

Boston Borough Council

Managing Stress Policy REVISED DRAFT

Policy Statement

Boston Borough Council recognises that stress is an everyday part of both working and home life but that it needs to be managed effectively. As an organisation we have both a moral and legal duty to ensure that employees aren't made ill by their work or working environment. The Council recognises that their duty extends to mental health as well as physical health.

This policy has been the subject of consultation with the trade unions.

It is vital in ensuring the success of this policy that managers play an active role in its implementation and that the Council provides training and access to information and assistance regarding stress.

It is the responsibility of managers to communicate this policy and ensure it is adhered to.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff both temporary and permanent within the Council. Whilst the main scope of this policy is to deal with the issue of work-related stress, the Council does recognise that there will be external sources which may also be a factor in causing stress for staff. When identifying and dealing with stress, the Council will endeavour to assist staff where possible if they should wish.

Legislation

Under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees.

Under the management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers have a duty to assess the health & safety risks to which their employees are exposed at work.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, employers have a duty not to discriminate against employees on account of their disability as defined under the Act. This involves making reasonable adjustments to the workplace or to the way work is done, if the existing work arrangements or physical features place the disabled person concerned at a substantial disadvantage. Ill health arising from, or exacerbated by, stress at work may constitute a disability under the Act.

Objectives

Staff are the Council's most important resource and it is vital that both the Council and employees are aware of the issues surrounding stress and are able to work together to reduce risks and occurrences of stress.

This policy is designed to answer questions about stress, what it is and what employee and employer duties are to recognise and work to reduce stress. It also:

- Aims to develop a framework for managing stress
- Identify potential causes of stress in the workplace
- Train managers to recognise and tackle causes of stress
- Educate employees to recognise and tackle causes and symptoms of stress
- Provide managers and employees with a procedure for dealing with complaints about management of issues raised by stress-related ill health

What is stress?

Stress is not the same as pressure. All jobs involve some degree of pressure and some pressure can be positive by motivating people, improving job performance and giving job satisfaction. However, unwelcome pressures that we cannot cope with, even in some cases too little pressure or challenge, are likely to result in stress for the individual.

Stress is the adverse reaction people may have to *excessive* pressure. It arises when the demands of the job and other factors exceed the employees' ability to cope with or control them.

What constitutes stress for one individual may well not be stress for another. All circumstances must be dealt with on an individual basis.

Managers should be aware that the following could be signs of stress in a member of staff. It should be remembered that these are not prescriptive and that any number of factors could indicate a member of staff is suffering from stress.

- Increases in overall sickness absence – particularly frequent short absences
- Poor work performance – less output, lower quality, poor decision making
- Relationships at work – conflict between colleagues, poor relationships with members of the public/clients
- Staff attitude and behaviour – loss of motivation or commitment, poor timekeeping, working longer hours but with diminishing effectiveness

Causes of Stress

Both factors external to the workplace and those related to work can be causes of stress.

Harmful levels of stress are most likely to occur when:

- People are unable to exert control over the demands placed upon them
- Conflicting demands are put upon people
- Heavy workloads
- Unrealistic deadlines are demanded
- People experience a high degree of uncertainty about their work, jobs and career prospects
- Work schedules are inflexible and over demanding
- There is a prolonged conflict between individuals
- Staff are working in a poor physical environment
- Lack of support/guidance from line managers

Recognising Stress

Most of the outward signs of stress in individuals should be noticeable to managers and colleagues.

Different people may experience different symptoms of stress. Below are some examples of symptoms. A combination of the following symptoms could indicate that you are suffering from stress.

Physical	Psychological	Behavioural
Headaches	Forgetfulness	Irritability
Stomach problems	Anger	Becoming withdrawn
Difficulties sleeping	Frustration	Being aggressive
Aches and pains	Anxiety	Absence from work
Chronic mild illnesses	Depression	Drugs/alcohol

Employers Responsibility

The Council and line managers have a particular responsibility to be aware of their legal as well as moral duties as employers and also to be aware of how to recognise early signs of stress in their staff.

Managers should:

- Observe and formally evaluate work performance through the My Performance process
- Where possible identify and help individuals to overcome and be sympathetic to their problems before they become too serious and before job performance is affected
- Become familiar with this policy and become suitably trained in stress management
- Ensure that absences which may have been caused by stress are acted upon sympathetically and with understanding

Preventative Measures

Generic Risk assessments are a main tool for identifying potential stress related activities and controls are then put in place to minimise identified risks. These are revisited annually or in the event of an incident.

A risk assessment for stress involves:

Looking for pressures at work that could cause high and long-lasting levels of stress.

Deciding whom these might harm and deciding whether you are doing enough to prevent that harm.

If necessary, reasonable steps should be taken to deal with these pressures.

Risk assessments should include attention paid to the demands of each job i.e. excess deadlines, emotionally draining work, repetitive work, interaction with members of the public etc,

Relaxation techniques and regular exercise can be used to prevent stress and are excellent ways of reducing stress.

Line managers and colleagues should be alert and sensitive to early signs of stress in others and report this to someone who can help.

Health Questionnaire

All new employees are asked to complete a health questionnaire.

The purpose of the questionnaire is not to be discriminatory and bar those with a history of stress-related illness from employment, but to use the information in a constructive manner. It will be used by Occupational Health to ensure that the Council may identify support, if any that the person will need to perform effectively in their job.

Induction Programme

All staff should be given a full induction programme within three months of commencing employment. Vital parts of the Induction process such as Health & Safety information should be given to staff within the first week. Starting a new job can be a very stressful time and a planned induction should eliminate concerns. Along with this all staff should help ensure that a new member of staff's induction into the organisation is as smooth as possible.

Training & Development

Staff may experience stress through feeling that they are not adequately trained for their job. This can be especially so if they move into a new or changed role. Line managers should ensure through the My Performance process that staff are adequately trained to carry out their job.

Line managers and staff may liaise with the Learning & Development Co Ordinator to discuss fulfilling training needs.

Absence Management

Line managers must ensure that returns to work interviews are carried out after every absence. These will usually be an informal chat but should be recorded on the relevant form.

If a stress-related condition is identified, line managers should continue to meet with staff to discuss their recovery and the factors which may have contributed to the stress.

Managers should be aware of the need for confidentiality and approach the matter sensitively. If staff feel that they cannot approach their line manager as they are the cause of stress, staff may approach their service manager, Trade Union representative or People Services.

The Sickness and Absence Management policy may be referred to. This is available from People Services.

Employees Responsibility

Self Awareness

It is important not to feel stressed to a point where it becomes intolerable. By taking action early, it is possible to minimise the harmful effects of stress.

Where occurrences of stress are believed to be related to work, for whatever reason, staff are encouraged to discuss their problems initially with their line manager.

If they do not wish to do this directly they may do this via their Trade Union representative or People Services.

Staff should be aware that their line manager needs to be informed about situations that are causing stress. If managers are not aware there is very little they can do to improve situations or resolve problems.

If the employee is not satisfied, the grievance procedure is available for staff to use should they feel that their situation has not improved.

Getting help

You can use your Team Meetings as a method for voicing any concerns or worries you may have about work of a general nature such as workloads or staff issues.

Your line manager, People Services and your Trade Union representatives are all available for you to speak to regarding work or personal issues on a confidential basis.

The Council can refer you to an external, professional counsellor if you are experiencing problems at home or work which are causing you to feel anxious or stressed. To access this service please speak to People Services, your line manager or your Trade Union representative who will refer you to People Services. Please be assured that the counselling is strictly confidential and anything you discuss will not be reported back to the Council. All counselling sessions are conducted off-site by an independent, private organisation and are free of charge for staff.

For other problems outside of work the following may be able to offer advice and support or direct you to people who can help:

The Boston Citizens Advice Bureau offer debt counselling, advice on legal and many other issues. NHS Direct offer immediate and confidential health advice.

If you require other expert help or advice please contact People Services who may be able to put you in contact with someone who can help and don't forget that your G.P. may be able to offer support and advice.

Working Hours

Line managers and staff themselves have a responsibility to ensure they are not working excessive hours on a regular basis which can cause stress. For guidance on working hours please refer to Working Time Directive information from the Department of Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR).

Coping With Stress

Firstly, we should try to eliminate the source of stress or reduce the effects of the source. The effects of stress may be reduced by "lifestyle" campaigns such as promoting fitness and relaxation.

Some stress management techniques have been shown to have positive benefits on physiological system (immune, cardio-vascular and endocrine) of employees. Physical exercise, deep muscle relaxation, guided imagery, breathing exercises and aromatherapy are all useful especially when a battery of approaches is used.

Other relevant policies & procedures

Other policies such as grievance, harassment and the whistle blowing policy may also be a route for employees to eliminate stress. Please refer to these policies for further information.

Recovering from Stress

When employees are absent from work as a result of stress, the return to work is likely to be a “stressful” experience. A manageable programme of work should to be agreed out with the individual and the line manager. A referral to the Council’s medical adviser and/or a request to the employees GP may be appropriate so that fitness to return to work may be assessed and advice given on reasonable measures to be taken to avoid a reoccurrence of stress.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to monitor the levels of stress in the organisation the following should be considered:

Patterns in sickness Absence
Staff Turnover

Useful contacts

Name	Post	Extension Number
Katharine Nundy	Head of Business Transformation	274
Becky Gardner	Senior People Services Adviser	270
Debby Cooper	People Services Adviser	273
Kath Mountain	GMB Representative	83200
John Halliday	GMB Representative	83218
Sheena Barsley	GMB Representative	222
Simon Grant	UNISON Representative	255
Jason Bagley	UNISON Representative	251
Jane Lyman	UNISON Representative	248
Debbie Paul	UNISON Representative	363483
NHS Direct	Confidential Health Advice	0845 4647 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
Boston Citizens Advice Bureau	Confidential advice and support	08444 994 199
GMLP/Creations	Discounted 50% Leisure activities	01205 363483
Working Time Directive	Dept of Business Innovation and skills	www.berr.gov.uk

This Managing Stress Policy has been agreed by Boston Borough Council and the Trade Union representatives for the workforce.

Signed:

Date:

Chief Executive

Signed:

Date:

UNISON Branch Secretary

Signed:

GMB Representative

Date: