Finance and Resources Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 23 May 2019

Stress Management Policy

Item number	7.5
Executive/routine	
Wards	
Council Commitments	

1. Recommendations

1.1 To approve the new Stress Management Policy.

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Report

Stress Management Policy

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The Stress Management Policy sets out our approach to providing guidance, tools and support for both employees and managers encouraging a more effective and preventative approach to the management of stress.

2.2 The policy will complement and support the organisation's wider Wellbeing Strategy, which was approved at Committee on 7 March 2019.

2.3 If approved, the policy will replace the current Managing Stress Policy which was approved at Committee on 24 March 2014.

3. Background

3.1 The current policy and supporting materials, whilst compliant, require a refresh in line with our approach to policy development, making it clearer for colleagues and placing greater emphasis on prevention.

3.2 This new policy and supporting materials have been revised to support colleagues in the prevention and management of stress and continues to be compliant with the Health and Safety Executive guidelines. It also includes best practice from organisations such as ACAS and the NHS.

3.3 The revision of this policy forms part of our wider wellbeing strategy agreed at committee in March 2019.

4. Main report

4.1 The Stress Management Policy has been developed in line with guidance from ACAS and continues to observe the principles outlined in the relevant Health and Safety executive (HSE) guidance. These include: awareness of both the causes and signs of stress, the risks associated with stress and the six management standards that the HSE categorise as a successful management approach.

4.2 The HSE also strongly encourages employers to promote wellbeing and to introduce measures to prevent, reduce and supportively manage stress in the workplace. This approach has been integrated into both the policy and guidance.

4.3 The policy reinforces the responsibility of managers to support colleagues who are experiencing stress, and to ensure that these issues are handled sympathetically and in confidence.

4.4 The policy also strongly encourages employees to be proactive by seeking and acting upon opportunities to manage their own wellbeing, and signposts external agencies and channels of support as appropriate.

4.5 The previous policy and guidance provided templates and guidance for the completion of both Individual and Team Stress Risk Assessments. These remain, although the team assessment has been updated to include a Likert scale to capture responses. This will better indicate the levels of stress that exist in a team and allow the Manager to identify the most severe stressors and the associated risks.

4.6 The policy sets out a commitment to provide support and raise awareness of the signs of stress, with a view to highlighting the importance of reducing unnecessary levels of work related pressures that can contribute to stress.

4.7 The policy is intended to promote a culture of a more preventative approach to managing stress, breaking down stigmas and encouraging open and honest conversations.

4.8 The policy and guidance has been developed in line with the Council's current style, tone and format. This will provide colleagues with a less complex policy and more accessible set of tools that provide clarity on how to effectively prevent and manage stress.

5.   Next Steps

5.1 If approved, the implementation plan will be put into effect, commencing with the design of training modules and materials both for employees and members of Management.

5.2 It is expected that all necessary implementation steps will be able to be completed by June 2019 at which point the new policy will become effective.

6.   Financial impact

6.1 There is no material impact resulting from this policy.

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7.   Stakeholder/Community Impact

7.1   The policy applies to all employees and is explicit in the consistency of its application.

7.2   Trade Unions and key stakeholders have been consulted in the development of this policy.

7.3   If approved, the policy will be a local collective agreement between the Council and the recognised trade unions.

8.   Background reading/external references

8.1   None.

9.   Appendices

9.1   Stress Management Policy

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Stress Management Policy

It is the aspiration of the council to create a culture which recognises the importance of all our colleague's general wellbeing. As part of this we are committed in our support and our focus on recognising and acknowledging the signs of stress. We take a proactive and preventative approach, raising awareness of the signs of stress and highlighting the importance of reducing unnecessary levels of work related pressures which can result in stress. It is our collective responsibility to talk openly and honestly about how we are feeling so that early signs can be identified and mitigated against, with a commitment from the council to offer the right support where appropriate.

Author	Scope
Employee Relations, Human Resources, Resources Directorate	This policy applies to all Council employees.

Purpose	Review
The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness and understanding of stress, and to set out how to try to prevent, reduce and supportively manage stress.	The policy will be reviewed as and when a change to the existing policy deems this necessary, primarily as a result of: changes to legislation or statute; agreement of new national terms and conditions of service or Government Policy; organisational change; or resulting from changes agreed through Trade Union Consultation.

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1. Policy Aims

- To promote wellbeing through proactive and supportive management of work related stress.
- To increase the general awareness and understanding of the causes of work related stress.
- To encourage colleagues to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and to engage with the support that is available.
- To address work related factors which might contribute to excessive undue pressure at work, which may have led or lead to stress related illness.
- To promote a culture and environment where stress is mitigated as far as possible, it's acknowledged without stigma and colleagues feel comfortable in talking about the support they need.

2. What is stress?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as: *'The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.'* While some degree of pressure and demand is to be expected in the workplace to ensure the efficient running and productivity of any business, there are factors that can lead to employees feeling excessive pressure – and if not properly managed, these can lead to increased sickness, anxiety, depression or other mental ill-health.

The HSE also emphasises that it is important not to medicalise stress, as stress is a state, not an illness; however, if mismanaged it can lead to the development of mental and physical illnesses. They also acknowledge the difference between pressure and stress. Pressure can be positive and a motivating factor and is often essential in a job. It can help us achieve our goals and perform better. Stress occurs when this pressure becomes excessive. Stress is a natural reaction to too much pressure but is never positive.

Stress both inside and outside work can affect our wellbeing. We can experience excessive pressure and demands outside work, which can also contribute to how we are at work. Stress tends to build up over time because of a combination of factors that may not all be work related. Conflicting demands at work and home can lead to excessive stress. Often home and work lives are so interwoven that it may not be possible to identify any single cause of stress. Our employee assistance programme is a free and confidential service available for all colleagues and is there to provide support regardless of the causes of stress. You are actively encouraged to take advantage of the support that is available for you whenever you need it.

3. Identifying signs of stress

Signs and Symptoms of Stress

It's important to pay attention to yourself and your colleagues, so if you notice signs that a person maybe feeling stressed you can provide or seek appropriate support. Please see supporting guidance relating to this policy for the most up to date information on identifying signs and symptoms of stress.

4. Employee Responsibilities

There are inevitably times in our lives where excessive pressure may lead to stress. It is important that you are aware of the signs and symptoms so that you can actively engage with the right support for you.

- You are encouraged to discuss any concerns, issues or support you need with your manager or a colleague. If you are a member of a Trade Union you can also speak to your TU representative. Any concerns you raise will be handled in a supportive and sympathetic way;
- If you feel able to, it is important for you to speak to your manager or a colleague if you feel stressed, regardless as to whether that stress has been caused from situations at work or home;
- You should discuss issues or concerns you have with your line manager or trade union to proactively mitigate unnecessary stress;
- Cooperate with referrals to occupational health and participate in counselling when recommended by a health professional;
- You are encouraged to investigate health and wellbeing opportunities and look after your physical and mental health;
- Recognise the importance of taking your annual leave which can support your overall wellbeing;
- When appropriate, make use of the free confidential services available to you from the employee assistance programme, provided by the Council;
- Remember you can also seek support from your GP;

5. Manager Responsibilities

Your role is pivotal in identifying and managing excessive pressures at work. You have knowledge of your team and their usual working styles. This insight can allow you to identify uncharacteristic behaviour that could be an early warning sign of a potential issue. In order to manage any potential issues effectively you need to be supportive and sympathetic to ensure employees feel comfortable to speak openly.

A manager can put in place a number of steps that can be used to alleviate pressures and promote a healthy workplace. These preventative measures will support our aim to mitigate unnecessary levels of stress:

- Provide clarity of what's expected in the role and how it should be done, with supporting feedback, coaching and development as required;
- Regular communication ensuring colleagues are informed and engaged;
- Active work force planning to ensure the right resources are in the right place at the right time doing the right thing, in a planned and balanced way;
- Promote and encourage team members to access health and wellbeing initiatives;
- Empower team members to be able to influence where, when and how work is done to sufficiently feel in control of their workload within the remit of the role;
- Fully utilise skills and make time to listen, support and involve in decisions where possible;
- Consider any adjustments made in occupational health reports and discuss these with employees;
- Conduct appropriate level of stress risk assessments and work to implement recommendations;
- Ensure you create a safe space to have a discussion around any stressors;
- Confidentiality must be respected and maintained and personal circumstances are not discussed with others without consent, unless in exceptional circumstances where this level of confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if there are health and safety concerns for fellow colleagues or clients of the council.

Senior managers are also responsible for;

- Ensure line managers are adequately trained, resourced, and personally supported to meet expectations of this policy;
- Conduct appropriate level of stress risk assessments and work to implement recommendations;
- Ensure all colleagues are sufficiently trained to carry out their role and open and honest conversations take place about performance and any additional improvements required;
- Actively promote zero tolerance of bullying and harassment;
- Proactively manage annual leave to ensure both sufficient cover and equally that colleagues do not have excessive periods without leave;
- Be cognisant of pressure outside work, e.g. bereavement, financial, divorce or separation, serious illness and offer additional appropriate levels of support;
- Routinely monitor workload and working time to ensure a fair distribution and balance with appropriate downtime;

6. Managing work related stress & Stress Risk Assessments

Management Standards

The management standards have been developed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to help reduce the levels of work-related stress. The standards are: **Demands**, **Control**, **Support**, **Relationships**, **Role**, and **Change**.

The standards and supporting risk assessments can be found in the Stress Management supporting documentation and guidance which include sign, symptoms, and wellbeing initiatives.

This policy should be followed in accordance with management responsibilities outlined in this policy.