stress in the Workplace procedures, including sensitive and planned management of return to work following sickness absence and use of stress risk assessments where appropriate.

- Providing resources and support for managers and employees through the Council's Wellbeing agenda which will allow them to recognise the signs and symptoms of stress and manage these appropriately.

- Providing managers with resources and training which raises their awareness of how their behaviour can impact on the stress levels of their staff and support them to develop positive behaviours in this regard through the PRD process.

- Providing access to a free and confidential Counselling service for Council employees

- Promotion of joint working between management, individuals and the recognised trades unions, with the aim of identifying and minimising the impact sources of stress

In their endorsement of this policy and procedure, and in monitoring of stress-related absence, Elected Members and Strategic Management Team will demonstrate their commitment through their actions, including not having unreasonable expectations of employees and dealing with stress-related absences, or employees who are experiencing stress, with empathy and consideration. Strategic Management Team, Senior Managers and Managers will ensure that they create an environment in which employees are able to say when they are struggling, and must be prepared to prioritise for employees by removing pieces of work from the employee and making any alternative arrangements as required. This commitment will become intrinsic to the culture of the organisation.

The entire workforce and Elected Members have responsibilities when it comes to ensuring that stress is managed appropriately:

Elected Members

Will endorse and exhibit a supportive approach to managing stress and demonstrate their commitment to this in their monitoring of stress-related absence. Elected Members are bound by their own Code of Conduct, within which there is a Protocol for Relations between Councillors and Employees in Scottish Councils. Elected Members will be mindful of the impact that stress has on employees and ensure in their interactions with employees that they do not place unreasonable demands on, or have unreasonable expectations of, employees, and that they do not approach employees direct unless this has been agreed as a working practice with the relevant manager.

Strategic Management Team

Will be committed to managing stress and ensure that this message is understood throughout their department. Strategic Management Team will communicate the message that stress is not a sign of weakness and that they will support employees who are experiencing episodes of stress. Strategic Management Team will ensure, in their monitoring and analysis of stress-related absence, that they take appropriate action to support employees within their department and that the relevant policies

and procedures are implemented consistently and all staff are aware of their own role, responsibilities and expectations.

Senior Management

Will ensure they deliver the message that they are committed to managing stress and that staff and managers within their team are aware of what is expected of them in terms of managing stress and have the resources and appropriate training to do so. Managers will make appropriate arrangements to support employees who are experiencing stress.

Managers

Will ensure they are aware of the Council's policies and procedures in relation to managing stress and that they follow these. Managers will be aware of how their behaviour can impact on the stress levels within their team and will identify and monitor development needs in relation to these through the PRD process. They will also ensure that employees within their teams are aware of their own responsibilities with regard to identifying the signs and symptoms of stress in themselves and colleagues and taking early action to seek support.

Employees

Will ensure they are responsible for their own welfare. Where an employee recognises that they are experiencing early signs of stress or pressure or they have reason to believe one of their colleagues may be they will take action to seek support from their line manager or another appropriate manager at the earliest possible opportunity.

Improvement and HR

Will ensure the Council's policies and procedures are robust, clear and in line with best practice guidance in the field of managing stress. Improvement and HR will also ensure that resources on managing stress are easily accessible to managers via MyHR on The Hub and that support is available for managers working through the procedures.

The Trades Unions

Will ensure they are available to support members on the issues of stress at work and through the Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy and Procedures and should encourage members to use the Reducing Stress in the Workplace Procedures. In addition the Trades Unions will advise management of any changes to work practices or design that could contribute to stress and work with management and their members to identify actions to eliminate and reduce stress.

Legal Context

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 employers have a general duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practical, the health, safety and welfare of their

employees at work. This includes taking steps to make sure they do not suffer stress-related illness as a result of their work.

This policy also takes into consideration the legal requirements of the UK Employment and Health and Safety Law, the relevant provisions of EU law such as:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Management of Health and Safety and Work Regulations 1999

4.0 Application of Policy and Procedures

Separate Reducing Stress in the Workplace Procedures and guidance have been developed to support the application of this policy.

5.0 Review and Monitoring

The policy will be updated to incorporate any relevant change to legislation or best practice as required.

ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL

REDUCING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE PROCEDURES

Making Argyll and Bute a place people choose to live, learn, work and do business.

Author:	Improvement and HR
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Reducing Stress in the Workplace Procedures

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1.0 Introduction

These procedures have been developed to provide guidance on meeting the requirements set out in the Council's Reducing Stress in the Workplace Policy and should be read in conjunction with these.

The Council recognises that it has a duty to deal with work related stress when it arises and is keen to support employees and managers to resolve or mitigate issues of workplace stress. While not legally responsible for stress which arises outwith the workplace, the Council recognises that this can often impact on an individual's overall wellbeing and can therefore impact on the employee at work. Where an employee is experiencing stress as a result of issues or events outwith the workplace managers should consider what, if any, support could be put in place for the employee.

Employees can expect to be supported by the Council at times when they are experiencing stress and will be directed to sources of information or support when the Council becomes aware of their situation. The Council recognises that stress can be a reaction to a variety of issues and does not necessarily impact on an employee's ability to attend work and undertake their duties, but will take appropriate steps to monitor and, where possible, reduce or minimise stress in order to support and assist employees. Employees are encouraged to discuss with their Line Manager any concerns that they have in relation to stress at the earliest opportunity. Line Managers will ensure that employees are supported in accordance with this and other relevant policies and procedures.

The Council also acknowledges that employees who are subject to management under Council procedures may experience stress at that time. The Council will ensure that employees are directed to sources of support for stress, and will take appropriate steps including Occupational Health advice, while the procedures are progressed.

Importance of early detection

Detecting possible stressors early on, acknowledging them and taking preventative or remedial action can prevent pressure becoming a problem and it can be easier to reduce or eliminate the causes. This will both improve employee wellbeing and deliver benefits to the Council. Examples of these outcomes include: employees experiencing better sleep, decreased colds and flu, decreased risk of heart attack; improved attendance levels, decreased turnover, improved employee commitment and engagement, improved productivity.

2.0 Identifying the signs and symptoms of stress

Stress can cause changes in those experiencing it – sometimes the signs can be clear to others and sometimes they can only be recognised by the person themselves. It is important that everyone looks out for changes in behaviour in ourselves, our colleagues and in groups of employees.

In ourselves
Stress can show itself in many physiological ways, affecting all parts and systems of the body eg
- Head and mental health – anxiety, changed moods, negative thoughts, increased emotions, disturbed sleep patterns
- Heart, lungs and circulation – changes in heart rate, increased blood pressure, 'palpitations'
- Skin – sweating, reddening, blushing
- Metabolism – increased cholesterol, increased glucose availability
- Muscles and joints – muscle tension
- Digestive system and gut – dry mouth, suppression of digestion or nausea, 'butterflies' in stomach
- Reproduction and growth – suppression of reproductive and growth hormones
- Immune system – changes in specific immune responses

Long-term physiological effects can include anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, eczema, psoriasis, metabolic changes, muscle stiffness, soreness, osteoporosis, appetite suppression, Irritable Bowel Syndrome and other gut conditions, reproductive abnormalities, loss of libido, immune suppression, increased susceptibility to some infections or diseases.

These changes can manifest in emotional symptoms, mental issues and behavioural changes eg negative or depressive feelings, disappointment with yourself, increased sensitivity or tearfulness, confusion or indecision, poor concentration or memory, changes in eating habits, mood swings, changes in sleep patterns, increased smoking / drinking / drug taking, nervous behaviour, changes in attendance or timekeeping.

In others - individuals
It can be possible to recognise some of the above symptoms or behaviours in others, perhaps from what your colleague or team member is telling you about what they are experiencing or perhaps in discussion about absence.

In others - groups
Groups of employees can experience stress in situations. Examples of this could include times of major change, following a traumatic event within the team, as a result of a build-up of pressure eg high workloads for a prolonged period. Signs that a group of employees is experiencing stress could include increase in turnover, complaints or grievances; increase in sickness absence or stress; disputes or disaffection within the group; poor performance; difficulty in attracting new staff.

What to do – general points

It is important not to assume that someone exhibiting any of these behaviours is experiencing stress as they can be indicative of other conditions, but if you recognise this in yourself or a colleague then it may be advisable to contact your GP or suggest that they contact their GP. If it is small changes in a person's behaviour you shouldn't over-react, but if they continue then you may wish to discuss it. **It is not the responsibility of an individual or a line manager to diagnose stress so if you are worried about yourself or another person it is recommended that you or they see their GP.** What you can do is recognise the change in behaviour, be aware that something is wrong and take action.

If an employee or group is experiencing work related stress, it is important that managers accept that it may be a problem for staff and understand what it is and also understand the relationship between work stress and stress from events or circumstances outside of work. You should listen to what the employee says about how they are feeling and what they perceive the reason(s) to be and take action on what you find out. It may not be possible or appropriate to resolve all the issues, sometimes it isn't the job or activities that are stressful in themselves and the role of the line manager does not extend to eg counselling, but you should discuss what you can and can't do for the employee to help them through the difficult period. It is important that you make time to deal with the problem properly, and that you take action.

Without generalising, but acknowledging that when people are faced with more pressure, or more intensive pressure, or more often – as can happen where there is a mix of issues - an individual may be more susceptible to an adverse reaction. While these issues may be equally be work related or personal, worry about how an individual is perceived - or is perceived to be coping - in the workplace can also lead to stress.

Therefore, when you as a line manager or as a colleague are considering approaching an employee to discuss potential signs of stress, you need to do so
- on the basis of having made no assumptions or preconceptions
- considering specific circumstances – as far as you are aware – that may have a bearing on your colleague or team member's demeanour
- without over-reacting to individual triggers, but think of the person, potential stressors and reactions as a whole

3.0 Relationship with other policies and procedures

Equality and Diversity Policy - Stress and Protected Characteristics
Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council must
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The Council's Equality Duty allows us to
- Take effective action on equality issues
- Make the right decision, first time round
- Develop better policies and practices, based on evidence
- Be more transparent, accessible and accountable
- Improve outcomes for all

The Reducing Stress in the Workplace Procedures have been developed in conjunction with Trade Unions, departmental representatives and Equality Forum representatives. Examples of matters that may be relevant for consideration in identifying or dealing with stress, in relation to the protected characteristics, are outlined below.

Some employees may have underlying mental health conditions which can be exacerbated by stress. In these situations you may wish to consider writing a Wellness and Recovery Plan (WRAP) (sometimes called an advance statement), which is an agreement between an employee and his or her line manager about what to do if you become unwell. It is an appropriate supportive preventative measure and a means of proactively managing an aspect of mental health. A WRAP can include guidance on eg how your line manager should approach you if he or she sees changes in your behaviour; triggers or warning signs; crisis and recovery plans etc. Detailed guidance on managing mental health conditions in the workplace can be found on the websites of relevant organisations; further information on WRAPs in particular is available at www.rethink.org

Apart from mental health conditions, other disability can impact on stress. This can be as part of a person's cycle of management of health, but also particularly when circumstances change eg where there is a sudden diagnosis of a potentially or actually life-changing condition; where a known condition enters a degenerative phase; where existing coping mechanisms or treatment stop being effective etc. Discussions with employees in these situations should be carefully tailored to the specific circumstances, and in many cases it will be appropriate to seek advice from Occupational Health. Depending on the circumstances you may be seeking advice for the short-term or long-term.

Differences in gender and in culture can affect how we perceive and deal with stress. Men and women react differently to pressure. While there is no single underlying reason for this, you may wish to consider how to approach

a colleague or team member, or begin a conversation with them about changes in behaviour, and the terminology that you use. If an individual – whether male or female – is typically considered to be of 'strong' character, or a 'coper', or finds it difficult to relate to the language being used then they may find it more difficult to talk about feelings of 'not coping'. Cultural backgrounds can influence what a person perceives to be a stressor and also how he or she responds. Social customs can be causes of anxiety eg shaking hands with the opposite sex, or eye contact.

Life events can impact how we deal with stress. An employee who has recently given birth or adopted a child may experience conflicting emotions about returning to work. Family life and life events, across the spectrum can, in general, impact on an individual's reaction to pressure. While analysis of Council absence has shown that employees who are absent due to stress tend to be older, care should be taken in making assumptions or generalisations about how people cope, eg it may simply be that an individual has more personal responsibilities or pressures when he or she finds him- or herself with caring responsibilities for one or more parents in addition to responsibilities as a parent him- or herself, and whatever other pressures he or she has to deal with day-to-day.

Some LGBT people or people who have proposed, started or completed a gender reassignment process may report that they feel more vulnerable. If this is reported as being due to bullying, the Council does not condone bullying in any respect and all instances this should be dealt with in accordance with the Workplace Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure. However, vulnerability can be as a result of less overt reasons eg social isolation and invisibility – particularly if a person is not 'out' at work. If an individual hasn't previously expressed offence or distress in the past, this does not mean that they condone or agree with behaviour or opinions; they may still be experiencing stress.

Religion and belief can both be a cause of, and help a person deal with, stress. It can help an individual deal with stress by providing structure, peer support, a sense of belonging and sometimes professional support (eg counselling), however it can also create pressure eg if an individual is following a very strict dogma. Social or lifestyle decisions and any tension between them and a person's religious doctrine can also create stress, and this differs between religions or belief systems, depending on the individual doctrine.

There can be friction between the expression of a person's religion or belief or other strongly-held principles and their colleagues' feelings of freedom of expression, other religion or belief, sexual orientation or sex etc. The Council supports the rights of everyone under the protected characteristics but recognises that sometimes these may be conflicting. In these circumstances intolerance, particularly when expressed as overt or covert bullying or through any unlawful act, is not acceptable. Employees should recognise where their belief, as expressed, could reasonably cause offence or stress to another employee, and modify their behaviour accordingly.

Maximising Attendance at Work Policy and Procedures

Where an employee is not absent from work but has reported that he or she is experiencing stress, the Maximising Attendance at Work Procedures will be followed as referred to in section 5. Where an employee is absent from work for a stress-related reason, the Maximising Attendance at Work Procedures will be followed as referred to in section 6.

There may be isolated circumstances where the Council is implementing the Maximising Attendance at Work Procedures as a result an employee's absence or absence pattern, and the employee reports that he or she is experiencing stress as a result of this. The employee will be advised of appropriate sources of support and information and the manager will be mindful of the impact on the employee. The Council remains entitled, however, to bring matters of absence or unsatisfactory attendance to the attention of the employee and put in place appropriate measures to bring attendance to an appropriate level, or deal appropriately with continued absence or unsatisfactory attendance.

Improving Employee Performance Policy

Where an employee is experiencing stress as a result of the Council implementing the Improving Employee Performance Policy, the employee will be advised of appropriate sources of support and information and the manager will be mindful of the impact on the employee. The Council remains entitled, however, to bring matters of under-performance to the attention of the employee and put in place appropriate measures to bring performance to an appropriate level, or deal appropriately with continued under-performance.

Disciplinary Procedures and Code of Practice

Where an employee is experiencing stress as a result of being the subject of an investigation into alleged misconduct under the Council's Disciplinary Procedures and Code of Practice, the Council will endeavour to ensure that the investigation and any resultant formal procedures are completed as soon as possible and without undue delay. The employee may be required to attend an Occupational Health consultation to determine the appropriate means of concluding the process, which will consider his or her fitness to attend meetings in person, fitness to participate in writing, or other appropriate measures. The Council remains entitled, however, to investigate allegations of misconduct and take appropriate action in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedures and Code of Practice.

Grievance Procedure

Where an employee is experiencing stress as a result of being the subject of a complaint under the Council's Grievance Procedure, the Council will endeavour to ensure that the investigation and any resultant actions or procedures are completed as soon as possible and without undue delay. Where appropriate, and with the consent of both parties, mediation will be undertaken on conclusion of the Grievance Procedure, in order that both parties establish an appropriate and effective means of working together. The employee may be required to attend an Occupational Health

consultation to determine the appropriate means of concluding the process, which will consider his or her fitness to attend meetings in person, fitness to participate in writing, or other appropriate measures. The Council remains entitled, however, to investigate grievances and take appropriate action in accordance with the Grievance Procedure or any other relevant policy or procedure.

General points relating to conduct and behaviour
The Council takes all allegations of inappropriate conduct or bullying seriously and this will not be tolerated in any circumstances. Where an allegation is made against an employee in regard to behaviour against an employee, client or member of the public – irrespective of whether the recipient has reported experiencing stress as a result of this – it will be dealt with under the appropriate policy.

4.0 Training

The Council is committed to helping individuals identify and deal with stress - whether work or personal, their own or a colleague or team member. A half day course is available for employees, called Stress Tools and Techniques. If you would like further details on this course, contact learninganddevelopment@argyll-bute.gov.uk

There are also two e-learning modules in regard to mental health and wellbeing:
- Recognising Stress
- Dealing with Stress

You can work through these on the e-learning (LEON) section of The Hub – in the first instance you should contact learning and development for login information. Managers can also access the above resources and training. Additionally, there is a Managing Stress in the Workforce course as part of Argyll and Bute Manager.

There is more information about core competencies and the Argyll and Bute Manager course in section 8.

Following a period of stress-related absence, whatever the duration, all employees should expect to have a return to work meeting at which they should be prepared to discuss the nature of the stress and what support or adjustments can be made, particularly in the short-term. Managers should also be prepared to have this conversation and should make him- or herself familiar with potential options available in the context of the employee's work. Longer-term adjustments can also be discussed, but if through the discussion it becomes apparent that there is an issue with a specific part of the job then Occupational Health advice should be sought. Where the absence has been long-term, an Occupational Health referral will normally have been made as part of the process of managing stress-related absence.
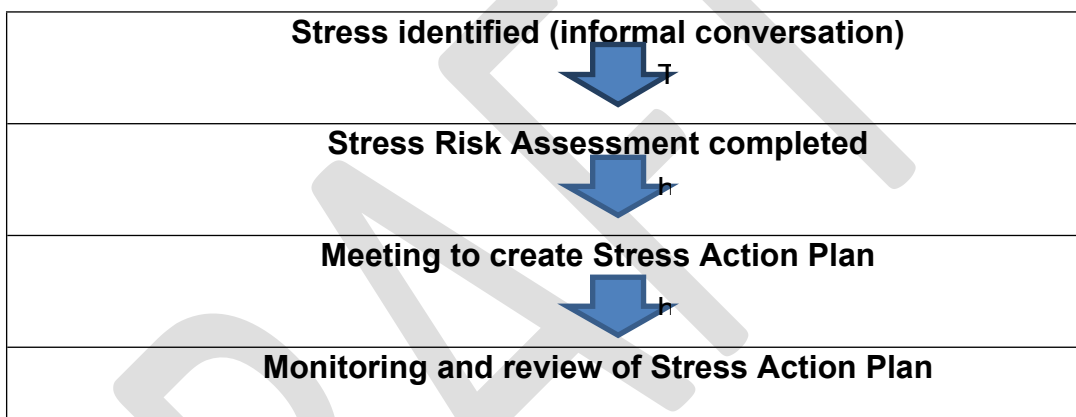
It is important that support measures or adjustments are put in place quickly so that the employee can return to and / or sustain work. Even if the absence has not been long-term, the line manager should keep in regular contact with the employee to establish how they are coping. Employees should expect to meet with their line manager and contribute to this discussion.

The training tools explain the various processes, what is expected of you as an employee or a manager, and what you can expect. Please ensure that you are familiar with this.

5.0 Managing Stress at work (employee is not absent)

When identified early, stress can often be managed with some adjustments or additional support while the employee remains in work. Work is an important determinant of mental wellbeing and often an employee who is going through a difficult time e.g. the breakdown of a relationship, or caring for an infirm relative may wish to maintain the routine of attending work and continuing to benefit from the support of colleagues. It is therefore important that the Council has procedures in place for recognising and managing stress through supporting the employee where possible to remain in the workplace.

The flowchart below outlines the procedure to be followed for managing stress in the workplace

Stress identified (informal conversation)
Stress Risk Assessment completed
Meeting to create Stress Action Plan
Monitoring and review of Stress Action Plan

Stage One: Identifying Stress

Stress may be identified by the employee themselves, their line manager or another colleague. Section Two of these procedures provides guidance on how we can identify the signs and symptoms that someone may be suffering negative effects of stress and the positive action we should take. Regardless of how the potential signs of stress have been identified, the line manager and employee should have an initial informal conversation to acknowledge concerns and discuss whether there are grounds to move forward in relation to completing a risk assessment and putting actions in place. It may be that the signs and symptoms have been misinterpreted or that there is an alternative explanation which is not linked to stress. If this is the case then moving forward in relation to these procedures may not be beneficial.

If the informal conversation establishes that there are factors which could be causing stress then the line manager should issue the employee with the Stress Risk Assessment to complete. Where the employee his- or herself has brought up the issue of stress they may access the toolkit via MyHR on The Hub and provide it to their line manager at this informal stage.

From time to time the line manager's behaviour or their relationship with the employee may be a contributing factor to the employee's stress. Where this is the case the employee should raise their concerns with another appropriate manager (usually their line manager's direct line manager) and initial discussions in relation to their issues should be held with the alternative manager until the relationship issues have been resolved. Where relationships are an issue it may be appropriate to refer to the Council's Mediation procedures.

Stage Two: Completing the Risk Assessment

Once it has been established that an employee may be experiencing stress it is important to assess and mitigate the risk of that becoming an issue in relation to their health and overall wellbeing. The Stress Risk Assessment can be accessed via The Hub and uses the HSE stress management standards to break the job down into components which could be the source of pressure at work as well as giving consideration to factors outside of work. The self-assessment toolkit is a useful tool for breaking down stress into its component parts and is a good basis on which to form a discussion with the employee around what action could be taken to mitigate the risk of stress impacting on their health and wellbeing.

The 6 factors used in the questionnaire are noted below and Appendix One identifies potential action that could be included in an action plan to mitigate these, although the examples illustrated are not exhaustive and individual cases will vary in terms of the actions which may be appropriate. Where appropriate, advice can be sought from Occupational Health in relation to measures that may be put in place.

- **Demands**: Are there any concerns around timescales, deadlines, intensity of work?
- **Control**: Does the employee have control over how they do their work? When they can take breaks?
- **Support** (from manager and peers): Does the employee get feedback on their work? Can they rely on help from colleagues? Do they feel encouraged?
- **Relationships**: Is there friction in the workplace? Does the employee feel bullied?
- **Role**: Is there clarity around what is expected from the employee? Do they understand where their role fits within the wider context of the Council?
- **Change**: Do they have the chance to discuss change, do they feel consulted?

The employee should be asked to complete the Stress Risk Assessment and should, where required, be given time during working hours to complete the questionnaire and bring it to the meeting. The

Stress Risk Assessment will form the basis of the discussion for creating a Stress Action Plan.

Stage Three: Developing an individual stress action plan

Once the employee has completed the Stress Risk Assessment a meeting should be arranged at which the employee and line manager can discuss what measures can be put in place to support the employee, and this will be very much dependent on what the employee has indicated on the risk assessment. This meeting should be convened as soon as possible and certainly within 5 days of the original assessment having been completed. Although it is not required, where an employee wishes to be accompanied at the meeting by a trade union representative or another companion this request should normally be accommodated.
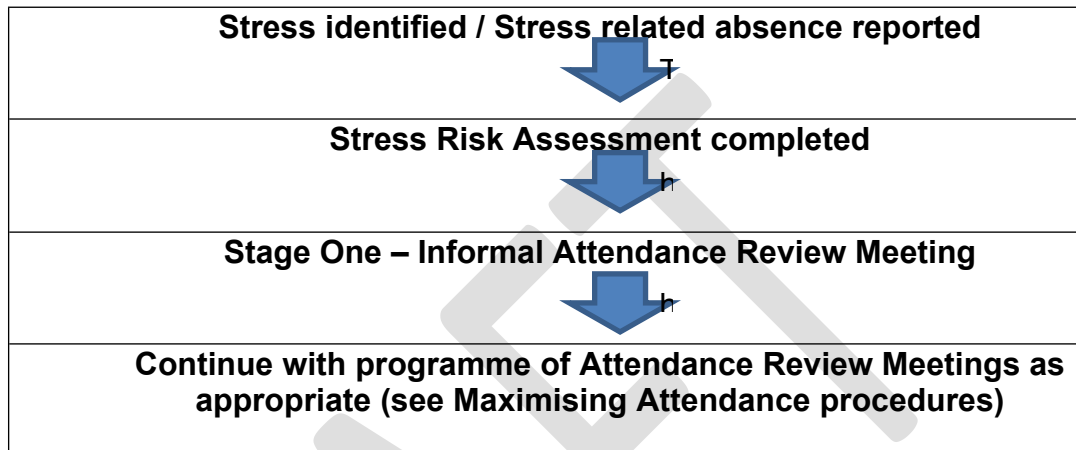
Please refer to the Managers' Guide on meeting with an employee to develop a Stress Action Plan for further information on how to conduct this meeting and what should be covered (Appendix One)

Stage Four: Monitoring and Review

Once the Stress Action Plan has been developed a copy of this and the completed Stress Risk Assessment should be sent to HR for the employee's file. The action plan should be reviewed regularly by the employee and the line manager. Initially the reviews may be more frequent to allow a check that the measures are having the desired effect. Where temporary adjustments have been agreed, for example in work patterns, then it is important for reviews to take place before these come to an end and for a discussion about how the return to contractual duties will take place and what support is required around this.

6.0 Managing Stress related absence (Employee not at work)

All absence should be managed in accordance with the Council's Maximising Attendance Policy and Procedures; the framework of Attendance Review Meetings outlined in the Maximising Attendance Procedures provides the setting in which discussions about the employee's stress related absence should take place.

Stress identified / Stress related absence reported
Stress Risk Assessment completed
Stage One – Informal Attendance Review Meeting
Continue with programme of Attendance Review Meetings as appropriate (see Maximising Attendance procedures)

Stress identified / Stress related absence reported

The employee will report their absence to the absence line in accordance with the Maximising Attendance Procedures. On reporting stress related absence to the absence line the employee will be made aware of the Employee Counselling Service. In addition to this, the attendance team will arrange for them to receive a Stress Risk Assessment. The employee will be asked to complete this and bring it with them to their first Attendance Review Meeting. In instances where the reason for absence changes to stress, or where the employee does not report the absence themselves, the attendance team will endeavour to make contact with the employee at the earliest possible opportunity following receipt of the information that the employee is off sick with stress. The line manager will also contact the employee to discuss their absence and any measures that could be put in place to assist an early return to work.

Stage One Attendance Review Meeting

The line manager will receive an email from HR to advise that the employee has reached a trigger within the Maximising Attendance Procedures and that they have to arrange an Attendance Review Meeting. Stress related absence (regardless of its length) is a trigger and warrants an Attendance Review Meeting under the Maximising Attendance Procedures. The line manager should write to the employee providing 5 days written notice of the meeting and informing them of their right to be accompanied if they wish (standard letters are

available to download from MyHR on The Hub). The letter should also remind the employee to bring along the completed Stress Risk Assessment questionnaire which they should have received from the attendance team. The stage one Attendance Review Meeting should take place within the employee's first 8 weeks of absence.

Every meeting will be different depending on the employee's individual circumstances but the following agenda maybe a useful guide:

Welcome and Introductions
Welcome the employee to the meeting and introduce everyone present (TU rep, HR etc. if appropriate) explain the purpose of the meeting and try to put the employee at ease. Although this meeting is part of the formal Maximising Attendance procedures it should be supportive in nature and discussion will be around the reasons for the employee's absence, what can be done to support the employee while they are absent and to assist them in making in a return to work.

Explore the reasons for absence
In order to put support in place for an employee it is important the line manager understands the factors that have contributed to the employee having to take time off work. Allow the employee to explain how they are feeling and the reasons for their absence. Open questions are helpful here such as
"Can you tell me about how you are feeling?"
"Can you talk me through the events which led up to you recognising you were stressed and having to take time off?"

Explore the Stress Risk Assessment
Now that you have an understanding around the reasons for the period of sickness absence it will be helpful to explore this more fully using the Stress Risk Assessment. By going through the completed questionnaire with the employee you will be able to identify which areas of the work may be contributing to their stress as well as considering factors outside of work.

Explore possible actions / develop Stress Action Plan
Once you have identified the main stressors you should agree what, if any actions/ measures could be put in place to mitigate these. You should complete a Stress Action Plan in this regard to keep record of what can be done and within agreed timescales. Appendix one provides guidance on the type of adjustments or measures you may wish to consider for each group of main stressors. However the list is purely indicative and not exhaustive. Measures and adjustments will vary greatly depending on individual circumstances.

Consider if Occupational Health advice could be helpful
Although not always necessary, Occupational Health can be a useful tool when managing stress-related absence. The Occupational Health doctor can provide advice on the employee's current medical state

and how this is likely to impact on their ability to do all or certain elements of their post. They can also advise on the likely timescales for return to work depending on treatments etc. and whether ill health retirement or redeployment could be appropriate. In addition the Occupational Health Doctor can advise on reasonable adjustments to be considered as well as appropriate programmes for a phased return to work. From time to time employees may feel that other corporate procedures are contributing to their stress e.g. discipline, grievance or performance management. Where appropriate the Occupational Health Doctor will be able to advise on the employee's fitness for taking part in meetings as part of these procedures.

During the meeting discuss whether it is appropriate for a referral to Occupational Health to be submitted and agree actions if necessary in this regard. In rare circumstances, on conclusion of this meeting a manager may consider an Occupational Health referral to be appropriate but the employee does not. If this is the case the manager should approach HR for advice. Managers should consider what may be causing reluctance eg the employee may not be ready for this discussion. Employees should be aware that refusing to attend Occupational Health can lead to suspension of sickness allowance and the Council will be unable to provide appropriate support to the employee.

Closing the meeting and review
Now that you have agreed actions that have to be put in place including consideration of an OHP referral and having completed a Stress Action Plan you should summarise what has been agreed and draw the meeting to a close. If the employee is to remain absent while agreed measures are put in place it is important to agree the following before closing the meeting in accordance with the Maximising Attendance Procedures:

- Method and frequency of informal contact while they employee remains absent
- Date time and venue for next review meeting

Where plans are in place for the employee to return to work you should monitor and review progress against the Stress Action Plan in accordance with section three of these procedures on managing stress at work.

7.0 Mediation

Mediation can be a useful means of resolving matters when stress in the workplace is associated with conflict or relationship issues. Mediation is voluntary on both sides and involves an impartial third party helping participants find their own solution and reach an agreement that will resolve the issue.

A mediation session, which usually lasts a maximum of a day, allows an issue to be discussed in a confidential and supportive environment and can bring a speedy end to an issue. An agreement is written up by the mediator at the end of the session and both parties can move on, improving the situation and removing the stress, or at least aspects of stress that are covered by the agreement.

A leaflet outlining the benefits of mediation and the mediation process is available on MyHR.

8.0 Supporting Management Development to deal with Stress in the Workplace

Line managers are supported in their role to help them deal with situations of stress in the workplace. The PRD processes, 1:1s and Supervision all create opportunities for managers to discuss any emergent issue with employees, whether it has been identified by the individual or the manager. It is the intention of the Council to create a supportive environment for employees where there is communication with line managers who know their team – their capabilities, strengths and weaknesses – and who recognise and praise achievement, however small. Line managers will also deal with issues of stress in the workplace at the earliest opportunity.

The Council's competency framework provides a foundation on which managers can build their capability as an effective manager as part of the process through which we demonstrate our vision and values in how we manage and deliver our services. There are seven themes which are split into four levels. All employees have to meet the requirements of Level 1 and further levels apply to managers depending on their seniority within the Council. The competency framework is a core part of the PRD process.

The Argyll and Bute Manager programme has a number of modules, built around the Council's policies, whereby line managers can work through aspects of the employer-employee relationship that can be stressful for employees eg Improving Employee Performance, Maximising Attendance, Disciplinary Procedures and Code of Practice. There is also a dedicated Managing Stress in the Workforce module within the programme.

9.0 Continually mitigating the risk of stress across the organisation

- Stress Audit every 2 years with regular pressure indicator
- Service redesign or Job evaluation
- Managing Stress course for employees

To determine levels of stress, the Council undertakes regular Stress Audits in which every employee is asked to provide their views and comments on a range of factors relating to eg relationships, experiences, demands, change etc. The Council will use the results from each survey to identify services where improvements can be made and compare with previous surveys to track overall improvements over time. The final 6 questions of the survey are also a pressure indicator, which we will review on a regular basis for action as appropriate.

Additionally, the Council monitors information which is acknowledged to be an indicator of levels of stress in an organisation, in order that action can be taken as appropriate at an early stage eg sickness absence data, staff turnover. There are also opportunities for employees to discuss concerns relating to stress in the organisation through PRD meetings, 1:1s, Supervision, team meetings, toolbox talks etc.

Where changes are being considered to how we deliver services and / or go about our business as a Council, as part of the service redesign process managers must consider the impact of changes on their team and, if appropriate, employees in another service who are also affected by the change (a manager from the affected service will be part of the review group in this situation and will fulfil this role). As part of the job evaluation process, which may be within the service review process or which may relate to an individual post, managers must also consider how changes to or creation or replacement of a post will impact on the jobholder.

Employees can request to attend the Stress Tools and Techniques course through which they can develop insight into behaviours and reactions and develop techniques to manage their own stress, and can complete the e-learning modules Recognising Stress and Dealing with Stress (as detailed in Section 3).

10.0 Appendices

Appendix One – Managers' Guide to developing a Stress Action Plan

Appendix Two – Stress Risk Assessment toolkit

Appendix Three – Stress management competency indicator tool

Appendix Four - Guidance – Identifying the signs and symptoms of stress

Appendix Five - Counselling service details

Appendix Six – Links to other resources

Appendix One: Managers' Guide to developing a Stress Action Plan

Meeting Arrangements

Venue
The arrangements for the meeting are important. Ideally the meeting should be face to face where possible. Given the geography of the Council this may not always be possible and video conferencing or shared screen video calls via Lync may be appropriate. The venue should be private and out of sight and earshot of other employees. It is not appropriate to hold these meetings in a public venue e.g. café etc. Where the meeting is taking place via Lync ensure the employee has somewhere private to access the call. They are unlikely to wish to discuss their issues around stress at their desk in a shared office for example.

Time
Think about the timing of the meeting beforehand. The employee may wish to open up to you about issues that are troubling them and how they are impacting on them at work and it is important that they feel they are given the time to do this. Unless there were exceptional unforeseen circumstances it would not be appropriate cut this meeting short in order to dash off to another pre-arranged meeting or for the employee to feel that you are rushing through it in order to get to another commitment. Make sure you have plenty of time to carry out the meeting. Additionally, ensure the employee has the time they require - if the meeting is arranged for 10 minutes before the end of their shift and they have commitments after work they may feel they have to rush through it.

Agenda/ What to cover
Welcome the employee and explain the purpose of the meeting and the supportive context of the Council's Reducing Stress in the Workplace and Maximising Attendance procedures. The purpose of the meeting is to explore the possible stressors both in the workplace and outwith the workplace and look where possible at options to support the employee to manage these. The manager should not in any way attempt to take ownership of the employee's situation or the stress that they may be experiencing. However where it is reasonable for adjustments or support to be put in place that will assist the employee in managing their stress these should be offered. Also, where stressors in the workplace are identified, the Council has a duty to attempt - where possible - to mitigate these.

Talk through the employee's responses to the Stress Risk Assessment questionnaire. Having reviewed the responses to the questionnaire you should go on to discuss what possible support could be put in place. Table one outlines some possible suggestions

although these are not exhaustive and each case will vary in relation to what is appropriate.

It is important that mangers are supportive to employees who are experiencing stress but that this support is within the boundaries of their role. For example, managers would not be expected to act as a counsellor for employees who wish to discuss their issues in detail but they could make employees who are keen to talk about their issues aware of the Counselling service where trained counsellors will be available for them to work through their issues. The line manager's role is to listen, show empathy, make adjustments in the workplace where it is reasonable and appropriate to do so, and to signpost the employee to various organisations or external agencies who may be able to assist them.

The wellbeing section on The Hub has a number of links where employees can access support or advice on mental and physical wellbeing and it may be worth making the employee aware of these. Where the line manager is not sure what adjustments would be reasonable they may wish to discuss these with their HR Officer or refer the employee to the Occupational Health Doctor for advice on what adjustments may be of assistance.

Possible actions

Stressor	Includes	Possible actions to consider
Demands	Timescales, deadlines, intensity of work	Time management training Renegotiation of deadlines Temporary adjustments to accommodate reduced workload
Control	Does the employee have control over how they do their work? When they can take breaks? Is their work pattern conflicting with other demands?	Alternative Ways of working policy and procedures
Support	Does the employee get feedback on their work? Can they rely on help from colleagues? Do they feel encouraged?	Regular Team meetings Team building exercises Arrangements for increased one to one/supervision
Relationships	Is there friction in the work place? Does the employee feel bullied?	Rebuild working relationships via Mediation Procedures

		Grievance procedures Bullying and Harassment
Role	Is there clarity around what is expected from the employee? Do they understand who their role fits within the wider context of the Council?	Clear job description Appropriate training PRD outlines expectations
Change	Do they have the chance to discuss change, do they feel consulted?	Clear flow of communication within the team Regular team meetings where change is planned and discussed Employee involved and consulted in change processes

Appendix Two – Stress Risk Assessment toolkit

Stress Risk Assessment
For Individuals and Small Teams

This Stress Risk Assessment is designed to be used alongside an organisational level Stress Risk Assessment. An organisational assessment is important as it aims to identify and reduce potential causes of stress before they have an impact on performance and health, taking a strategic and proactive approach.

However, what is a source of stress for one individual may not be a source of stress for another and at different times individual employees may feel they are not able to cope with the pressures of work. This is sometimes, but not always, exacerbated by pressures an individual may be experiencing outside work. It is important that individuals raise any concerns about pressure at work and outside work early so that the organisation can look to see if they can take steps to reduce excessive pressures (or stress) where possible and / or support the employee.

Similarly, it is good practice for individual teams to regularly discuss pressures at work so that they can be addressed, where possible, if they are becoming excessive. Where it is not possible to directly reduce the pressures it is still important for teams to discuss them so that individuals do not feel alone and team members can support each other.

This risk assessment can be used to support discussions with individuals or teams to systematically work through the pressures and consider if these are a source of stress and, if so, if any action can be taken to reduce the risks to performance and health.

Individual Stress Risk Assessments are commonly facilitated by the Line Manager or other appropriate person in the organisation e.g. HR, Health and Safety or Occupational Health adviser. It is useful if the individual employee has an opportunity to look through the risk assessment in advance of the one-on-one meeting.

Team Stress Risk Assessments are most commonly facilitated by the Team Manager / Leader. It is useful if the individual team members have an opportunity to look through the risk assessment in advance of the team discussion.

Work and Wellbeing Consultants Ltd

www.work-wellbeing.co.uk Email: enquiries@work-wellbeing.co.uk

Stress Risk Assessment

For completion by employee		For completion by line manager	
Name:		Date SRA received:	
Employee number:		Line Manager's name and post title:	
Post title:		Is employee currently absent from work?	YES / NO
Team and Service:		If yes, please detail reason for absence and date absence commenced.	
Work location:		Has an OHP referral been organised?	YES / NO
Date SRA submitted to line manager:		Date SRA discussed with employee:	

Guidance for line managers

When assessing risk levels, please consider the guidance in the table below. You should also consider whether the risk is inherent in the job or whether it is linked to the individual's reaction, in order to assess appropriate measures to minimise risk. Has the employee experienced stress as a result of this risk before – if so, what measures were put in place? Also list any control mechanisms that are currently in place to minimise the risk.

RISK LEVEL	High	Medium	Low
Description	High probability of long term sickness due to work-related stress	Medium probability of sickness due to work-related stress	Low probability of work-related stress
Next steps	Immediate action required	Action required	Exposure to hazard very rare

Stress Risk Assessment

Column 1 Potential cause of stress	Column 2 Consider each question	Column 3 Tick as instructed in Column 1	Column 4 What action might help in response to areas ticked in Column 3	Line Manager: **Risk Level** High/ Medium/ Low
Demands If the answer to these questions is YES, tick Column 3	**Do different people demand things from you at work that are hard to combine?**			
	Do you have unachievable deadlines?			
	Do you have to work very intensively most of the time?			
	Do you have to neglect some tasks because you have too much to do?			
	Are you unable to take sufficient breaks?			
	Do you feel pressured to work long hours?			
	Do you feel you have to work very fast most of the time?			
	Do you have unrealistic time pressures?			
Control If the answer to these questions is NO, tick Column 3	**Can you decide when to take a break?**			
	Do you feel you have a say in your work speed?			
	Do you feel you have a choice in deciding how you do your work?			
	Do you feel you have a choice in deciding what you do at work?			
	Do you feel you have some say over the way you do your work?			
	Do you feel your work time is flexible?			

Column 1 Potential cause of stress	Column 2 Consider each question	Column 3 Tick as instructed in Column 1	Column 4 What action might help in response to areas ticked in Column 3	Line Manager: **Risk Level** High/ Med/ Low
Support (Manager) If the answer is NO, tick Column 3	**Does your Manager give you enough feedback on the work you do?**			
	Do you feel you can rely on your Manager to help you with a work problem?			
	Do you feel your Manager supports you through mentally challenging or emotionally demanding situations at work?			
	Do you feel your Manager encourages you at work?			
Support (Peers) If the answer is NO, tick Column 3	**Do you feel your colleagues would help you if work became difficult?**			
	Do you get the help and support you need from your colleagues?			
	Do you get the respect at work you deserve from your colleagues?			
	Are your colleagues willing to listen to your work-related problems?			
Relationships If the answer is YES, tick Column 3	**Are relationships strained or is there friction or anger eg between colleagues, service users, Elected Members etc?**			
	Are you subject to unkind words or behaviour at work? If so do you feel 'bullied' at work?			
Role If the answer is NO, tick Column 3	**Are you clear about what is expected of you at work?**			
	Do you know how to go about getting your job done?			
	Are you clear about what your duties and responsibilities are?			
	Are you clear about the goals and objectives for your team or Department?			
	Do you understand how your work fits into the overall aim of the organisation?			

Column 1 Potential cause of stress	Column 2 Consider each question	Column 3 Tick as instructed in Column 1	Column 4 What action might help in response to areas ticked in Column 3	Line Manager: **Risk Level** High/ Medium/ Low
Change If the answer is NO, tick Column 3	**Do you have enough opportunity to question Managers about change?**			
	Do you feel consulted about change at work?			
	When changes are made at work, are you clear about how they will work out in practice?			
Other issues If YES, tick Column 3	**Is there anything else that is a source of stress for you at work?** **If so provide details.**			

Council-specific questions

Column 1 Question	Column 2 Response	Column 3 What action might help in regard to areas where response in Column 2 is NO	Line Manager: **Risk Level** High/ Medium/ Low
Do you have the skills, knowledge and training to undertake your tasks?	YES / NO		
Do you have the opportunity to develop skills?	YES / NO		
Are you aware of support mechanisms available? Employee Counselling Service Occupational Health Service Mediation HR advice Health and Safety advice	 YES / NO YES / NO YES / NO YES / NO YES / NO		

Factors outside Work

This list of questions is mainly focused on factors at work. However, there may be factors outside work, for example your family life or personal circumstances, which may contribute to or add to the pressures at work. These may make it harder to cope with demands at work that you would normally be able to cope with.

It is useful, if you can, to discuss any concerns you have outside work with your line manager or other trusted colleague in the workplace as your organisation may be able to support you through these difficult times as well as address the sources of pressure at work.

You may wish to use the box below to list any factors outside work that you would like to discuss with your line manager

On the next page you will find an action plan which will be completed jointly by the employee and line manager once the contents of the Stress Risk Assessment have been discussed.

Action Plan

Line manager and employee should now agree an action plan using the template below: -

Stress Risk Assessment Action Plan					
Area of concern	Agreed action	By whom	By when	Review date	Date completed

Employee		Line Manager	
Signed:		Signed:	
Dated:		Dated:	

Further sources of support: -
Learn-in-Bytes modules   http://intranet.argyll-bute.gov.uk/e-learning
Counselling service   http://www.nhs24.com/usefulresources/livinglife
Maximising Attendance Procedures   http://intranet.argyll-bute.gov.uk/my-hr/sickness-and-absence
Health and Safety   http://intranet.argyll-bute.gov.uk/health-and-safety
HSE   http://www.hse.gov.uk/scotland/index.htm

Appendix Three – Stress management competency framework indicator tool

We have covered the line manager's role in identifying and managing stress, noticing changes in others' behaviour and being the point of contact for employees to discuss issues when they feel stressed.

The other part of the manager's role is to think about their own behaviour and how this helps reduce or indeed how it can contribute to an employee's stress. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provide a questionnaire for managers to assess their own behaviour and, through this, their effectiveness at preventing and reducing stress in their teams. Managers can ensure that the effective behaviours become part of their management skill set.

The toolkit is available on the links below as an interactive spreadsheet and a pdf document – the pdf document is also attached on the following pages

- Interactive spreadsheet http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.xls

- pdf document http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.pdf

Appendix Four - Guidance – Identifying the signs and symptoms of stress

The following information has been obtained from the HSE website
http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/signsandsymptoms.htm

Key message

Stress can cause changes in those experiencing it. In some cases there are clear signs that people are experiencing stress at work and if these can be identified early, action can be taken before the pressure becomes a problem. This may make it easier to reduce and eliminate the causes.

It is important that everyone looks out for changes in a person's or a group's behaviour. However, in many cases the changes may only be noticeable to the person subject to the stress and so it is also important to look at how you are feeling and try to identify any potential issues you may have as early as possible and take positive action to address them; this may be raising the matter with a line manager, talking to an occupational health professional or your own GP.

Stress can show itself in many different ways - see below. Some of the items in this list may not be signs of stress if people always behave this way. Managers may need to manage staff exhibiting some of these signs differently. You are particularly looking for changes in the way people behave that could be linked with excessive pressures.

Signs of stress in individuals

If you are suffering from some of the following symptoms it may indicate that you are feeling the effects of stress. If you find that work or aspects of your work bring on or make these symptoms worse, speak to your line manager, trade union representative or your HR department. It may be that some action taken at an early stage will ease the stress and reduce or stop the symptoms.

Emotional symptoms
- Negative or depressive feeling
- Disappointment with yourself
- Increased emotional reactions - more tearful or sensitive or aggressive
- Loneliness, withdrawn
- Loss of motivation commitment and confidence
- Mood swings (not behavioural)

Mental
- Confusion, indecision
- Can't concentrate
- Poor memory

Changes from your normal behaviour
- Changes in eating habits
- Increased smoking, drinking or drug taking 'to cope'
- Mood swings effecting your behaviour
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Twitchy, nervous behaviour
- Changes in attendance such as arriving later or taking more time off.

Please note these are indicators of behaviour of those experiencing stress. They may also be indicative of other conditions. If you are concerned about yourself please seek advice from your GP. If you are concerned about a colleague try to convince them to see their GP.

Signs of stress in a group

- Disputes and disaffection within the group
- Increase in staff turnover
- Increase in complaints and grievances
- Increased sickness absence
- Increased reports of stress
- Difficulty in attracting new staff
- Poor performance
- Customer dissatisfaction or complaints

It is not up to you or your managers to diagnose stress. If you or they are very worried about a person, recommend they see their GP. It is up to you and your managers to recognise that behaviours have changed, be aware that something is wrong and take prompt action. Take care not to over react to small changes in behaviour. You and your managers need to act when these behavioural changes continue. Use these symptoms (both individual and group) as clues.

Appendix Five - Counselling service

The Council supports employees who feel that they would benefit from professional support. The Council provides access to independent confidential support, information and help from trained counsellors who can help with personal difficulties, harassment and bullying, bereavement and addiction.

Counselling can help employees who are experiencing:

- Stress at home or at work
- Family or relationship problems
- Harassment or bullying
- Bereavement
- Anxiety and depression
- Post traumatic stress
- Alcohol or drug related problems
- Excessive gambling
- Any concerns that are causing worry

The counselling service is provided by PAM Assist and is available by telephone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and is accessed through the free telephone number **0800 882 4102**. Face to face counselling can also be arranged.

The PAM Assist website www.pamassist.co.uk also provides information, factsheets and tips on a variety of issues. In order to access this you need to enter the following information: -
    Username: argyllbute
    Password: argyllbute1

All counselling is free and completely confidential.

Appendix Six – Links to other resources

Learn-in-Bytes modules	http://intranet.argyll-bute.gov.uk/e-learning
Maximising Attendance Procedures	Information for everyone http://intranet.argyll-bute.gov.uk/my-hr/sickness-and-absence
	Information for managers http://intranet.argyll-bute.gov.uk/my-hr/managing-sickness-and-leave
Mediation	http://intranet.argyll-bute.gov.uk/my-hr/health-and-wellbeing
Health and Safety	http://intranet.argyll-bute.gov.uk/health-and-safety
HSE	http://www.hse.gov.uk/scotland/index.htm
PAM Assist	http://www.pamassist.co.uk