

Staffordshire County Council		HR Policy Handbook		
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Policy Title	MANAGEMENT OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE			

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### Version Control

Version	Date Approved	Changes	Reasons for Alterations
Issue 1	February 2006	Introduction of Corporate Management of Stress Policy	
Issue 2	April 2010	Inclusion of advice regarding Statements of Fitness for Work and introduction of new corporate format and success indicators.	Review according to schedule and introduction of "Statements of fitness to work for employees."

## **Success indicators**

The following indicators will demonstrate the level of compliance with this policy and its procedures:

1. Stress risk assessment are undertaken for teams/units and record the findings using the Work Related Stress Risk Assessment Record Form
2. The results of risk assessments are communicated and control measures are implemented.
3. Where “Statements of Fitness for Work” regarding stress and mental health are provided by Medical Practitioners the adjustments and advice is considered.
4. Training regarding the management of stress is available for managers
5. Organisational Stress Survey results are validated and analysed through discussions with employee representatives at joint consultation forum by each directorate

### **1. Application**

This policy and the accompanying procedures apply to all County Council activities and workplaces.

### **2. Introduction**

Work-related stress is a serious problem for organisations, and can also cause problems for individual employees.

HSE commissioned research has indicated that: -

- about half a million people in the UK experience work-related stress at a level they believe is making them ill;
- up to 5 million people in the UK feel “very” or “extremely” stressed by their work; and
- work-related stress costs society about £3.7 billion every year

The Local Government Association has established that stress is the biggest cause of ill health absence in Local Authorities, accounting for 20% of absences and 30% of all long-term absences.

The costs of stress may also include high staff turnover, reduced work performance, lowered standards of service provision, more frequent accidents and poor public image. Taking action to reduce stress can be very cost-effective.

### **3. Policy Statement**

It is Staffordshire County Council’s policy to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure that no member of staff is exposed to excessive levels of work-related pressure. This is particularly seen as pressure that is unreasonable or inappropriate to the demands of their post, and that might therefore contribute to a risk of mental or physical ill health.

All reasonably practicable steps will be taken to monitor for and respond to situations in which mental or physical health or wellbeing is being adversely affected, either through unreasonable pressure or by a personal inability to cope with the normal and reasonable pressures of a job or workplace.

## **4. Aims and Objectives**

The overall aim of this policy is to promote and maintain both individual and organisational wellbeing. This will help to create the strong, resilient, effective and energetic teams needed for the Council to achieve its objectives, and to ensure that the people who make up those teams are healthy, committed and feel that they can contribute their best to their work.

The objectives of the policy are: -

- to prevent stress by identifying the causes and eliminating or adequately controlling the risks at source,
- to recognise and deal with stress related problems as they arise,
- to encourage and promote a climate of openness, and
- to rehabilitate employees suffering from stress through the provision of independent confidential counselling and changing their workload or working environment.

## **5. Arrangements for Applying the Policy**

### **5.1 Commitment and Communication**

Effective models for stress prevention indicate that top-level management commitment is an essential component.

All levels of management throughout the County Council are expected to fully support and actively promote the policy and be committed to addressing workplace stress. It is accepted that work-related stress is an integral part of human resource management and its effective management is wholly consistent with the Investors in People ethos.

The workplace culture should encourage good two-way communications and close employee involvement, especially at times of change. Employees should be allowed to contribute ideas and have some influence over decision-making, especially as regards their own work.

### **5.2 Risk Assessment**

The risk management process must consider work related stress. If present, it should be identified in risk assessments the same way as physical hazards such as hazardous substances or fire risks.

As part of the general risk assessment process, managers must consider whether their staff may be suffering from work stress. Stress is usually revealed by observations of employee difficulties or employee complaints of difficulties and ill-health. It may also be revealed through the following sources of qualitative and quantitative data; sickness absences, personal development review process, team meetings, stress survey results, high staff turnover/staff leaving, exit interviews, low productivity, focus groups, audit findings, etc.

Managers must complete a Stress Risk Assessment for their Team/Unit and record the findings using the Work Related Stress Risk Assessment Record Form HSF 23. Appendix 3 provides guidance for managers on the process of completing a work related stress risk assessment.

The assessment must be reviewed at least annually and following significant change. Remember a stress risk assessment is a continuous process that needs to be refined and adjusted as pressures change, and following significant change e.g. restructure, change of work location, change to role etc. Control measures should be monitored and improved if necessary.

When identifying the hazards facing the team/unit in terms of pressure, the six categories of risk that may cause work related stress outlined by HSE research will assist in this process:-

1. **Demands** – such as workload and exposure to physical hazards.
2. **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
3. **Relationships** – covering issues of bullying and harassment.
4. **Role** – understanding of role and eliminating role conflict.
5. **Support** – training and factors unique to the individual.
6. **Change** – how the organisational change is managed and communicated.

When reviewing risk assessments, the sources of qualitative and quantitative data can provide indicators as to whether the present actions taken to control work related pressure are working effectively, or need to be reviewed. Significant events with individual employees regarding work related stress would result in the need to review the Team/Unit Work Related Stress Risk Assessment.

It is recommended that managers document everything undertaken in connection with the assessment, including notes of meetings so that they develop a record of progress. Sensitive information provided by individuals must be treated in confidence, and not shared with others without their consent.

The outcomes of any stress risk assessment must be communicated to all relevant employees to ensure that they are aware of the hazards and the actions to be taken to prevent and minimise the potential for ill health caused by work related stress.

Individual employees may differ in their ability to cope with work related pressure. Where this is identified, the employees concerns and the action taken to manage the sources of negative pressure shall be recorded within the individual's appraisals, Personal Performance Review or Supervision/ 1-2-1 meeting records. Confidential/sensitive information provided by individual employees should be taken into account when completing the team stress risk assessment. However, such information about individuals should be recorded separately by the manager and treated in confidence.

At times, employees may highlight concerns regarding stress that are caused by factors outside of work. Action taken to help or support employees through such time will also be documented within PPR or Supervision/ 1-2-1 records.

### **5.3 Implementing Control Measures**

When deciding upon the control measures needed to eliminate or minimise the causes of negative pressure, it must be approached in the same way as

any other workplace hazard. It must be assessed and, where found to be excessive, appropriately modified. The following three levels of interventions provide the categories of controls that can be implemented to help eliminate and reduce the causes of negative pressure as well as minimise the effect of negative pressure. Whenever possible primary interventions should be used as these tackle the root causes.

1. **Primary Interventions** – those that seek to remove or modify the cause at source;
2. **Secondary Interventions**- those that seek to equip people to deal more effectively with the pressures they encounter in life;
3. **Tertiary Interventions** - seek to treat any damage that is already done.

Appendix 3 provides more detailed guidance for Managers on the control mechanisms available to effectively manage the negative impact of stress in the workplace.

#### **5.4 Training and Information**

Directorates will ensure that adequate information and training is provided in support of this policy.

Training will be at two levels: -

1. Training for Managers - to enable them to understand the nature of stress and its causes, how to recognise the signs of stress and the Manager's role in preventing and controlling the risks and an appreciation of the stress risk assessment process.

Management style and skills in people management are key to the achievement of good working relationships and environment which facilitates better mental well being. Enhancing management skills through training and development is recognised as making an important contribution.

2. Training for Employees - will be made available to individuals to assist them to cope better in managing their own stress.

Training is a support mechanism and does not resolve the problem alone, as it does not tackle the root cause of excessive pressure, but can improve a person's ability to perform and manage pressure.

Good working relationships should be promoted by the provision of training in interpersonal skills to management as well as other employees.

Summary guidance for employees on work-related stress and the Council's policy is contained within the Employee Information leaflet.

#### **5.5 Support & Counselling Service**

The Council will provide support to employees who are suffering from the effects of work-related pressure or stress.

Managers will act swiftly and will be understanding towards employees who admit to being under too much pressure ensuring that they provide support

where problems have developed, and where necessary refer the person on for further help. It will not be seen as the individual's fault, nor will they be made to feel guilty.

In many circumstances it may be helpful and supportive for an employee to discuss their difficulties with a trained expert who can help to resolve problems, or help the employee to achieve solutions for themselves. The council provides a confidential Staff Care Counselling Service; and an Occupational Health Unit that can assist staff with physical and mental ill health. The council will also provide information on other professional associates who offer advice and support. (See Appendix 2 for more detail)

If an employee for any reason does not feel able to discuss issues of stress directly with their line manager, they are advised to contact Directorate HR teams for advice and support.

The council promotes a “no blame culture” as this is an essential part of this policy and is supportive of individuals who seek assistance with work related stress.

It is recognised that employees do sometimes worry that they may endanger the security of their jobs by seeking help for mental health problems. This will rarely be the case since most episodes of depression and anxiety are of a transitory nature and pose little or no threat to the security of a persons work. The council's aim is to help, not to condemn and will ensure that there is no allocation of blame to those using the support mechanisms. Sufferers are encouraged to seek help at an early stage.

The council has an agreed grievance procedure to effectively deal with stress-related problems such as bullying, racial and sexual harassment and interpersonal conflicts.

### **5.6 Review and Audit**

Managers shall ensure that they use the Personal Performance Review Process to discuss work-related pressures when reviewing an individual.

The council will use a staff survey tool (Organisational Stress Survey) once every two years, to identify and monitor if the level of work related pressure is excessive and to identify the causative factors.

Each Directorate will ensure that the Organisational Stress Survey results are validated and analysed through discussions with employee representatives at joint consultation forums.

The results will be reviewed by CMT, DMT's and headlines communicated to the Business Units. Information regarding the results of the survey will also be communicated to employees.

The Council's aim is to exceed the HSE's recommended standards on Managing Work-Related Stress. This will be achieved when the Organisational Stress Survey indicates: -

At least 85% of employees indicate that: -

- they are able to cope with the demands of the job
- they are able to influence the way in which they work
- they receive sufficient support from Managers and Colleagues.

And at least 65% of employees indicate that:-

- they are not exposed to unacceptable behaviour at work
- they understand their role and responsibility
- the council/Directorate frequently engages them when undergoing change.

The survey only provides a snap shot and the review of risk assessment for stress must be an ongoing process to achieve a healthy workforce and organisation.

The council will engage with employees and Trade Union Representatives in the process and provide feedback on achievements against the Management Standards, through the Council Health and Safety Forum and Directorate Health and Safety Committees.

### **5.7 Rehabilitation**

Return to normal work in cases where absence has been involved must be carefully managed. In line with the Council's Attendance at Work Policy, Directorates will, as far as possible, help employees to return to work after illness, injury or adjustment to disability. The process of rehabilitation will include as appropriate the following range of approaches: -

1. Keeping in contact with employees, including return to work interviews.
2. Considering the advice provided by Medical Practitioners in "Statements of Fitness for Work"
3. Planning and undertaking workplace controls or adjustments to help employees to return and stay in work. These adjustments may involve adjustments to the premises, the job, alternative roles or the working arrangements such as a phased return.
4. Monitoring and reviewing Risk Assessments and implementing identified control measures to manage identified risks.
5. Making use of professional advice and treatment.
6. Agreeing and reviewing a return to work plan.
7. Having a co-ordinated return to work process agreed and communicated to the relevant parties.

Managers should seek advice from Directorate HR Units and Occupational Health Unit on rehabilitation options for employees.

## **6. Accountabilities**

### **6.1 The Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team (CMT) Members**

Are responsible, individually throughout their personal areas of responsibility and corporately across Staffordshire County Council, for:

- The strategic implementation, maintenance and operation of this Policy;
- The allocation of appropriate levels of resource needed for the implementation and operation of this Policy;
- Ensuring good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes;
- Ensuring monitoring and reporting of appropriate measures to reflect the implementation and operation of this Policy, to allow Senior Management Teams and CMT to review its effectiveness;
- Maintaining processes and facilities to provide professional advice and support to CMT on the formulation and operation of this Policy, in support of it's ongoing review and revision;
- Their own performance as line managers against the requirements of this Policy for those whom they directly line manage, and for those areas under their direct management control.

## **6.2 Director through Directorate Management Team (including Head Teachers)**

Are responsible for:

- The implementation, maintenance and operation of this Policy throughout their Business Units/Schools;
- Ensuring monitoring and reporting of appropriate measures to reflect the implementation and operation of this Policy within their Business Units/School, and to allow this to be reported;
- Ensuring the identification and delivery of training and education necessary to support the operation of the Policy within their Business Units/Schools;
- Initiating communication of the Policy widely and effectively throughout the Business Units/Schools, in support of achieving it's aims and benefits;
- Ensuring good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes;
- Their own performance as line managers against the requirements of this Policy for those whom they directly line manage, and for those areas under their direct management control;
- Producing an action plan for the implementation of this policy.

## **6.3 Managers**

Are responsible for:

- Conducting and implementing outcomes of risk assessments;
- Ensuring good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes;

- Ensuring that both they and their staff are fully trained to discharge their duties;
- Implement adjustments identified in “Statements of Fitness for Work” including considering phased returns to work, altered hours, amended duties, workplace adaptations or variations in job roles
- Monitoring workloads, working hours and overtime of their staff and themselves, to ensure that people are not overloaded, and can achieve a reasonable worklife balance;
- Monitoring holidays to ensure that they and their staff are taking their full entitlement;
- Setting the right example for others, to show how this Policy is to be applied in practice;
- Ensuring that bullying and harassment is not tolerated;
- Being vigilant and explore possibilities for offering additional support to any member of staff who is experiencing stress for causes taking place outside work, e.g. bereavement or separation;
- Actively managing work related-stress problems affecting team members so as to avoid harm increasing through neglect of the problem, and encourage and expect the person concerned to share the responsibility for doing so;
- Requesting advice from HR if they need assistance to manage the problem or require advice on gaining assistance for an individual;
- Monitoring and reporting on the successful implementation and operation of the Policy on an annual basis;
- Reporting any inability to implement this policy to their line manager to seek a resolution;
- Ensuring that employees who have, or have had, symptoms of mental health problems are treated responsibly and in an understanding manner; dealing with each person's problems on the basis of his or her individual circumstances, and ensuring that nobody's career is affected by the mere fact of their having suffered from mental illness;
- Respecting the confidentiality of their staff.

#### **6.4 Employees**

Are responsible for: -

- Seeking help early if pressure at work is getting out of hand or beyond control, using their Line Manager, the Staff Counselling Service, Occupational Health Unit, Trades Union, other management channels,

Human Resources or the complaint/grievance procedures, as seems appropriate;

- Accepting their responsibility for, and role in, resolving any problem in which their feelings of stress are affecting their work;
- Taking care of themselves, and recognise and respect the need for breaks, lunch periods, holidays, control of work demands, control of working hours and need for a proper work-life balance;
- Not avoiding or ignoring situations of pressure at work that they are finding difficulty coping with, but instead identify and discuss them early and try to be constructive in looking for solutions;
- Respecting the rights and needs of others and their wellbeing;
- Co-operating in the risk assessment process, pressure management survey and other processes undertaken to identify sources of excessive pressure in the workplace;
- Adhering to any control measures identified in risk assessments;
- Understanding and act in accordance with other, associated Council policies covering areas that can impact on stress and wellbeing at work, such as those for bullying and harassment;
- Seeking help from their GP and from Occupational Health if they feel that they are becoming ill as a result of pressure either at work or at home.

### **6.5 Occupational Health Unit**

- Provide specialist advice on stress;
- Support individuals who have been absent from work with stress and advise them and line management on a planned return to work;
- Refer staff to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required;
- Inform the Council of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

### **6.6 Directorate Human Resources Units (supported by Strategic Health and Safety Service)**

- Give guidance on the application of the stress policy;
- Assist managers to implement adjustments identified by “Statements of Fitness for Work”
- Assist managers with the risk assessment process when appropriate;

- Assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating statistics on sickness absence, turnover etc.;
- Provide/arrange for awareness training on stress management, and appreciation of the stress risk assessments process;
- Provide support to managers and individuals and encourage referral to occupational workplace counsellors and Occupational Health Unit as appropriate;
- To advise managers on managing employee absence due to stress and their rehabilitation on return to work;
- To advise managers on supporting policies which assist in managing stress at work (Sickness Absence, Capability, Disciplinary, Grievance, Harassment and Bullying etc.);
- Provide advice to managers and support to staff who have been involved in a traumatic incident (such as an accident, violent incident, racist incident etc.).

## **7. Legislative Framework**

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act the County Council has a legal duty to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations requires the County Council to:

- Assess risks to health and safety from hazards at work. This includes the risk to employees from excessive levels of pressure at work.
- Apply the principles of control to the levels and type of pressure, to prevent the development of work-related stress or ill health from exposure to excessive pressure.
- Review whether the health and safety systems implemented are adequately controlling the risks.

The Working Time Regulations place limits on the length of the working week, and stipulates the rest periods that employees must receive.

## **8. Further Advice and Information**

Directorate Human Resource Teams can assist with the interpretation and practical application of this policy. It is recommended that you contact them if further advice, guidance and support are required.

Further background information on this topic is available on the following Websites:

[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

[www.lg-employers.gov.uk](http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk)

## 9. Managers - Frequently Asked Questions

### Q How can I identify stress?

A Stress can manifest itself within an organisation as high rates of absenteeism, disciplinary problems, high staff turnover, low productivity, poor quality service. An analysis of sickness data and incidents of violence/accidents may point to problem areas. Exit information, Personal Development Reviews, Audits, and the encouragement of an open culture of discussion about pressure in the workplace can lead to the identification of problems and the necessary solutions.

### Q Stress is also caused by problems outside of work - As a Manager do I have to do something about that?

A The County is under no legal duty to prevent ill health caused by stress due to problems outside work, e.g. financial or domestic worries. However, non-work problems can make it difficult for employees to cope with pressures of work, and their performance at work might suffer. So being understanding to employees in this position is in the Managers and organisation's interests.

### Q Why would employees want to tell me about stress?

A Employees may be reluctant to admit they are feeling stressed by work. This is because being stressed can be seen as a sign of weakness. You can help by making it easier for your staff to discuss stress through reassuring them that the information they give you will be treated in confidence.

## 10. Related Factsheets

HR40 Managing Attendance at Work.  
HR15 Flexible Working  
HR41 Staff Counselling Service  
HR17 Grievance  
HR19 Harassment and Bullying at Work  
HR04 Capability  
HR99 Whistleblowing  
HR37 Re- Deployment  
HR65 Ill Health Retirement

## 11. Glossary of Terms

### Stress

Work-related stress is the adverse reaction that we can have to pressure or other types of demand placed on us at work if we feel that these are excessive. (See Appendix 1 Causative Factors of Stress for more information)

**Pressure-** is part and parcel of work and life in general. It is what helps to keep us motivated. We all require a certain level of pressure to function effectively.

**Excessive Pressure** – this is the result of an individual feeling overwhelmed by their daily demands and feeling unable to control their stressors.

**Negative Pressure** – or “distress” is the result of a bullying or discriminatory climate, a threat or fear, handling violence in the workplace, coercion etc.

**Inappropriate Pressure** – this occurs when an individual is required to manage a demand for which they do not perceive they are suitably equipped to manage.

A **manager** is any employee who supervises at least one other member of staff or manages the provision of a County Council service. Managers include supervisors, team leaders, premises managers and heads of establishments.

**Employee** also includes trainees on government schemes, agency workers, temporary workers and volunteers.

## **12. Standard Documents**

**Appendix 1** Causative Factors of Stress

**Appendix 2** Support Mechanisms

**Appendix 3** Work-Related Stress and the Risk Assessment Process

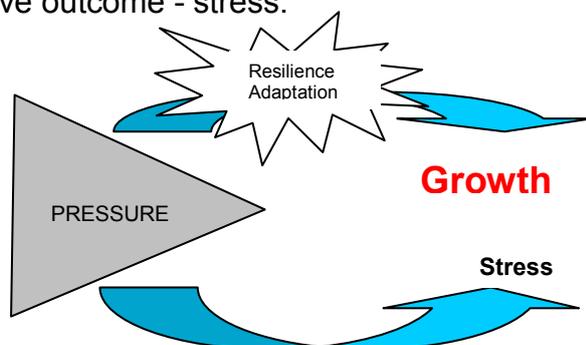
**HSF 23** Work Related Stress Risk Assessment Form

## Management of Stress in the Workplace Guidance

### Causative Factors of Stress

#### Effects of Pressure

As the figure below shows, pressure can give rise to a positive or negative outcome, depending on how the individual perceives and responds to it. Our objective in managing individual and organisational stress is to improve the probability that pressure will produce a positive outcome - growth - rather than the negative outcome - stress.



#### Contributing Factors

Pressures can derive from personal life as well as from work, the negative effects being indistinguishable and cumulative. In consequence, people who are experiencing stress in response to pressures at home, such as marital difficulties or problems with children, will come to work with a significant proportion of their coping capabilities already committed, and therefore not available to accommodate workplace pressures. This provides organisations with the rationale to help employees cope with pressure generally, and not just with pressure at work, since the two are inextricably linked.

A list of all the possible workplace pressures would be virtually endless; the following table attempts to capture the most common and important workplace stressors.

Source of Pressure	Description
Workload	The amount and/or difficulty of the work
Relationships	How well you get on with the people you work with
Recognition	The extent to which you feel that your efforts and achievements are recognised
Organisational climate	The 'feel' or 'atmosphere' within your place of work
Personal responsibility	Being responsible for your actions and decisions
Managerial role	Being responsible for managing and supervising others
Home-work balance	'Switching off' from the pressure of work when at home, and vice versa
Daily hassles	The day-to-day irritants and aggravations in the workplace

#### Potential Symptoms of Stress

The manifestations of stress are many and varied, and stress has been cited as causing and/or aggravating a large number of medical conditions. The symptoms and signs of stress can be classified as physical, psychological and

behavioural. A number of the more common ones are listed below; although these can all be caused by stress, they can also occur in other circumstances.

### ***Physical***

The physical presentations of stress include:

- Altered sleep patterns, such as difficulty getting to sleep, early waking;
- Tiredness;
- Lethargy;
- Panic attacks - breathlessness, bouts of dizziness, light-headedness;
- Dyspeptic symptoms;
- Nausea;
- Bowel symptoms, such as diarrhoea, constipation;
- Headaches;
- Muscle tension, such as neck pain, back pain;
- Nervous twitches.

### ***Psychological***

The psychological presentations of stress include:

- Irritability and aggression;
- Anxiety and depression;
- Poor decision making;
- Preoccupation with trivia;
- Inability to prioritise;
- Difficulty coping;
- Mood changes and mood swings;
- Difficulty concentrating;
- Deterioration in recent memory;
- Feelings of failure;
- Lack of self-worth.

### ***Behavioural***

The behavioural presentations of stress include:

- Lack of concern for appearance;
- Altered eating habits – more or less appetite;
- Drinking alcohol more;
- Smoking more;
- Absenteeism;
- Increased accidents;
- 'Presenteeism' – being physically at work, but not performing satisfactorily.

### **Prospects**

The outlook is generally good, provided the root causes are identified and successfully tackled. However, as with all illness, early detection and prompt treatment will improve the chances of a positive outcome.

### **Effect on Work**

Stress can have a negative impact on practically all aspects of performance, as can medication used to treat anxiety and depression. Particular consideration should be given to those driving or operating machinery; those in jobs where accuracy is critical; and those whose decisions have significant impact on the organisation.

## **Management of Stress in the Workplace Guidance**

### **Support Mechanisms**

The level at which pressure in our lives begins to exceed what we feel we can cope with varies from one person to another, but also from time to time within the same person, according to many factors. We differ with respect to the type and amount of pressure that we feel comfortable with, or feel we can cope with. We also differ greatly in our expectations, attitude and chosen ways of responding to pressure. Personality, outlook, coping skills and pressures in home life can all also affect whether a level of pressure at work remains a satisfying challenge for us, or starts to feel like something we can no longer easily cope with.

The discomfort of stress is usually short term and causes no lasting harm. In some cases, however, particularly where pressures are intense, continue for some time or are left unresolved, long-term stress can begin to contribute to longer-term psychological problems or physical ill health. It is important that upon noticing that it is happening, we identify its root causes and dealing with them, to bring the situation back under control. To find solutions to work-related stress, responsibility needs to be accepted, shared and discharged jointly by the County Council and its employees.

At times we all may need a little help and support to resolve the problem. Help directly in the workplace may not be enough for us to feel better able to deal with our work and home life pressures.

In many circumstances, therefore, it may be helpful and supportive for staff to discuss their difficulties with a trained expert who can help to resolve problems, or help us to achieve this for ourselves.

The County Council provides a Staff Care Counselling Service. This service is easy to use and completely confidential. Help is available with work-related problems and those arising from personal or domestic issues. If you are absent from work, home visits can be arranged. The service can be contacted directly; staff do not need to go through their line manager or a third party. The professionally trained Counsellors Angela Churn and Pam Horrocks are available on their direct line telephone number (01785) 277400/401.

In addition to the above you can also be referred to the Occupational Health Unit, or can refer yourself for assistance if you wish. This Unit is an occupational health service provided by Staffordshire County Council for the benefit of all its employees. The professional staff that can be accessed through the unit include a Consultant Occupational Physician and Occupational Health Nursing Advisers.

They are doctors and nurses with additional specialist training and qualifications in occupational health, above and beyond their normal clinical training, qualifications and experience. They are specialists in workplace health and medicine and are familiar with your work. They can therefore help advise you (and your employer if you wish), about health problems affecting

your work, in ways that your own GP may not be trained in, familiar with, or have time to do in their busy NHS clinics. They can also discuss and help you with any problems whereby you feel your work may be affecting your health. Occupational Health is primarily a preventive branch of medicine, aiming to prevent physical and mental ill health and to promote physical and mental wellbeing at work.

As occupational health can also work with us and with our employers, they are better placed than the NHS to help find ways to minimise the effect that any work-related stress may have on our work, to help us solve our problems and find the best available outcome.

The clinical staff in Occupational Health can also refer people for help from a clinical psychologist, if they feel this to be appropriate, and if they agree. The Occupational Health Unit can be approached directly for further advice by calling (01785) 276284.

Some professional associations also offer confidential advice and support. For example 'Teacherline' is a pioneering new service that offers teachers in England and Wales confidential counselling, support and advice. Teacherline can be contacted on 08000 562 561 or [www.teacherline.org.uk](http://www.teacherline.org.uk)

Within the Children, Young People and Families Directorate a Wellbeing Programme is operated, which schools and business units can join to look in further detail at staff wellbeing and to establish actions that will improve staff wellbeing. This is a facilitated event, operated by staff with specialist knowledge and experience to help assist a team to identify the potential causes of distress and implement effective control measures to improve wellbeing.

You may also wish to contact the local branch of your Trades Union, who may be able to offer help, advice and support about any problems you feel you are facing at work, or difficulty you are having in sorting those problems out.

## Management of Stress in the Workplace Guidance

### Work-related Stress and the Risk Assessment Process

Risk Assessment is an important tool in the prevention and management of workplace stress. It requires management action to identify hazards and the measures necessary to eliminate or control the risks. It is essential that managers record the matters that are a cause for concern and any actions subsequently taken.

The risk assessment process outlined below is taken from the HSE publication 'Tackling Work-Related Stress: A Managers' Guide to Improving Employee Health and Wellbeing'. The process detailed in this guidance is to be used by all managers when undertaking risk assessments.

#### The Process

The following stages should be undertaken and the findings documented on the Risk Assessment Form

#### First Stage – Commitment

The first stage is to ensure that there is a positive culture that will enable an open and honest assessment of any issues causing stress and with the potential to affect the health of staff.

- Obtain commitment
- Identify necessary resources
- Allocate sufficient time for the activity

Stress Risk Assessments are to be completed as part of the General Risk Assessment process, and when problems relating to workplace pressure are identified. The risk assessment should be discussed on an individual basis with employees as part of the PDR process.

#### Second Stage – Assessment

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Step 1</b> | Identify the hazards;   |
| <b>Step 2</b> | Decide who can be harmed and how;   |
| <b>Step 3</b> | Evaluate the risk by considering what action you are already taking, deciding if this is enough, and if it is not, deciding what more needs to be done; |
| <b>Step 4</b> | Record the significant findings of the assessment; and  |
| <b>Step 5</b> | Review the Assessment.  |

#### Identify the Hazards

Identify the hazards facing the team in terms of pressure. It is essential that the individuals concerned be consulted to ensure that all perceived stressors are identified and considered. The six categories of risk that may cause work related stress outlined by HSE research might assist in this process: -

- **Demands** – such as workload and exposure to physical hazards (violence and aggression, lone working, manual handling etc.);
- **Control** – how much say a person has in the way they do their work;

- **Relationships** – covering issues of bullying and harassment;
- **Role** – whether the individual understands their role; and whether it is ensured that they do not have conflicting roles;
- **Support, training and factors unique to the individual**
  - Support – from peers and line management;
  - Training – preparing the person to be able to undertake the core function of the job;
  - Factors unique to the individual - catering for individual differences;
- **Change** – how the County Council, its Directorates and Units manage and communicate change;

### **Decide Who Might be Harmed and How**

Work-related stress can affect anyone: no one is immune. In particular, however, it might affect those exposed to conditions under which any or all of the six factors detailed above are generating excessive or unusual pressure. In addition, people can become more or less vulnerable to work-related stress at different periods in their lives, so that they can feel that they have lost the ability to cope with work demands or situations that they were previously comfortable with, or might even have previously enjoyed. This can particularly affect people dealing with ill health or a domestic crisis, such as bereavement. It can also happen if the perceived balance between work and reward changes, so that they lose commitment, motivation, morale and an expectation of continuing to deal with problems and pressures.

### **Evaluate the Risk**

For each of the six main potential areas, in which excessive pressure at work has been identified, three questions need to be considered:

1. What action are you already taking?
2. Is it enough?
3. If not, what more needs to be done to bring the source of pressure under adequate control?

When evaluating the effectiveness of assessment, background information can assist to identify areas of concern or highlight indicators that may demonstrate whether or not the present control measures are working effectively. This information may come from Quantitative or Qualitative Sources.

### **Qualitative Methods**

- **Informal Talks With Staff** – The use of Team Meetings to discuss any excessive pressure through work and any potential for stress to result, as well as to explore what action can be taken to reduce or eliminate the problem;
- **Performance Appraisal** – A chance for a one-to-one discussion about individual work and to explore whether specific people are experiencing excessive pressure at work;
- **Focus Groups** – Useful to establish what a specific group of people think about their working lives;
- **Managing Attendance** – Return to work interviews with line managers following sickness absence allows for the opportunity to find out if there is a work-related problem and if so to start to tackle it.
- **Audit Findings** – May highlight issues of concern that could be affecting the level of pressure employees are exposed to, such as insufficient resources etc.

### **Quantitative Methods**

- **Sickness/Absence Data** - This should allow the identification of any underlying cause of sickness absence and a demonstration of its extent and area of concentration;
- **Productivity Data** – Lower than expected performance can identify work practices or conditions that are causing work-related stress, low morale, low commitment or reduced loyalty;
- **Turnover** – If particular areas of the organisation have a higher rate of turnover compared to other units, this may point to a hidden problem with work-related stress;
- **Results from staff survey (Organisational Stress Survey)** – These can help to establish the causes of stress and the nature and extent of the problem within an organisation.

Stress is a complex issue and Staffordshire County Council needs to use a variety of the above methods to measure and identify work-related stress and to formulate an overall picture.

### **Control Hierarchy for Managing Work-Related Stress**

Proper control mechanisms available for reducing general levels of pressure arising through work processes include:

- Avoid the risks (e.g. make the work environment safer);
- Combat risks at source (e.g. organise work sensibly and give people clear roles);
- Adapt the work to the individual (especially in workplace design, the choice of work equipment, and the choice of working methods, to alleviate monotonous work and work at a pre-determined rate, and to reduce their effect on health);
- Develop a coherent overall prevention strategy, which covers technology, organisation of work, working conditions, social relationships and the influence of factors relating to the working environment;
- Give priority to collective protective measures over individual protective measures (e.g. by tackling work-related stress at source rather than just providing information and training to individuals, or access to assistance programmes);
- Give appropriate instruction to employees.

Once the reasons for negative pressure or stress have been identified, agree actions to be taken and set timescales for implementation.

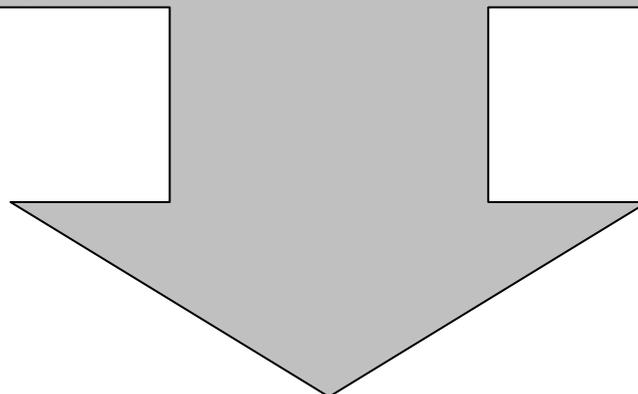
### **Implementing Controls Measures**

When deciding upon the control measures needed to eliminate or minimise the causes of negative pressure, it must be approached in the same way as any other workplace hazard. It must be assessed and, where found to be excessive, appropriately modified. The following three levels of interventions provide the categories of controls that can be implemented to help eliminate and reduce the causes of negative pressure as well as minimise the effect of negative pressure. Whenever possible, primary interventions should be used as these tackle the root causes.

1. Primary interventions – those that seek to remove or modify the cause at source;
2. Secondary interventions- those that seek to equip people to deal more effectively with the pressures they encounter in life;
3. Tertiary interventions - seek to treat any damage that is already done.

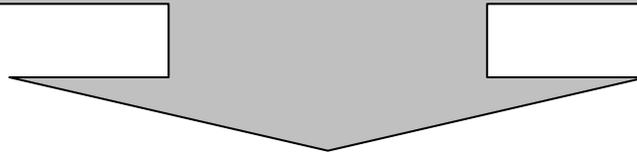
#### ***Primary Interventions***

- The use of questionnaires such as the Pressure Management Surveys, to identify the causes of excessive pressure in the workplace.
- PDR process provides a time for discussion and identification of the pressures being faced by an individual employee.
- Risk Assessment Process
- Information gathered from Qualitative and Quantitative Data can help provide indicators which may highlight where work related pressure needs to be reviewed.
- Development of a positive culture towards the management of stress, so that a stigma is not attached to mental health in general and stress in particular. Introducing the issue of stress under the banner of pressure management makes the subject more acceptable to employers and encourages employees to participate in programmes without admitting that they can no longer cope.
- Providing Managers with the Skills to identify work related stress and therefore implement effective control measures.



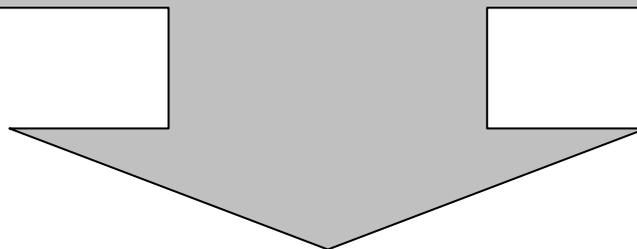
### ***Secondary Interventions***

Pressure is inevitable and because much of it arises outside of the workplace and is therefore beyond the control of the organisation it is important to make people aware of the skills they should adopt to manage pressure effectively and positively. If we can help people to manage pressure more effectively, then we can expect an improvement in their ability to perform.



### ***Tertiary Interventions***

Examples are employee assistance programmes and counselling services. While these are in no way a satisfactory response to the stress issue on their own, they do provide the comfort of a safety net. They also cater for those whose primary stressors lie in their personal lives and are therefore beyond the organisation's control, but the organisation can expect a payback in the form of a more speedily rehabilitated employee. The danger in an over-reliance on counselling is that organisations believe they have 'dealt with' stress, when in fact they have failed to move beyond the outward signs to get at the root causes.



### **Effective Management of Stress in the Workplace**

### Mechanisms to Control the Risks

Provided in the table below are some examples of some of the Mechanisms available for the six stress factors which can assist to control and minimise the effects of work related stress.

<b>Stress Factor</b>	<b>Mechanisms to Control Risk</b>
<b>1. Demands of the Job</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Absence Management Policy</li> <li>▪ Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures</li> <li>▪ Working Hours including those completed at home to be monitored</li> <li>▪ Suitable work breaks encouraged</li> <li>▪ Active analysis of work capacity</li> <li>▪ Team meetings</li> <li>▪ Appropriate training</li> <li>▪ Regular supervision</li> <li>▪ Personal Development Review Process</li> <li>▪ Risk Assessments implemented and communicated</li> <li>▪ Health and Safety Policies &amp; Procedures implemented</li> <li>▪ HR Capability Procedure communicated</li> </ul>
<b>2. Degree of Control over the Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flexible Working Scheme</li> <li>▪ Regular supervision</li> <li>▪ Employee input into Team Meeting Agenda items</li> <li>▪ Team plans</li> <li>▪ Personal Development Review Process</li> <li>▪ Open door culture</li> <li>▪ Empowerment</li> </ul>
<b>3. Working Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ HR Policy on Bullying and Harassment communicated</li> <li>▪ Anti Discriminatory Practices training</li> <li>▪ Quarterly supervision</li> <li>▪ Regular team meetings</li> <li>▪ Behavioural competencies</li> <li>▪ Team support</li> <li>▪ Staff Recognition Schemes</li> <li>▪ Social activities</li> </ul>
<b>4. Job Role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Detailed Job Descriptions</li> <li>▪ Personal Development Reviews</li> <li>▪ Regular supervision</li> <li>▪ Communication of Service Delivery Plans, Team Plans etc.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Management of Work Related Stress Policy communicated</li> <li>▪ Staff Care Counselling Service available to employees</li> <li>▪ Occupational Health Unit advice</li> <li>▪ Health and Safety advice</li> <li>▪ Commitment to rehabilitation of employees on long term sickness absence</li> <li>▪ Problem Solving Management Approach</li> <li>▪ Team meetings/PDR</li> <li>▪ Trade Union Representatives</li> <li>▪ Stress Management training</li> <li>▪ Time Management training</li> <li>▪ Analysis of Work Related Stress Management Indicator Tool</li> </ul>

<b>6. Change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chief Executives Bulletin</li> <li>▪ Directorate internal communication</li> <li>▪ Project Management Systems</li> <li>▪ Early and regular communication</li> <li>▪ Procedure to raise concerns</li> <li>▪ Open door culture</li> <li>▪ Consultation and engagement with staff</li> </ul>
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### **Individual Employee Risk Assessment**

Individual employees may differ in their ability to cope with work related pressure. Where this is identified the employees concerns and the action taken to manage the sources of negative pressure will be recorded within the individual's Personal Performance Review or Supervision/ 1-2-1 records. Confidential/sensitive information provided by individual employees should be taken into account when completing the team stress risk assessment. However, such information about individuals should be recorded separately by the manager and treated in confidence.

Significant events with individual employees regarding work related stress could result in the need to review the Team/Unit stress risk assessment. It may highlight the tip of an iceberg in terms of an issue that is wide spread amongst the team.

At times employees may highlight concerns regarding stress that are caused by factors outside of work. Action taken to help or support employees through such times will also be documented within PPR or Supervision/ 1-2-1 records.

### **Third Stage – Documentation and Evaluation**

Control measures should be monitored and improved if necessary. Assessments should be reviewed at regular intervals and following significant change. Remember a stress risk assessment is a continuous process that needs to be refined and adjusted as the pressure changes with time.

It is recommended that managers document everything undertaken in connection with the assessment, including notes of meetings so that they develop a record of progress. Sensitive information provided by individuals must be treated in confidence.

## Work Related Stress Risk Assessment Record

This Risk Assessment relates to: -

<b>Directorate</b>	Business Unit	Team/Service/Establishment

### Identify the Stress Factors, Evaluate the Risk & Take Action

Consider the six stress factors in turn, taking into consideration the desired state to identify the potential causes of stress for the scope of this assessment. It is essential that the individuals concerned be consulted to ensure all perceived stressors are identified and considered. Once the problems are identified, assess the level of risk and agree the control measures.

### Risk Assessment Record

Stress Factor	Potential Stress Causes Identified	Risk Rating <small>High/Medium/Low</small>	Control Measures/Further Action	To be Actioned By	Target Date
<b>A. Demands of the Job</b> <b>Desired State (Policy Aim )</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Suitable resources provided</li> <li>▪ Employees have adequate and achievable demands in relation to agreed hours of work</li> <li>▪ Employees have the skills and training to carry out their work</li> <li>▪ Safe &amp; healthy working conditions</li> <li>▪ Lone working &amp; violence &amp; aggression in the workplace are managed</li> <li>▪ A work life balance is encouraged</li> </ul>					
<b>B. Degree of Control</b> <b>Desired State (Policy Aim )</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Where practicable employees have a degree of flexibility over the way they do their work</li> <li>▪ Employees participate in decisions concerning their jobs</li> <li>▪ Employees concerns are addressed</li> <li>▪ Employees are encouraged to develop new skills</li> </ul>					

Stress Factor	Potential Stress Causes Identified	Risk Rating High/Medium/Low	Control Measures/Further Action	To be Actioned By	Target Date
<p><b>C. Working Relationships</b></p> <p><b>Desired State (Policy Aim )</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good Team Support</li> <li>• Effective Communications</li> <li>• Harassment &amp; Bullying Policy, and</li> <li>• Grievance Policy implemented with procedures to prevent &amp; resolve unacceptable behaviours</li> <li>• Managers are encouraged &amp; able to deal with unacceptable behaviours</li> <li>• Employees are encouraged &amp; able to report unacceptable behaviours</li> <li>• Appropriate supervision is provided</li> </ul>					
<p><b>D. Job Role</b></p> <p><b>Desired State (Policy Aim )</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicting job demands are avoided where practicable</li> <li>• Employees have a clear understanding of their work objectives, expectations, scope and responsibilities</li> <li>• Employees motivated by their job role</li> </ul>					
<p><b>E. Change</b></p> <p><b>Desired State (Policy Aim )</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Employees provided with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes</li> <li>▪ Job insecurity concerns managed.</li> <li>▪ Employees given the opportunity to comment</li> <li>▪ Employees involved in discussions about change</li> <li>▪ Employees to have access to relevant support during change</li> <li>▪ Identification of new training requirements following change</li> </ul>					

Stress Factor	Potential Stress Causes Identified	Risk Rating High/Medium/Low	Control Measures/Further Action	To be Actioned By	Target Date
<p><b>F. Support</b></p> <p><b>Desired State (Policy Aim )</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies &amp; procedures to adequately support employees</li> <li>• Managers encouraged &amp; able to support employees</li> <li>• Employees encouraged to support their colleagues</li> <li>• Open and honest culture.</li> <li>• Employees receive regular and constructive feedback</li> <li>• Employees receive induction</li> <li>• Employees know how to access resources to do their job</li> <li>• Individuality is valued</li> </ul>					

It is important that everyone accepts that the solutions require a partnership approach based on openness, honesty and trust.

**Sign off**

<b>Manager's Name</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
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Communicate the results of the assessment and provide feedback to staff and deal with individual concerns

**Monitor and Review**

Date Review Completed	Additional Action Identified on Review
Manager's Name	
Signature	