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Stress Management Policy

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Lewes District Council believes that its employees are its most important asset and that their wellbeing is essential to effective work performance and the provision of a high quality service. The Council recognises that it has a duty of care to its employees and that this duty extends to the active promotion of staff health and welfare in the broadest sense.

1.2 Lewes District Council recognises that stress is a health and safety issue and that it has many causes, including those arising from pressures in the workplace and those which affect the life of employees away from work. A controllable level of stress is healthy because it can lead to improved motivation, performance and increased job satisfaction. By contrast, excessive stress and repeated exposure to stressors is damaging to the individual. Stressors are the factors that can cause work related stress. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have identified six key factors that if not effectively managed are associated with poor health and wellbeing. These are the demands placed upon the employee, the control they have over their activities, the available support, working relationships within the team, their role and management of change. For detailed information on these factors see the *Council's Stress Management Guidance for Managers*.

2.0 Definition of Stress

2.1 Most people are exposed to regular pressures as part of their normal day to day lives and will generally cope with, and in many cases thrive on, moderate amounts of pressure with no detrimental effects. Indeed, lack of pressure or stimulation can be just as stressful for some people as too much pressure can be for others. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as *'The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.'*

3.0 Aims of the Policy

3.1 The aims of the Policy are:

- To increase an awareness of stress amongst managers and staff and explore methods available to combat it
- To initiate action to manage and reduce those pressures which lead to stress
- To assist staff in managing stress in others and themselves
- To manage problems which do occur and to provide accessible and confidential support
- To monitor and assess stress indicators

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- To encourage a flexible yet confidential approach to those individuals suffering from stress
- To manage effectively the return to work of those who have been absent as a result of stress

4.0 Responsibilities

Ultimate responsibility for this policy rests with the Council as the employer.

4.1 As with all matters relating to health and safety the Chief Executive will devolve responsibility for the application of this policy, and any supporting guidance, to Heads of Service and Managers.

4.2 Heads of Service and Managers will demonstrate their commitment and support to this policy by ensuring that the principles and strategies for managing stress are implemented and they will reflect the principles and strategies within their own management practice. Their specific responsibilities will be:

- To implement this Stress Policy for employees in their area
- To ensure that risk assessments take place and address any potential hazards and stressors
- To ensure that resources e.g. management time and commitment, are available to ensure that stress management principles and strategies are implemented
- To participate in, and to ensure the provision of, appropriate training to support the identification of occupational stress and recognised means of prevention, control and reduction
- To ensure that reasonable steps are taken to minimise the potential for risks arising from occupational stress
- To ensure good two way communication between themselves and staff, particularly when organisational or procedural changes are occurring
- To ensure that bullying and harassment are not tolerated
- To seek advice and guidance from HR where appropriate and work in partnership with HR to support staff who have been absent due to stress and to facilitate their return to work

4.3 Heads of Service and Managers may wish to devolve some authority in relation to this policy and its implementation. It is important therefore that members of staff who have management/supervisory roles should ensure that they:

- Foster good communication between management and staff, particularly at times of organisational and / or other change

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- Are aware of the necessary skills that staff need to complete their roles successfully and that they provide staff with meaningful development opportunities
- Monitor the physical work environment, workload, working hours, overtime levels and that they ensure that staff take their full holiday entitlement
- Deal immediately with issues of conflict, bullying and/or harassment
- Offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside of work
- Seek advice and guidance from HR where appropriate and work in partnership with HR to support staff who have been absent due to stress and to facilitate their return to work

4.4 Individual members of staff have a duty to:

- Take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others likely to be affected by their actions. Including taking account of the impact of their own lifestyle in terms of controlling stressors e.g. adopting healthy lifestyle habits
- Co-operate with the Council in ensuring that the aims and objectives of this stress policy are achieved including working with their line manager in undertaking risk assessments and implementing of any control measures
- Raise issues of concern with their line manager / supervisor. If an individual feels that their line manager/supervisor is connected to the stress they are experiencing then they should contact HR direct

5.0 Staff Development and Training

5.1 Many staff experience stress through feeling that they are not adequately trained for their current post and are especially at risk when they move to a new or changed role. The identification of training needs should have a high priority, especially so in cases where restructuring of individual posts, sections or larger units is taking place.

5.2 The identification and meeting of training needs should not be seen merely as a token annual exercise but as a continuing and vital process.

5.3 In relevant management and supervisory training (as well as in other relevant skills courses), it is highly recommended that stress management should be discussed as part of a manager's responsibilities

6. Implementation

Implementation of this policy is the responsibility of individual departments/Directorates.

6.1 HR will actively collaborate with staff and Unison in generating an awareness of workplace stress risk assessments and Council wide health and

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wellbeing

events.

6.2 Any individual exhibiting signs and symptoms of inappropriate stress levels requiring immediate support should work with the relevant management structure within the Directorate. If the situation is not remedied by this action or an individual member of staff feels it would be inappropriate to speak to their immediate line manager/supervisor or the situation continues to deteriorate than individuals should seek the advice and support of HR.

7.0 Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to any effective policy of stress management. They provide the necessary feedback that is critical to the maintenance and development of strategies, procedures and action plans designed to control stress in the workplace. This policy will be reviewed every 2 years, although updates and amendments achieved through monitoring the policies effectiveness may be made before.

7.1 All Directorates will identify and monitor specific indicators of stress within their areas of responsibility.

7.2 All Directorates will need to communicate regularly with HR to provide appropriate data regarding stress. This is in conjunction with sickness reporting procedures under the terms of the Council's Sickness Policy.

8.0 Further Information

The Health and Safety Executive has a comprehensive guide to Stress. This information can be accessed online at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>

The Council's **free and confidential counselling service** can be accessed via **0800 282 193** and covers personal life, work life, health and wellbeing and manager support. The counselling service and resources can also be accessed online via www.ppconline.info username: Lewes District Council. Calls are free from a landline but mobiles will be charged, however they can call you back right away should you request it.