



# Managing Stress at Work Policy

**Approved by:** Operational Leadership Team 12<sup>th</sup> September 2011

**Version Control:**

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1	20/12/10	Catherine Halford	Health and Safety Support Team (HSST)	Review of suggested changes to existing Policy
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1.2	20/5/11	Steve Dean	Schools H&S Group	To endorse revised policy
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# Solihull MBC Managing Stress at Work Policy and Procedure

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# SECTION ONE – SMBC MANAGING STRESS AT WORK POLICY

## 1.1 Introduction

Every job brings its own pressures and demands; these are an unavoidable part of working life. Some pressure can be a good thing, keeping individuals motivated and providing a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. However, people have a varying ability to deal with pressure and, if the emotional and physical demands on a person are greater than their capacity to cope, stress and ill health may occur.

Stress is not a mental illness, but the natural adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures and demands imposed on them.

Stress can be defined as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to an individual’s health.

According to the Health and Safety Executive 27.5 working days are lost for every incident of stress related absence and at Solihull, stress accounts for just over 23% of all employee sickness absence, with over 6800 days taken off in the 12 months to June 2011.

Taking action to reduce stress can result in better health, reduced sickness absence, increased performance and output, better working relationships and lower staff turnover.

The Managing Stress at Work Policy is set out in three parts:

**Section One** describes applicable legislation and contains the **Managing Stress at Work Policy Statement** which sets out a commitment to manage work related stress effectively.

**Section Two** describes the **organisation** and the **roles and responsibilities** of those responsible for implementing this Policy.

**Section Three** describes the day to day **arrangements** in place to achieve the aims set out in the Policy Statement.

## 1.2 Scope of Policy

Anyone can suffer from stress and this policy therefore applies to all employees. This includes those employed on NJC terms and conditions of service for local government employees, Soulbury, centrally employed teachers and all teaching and support staff at schools. This policy does not apply to agency staff or contractors and any issue regarding stress should be referred to the agency or contractor.

Whilst the policy primarily deals with work related stress, it is recognised that individuals who are suffering from stress for whatever reason, should have support and access to help. The Managing Stress at Work Policy has been developed in consultation with recognised Teacher Associations/ Trade Unions to provide a fair, consistent and supportive framework for the effective management of stress. It also provides a structured procedure for dealing with cases where an employee’s stress is cause for serious concern.

### 1.3 Legislation and Standards

The relevant applicable legislation and standards include:

The **Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974** requires employers to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that their workplaces are safe and healthy.

The **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** requires employers to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities.

Additionally, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have developed a set of **Management Standards** for Tackling Stress to help employers meet their legal obligations. The Management Standards cover six areas of work design that can, if not properly managed, represent the primary sources of stress at work. The Council has used the Standards to simplify the risk assessment process.

### 1.4 Managing Stress at Work Policy Statement

In relation to the management of work related stress, the Employer (whether this is the Council or the School Governing Body) will:

- develop and maintain a documented and consistently applied **management system** to identify and reduce workplace stressors;
- **identify** and **assess** the significant workplace stressors;
- **consult** with employees and trade union representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention and management of work related stress;
- provide appropriate **training** and **information** to raise general awareness and equip both line managers and employees with the necessary tools to effectively identify and manage stress within the workplace;
- take all reported occurrences of stress seriously and offer appropriate confidential **support** for employees who are suffering from symptoms of stress;
- undertake **monitoring** of stress related absence.

## SECTION TWO – ORGANISATION

### 2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

The following describes roles and responsibilities in relation to managing work related stress.

More detailed responsibilities for managing health and safety arrangements generally can be found in the Corporate Health and Safety Policy.

#### 2.1.1 The Employer

Overall responsibility for health and safety rests with the employer. This varies as follows:

- a) For core council staff, the employer is the Council;
- b) For staff in community schools, community special schools, voluntary controlled schools, maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units the employer is the Council (also referred to as the Local Education Authority);
- c) For foundation schools, foundation special schools and voluntary aided schools, the employer is usually the Governing Body.

The Council and/or Governing Body delegates the work required to meet their health and safety responsibilities to the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors, Head Teachers and Line Managers, with advice and support from the Health and Safety Support Team. However, the employer retains ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the Managing Stress at Work Policy is implemented.

#### 2.1.2 The Chief Executive / Corporate Directors / Head Teachers / Line Managers

The Chief Executive / Corporate Directors / Head Teachers / Line Managers will ensure that:

1. Relevant employees attend stress management training.
2. Risks associated with work related stress are identified and properly assessed (see Section 3.4 for further details);
3. Effective management action is taken to minimise work related stressors, including:
  - maintaining effective communication with staff (particularly during any period of change);
  - using team meetings, one-to-one meetings and appraisals as an opportunity to discuss the issue of stress;
  - monitoring workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded or overworking;
  - maintaining a safe working environment;
  - providing staff with adequate training, instruction and supervision to undertake their duties;
  - promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour;
  - being aware of the signs of stress and responding effectively to employees who identify the potential risk of excessive stress levels.
4. Any stress related absence is reported and managed in accordance with the Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure.
5. Where appropriate, referrals to Occupational Health are made.
6. Appropriate support and advice is sought from Human Resources (HR) if work related stress is identified as a problem, is a reason for absence or if an individual is returning to work following a stress related absence.

### **2.1.3 Health and Safety Support Team**

Health and Safety Officers within the Health and Safety Support Team will:

1. Jointly (with HR) develop corporate policies, procedures and standards as regards managing work related stress.
2. Carry out a programme of audits and inspections to ensure that health and safety policies are complied with.
3. Ensure appropriate health and safety awareness and training is available to staff.
4. Provide assistance (as appropriate) to complete suitable stress risk assessments.

### **2.1.4 Human Resources**

Officers within Human Resources will:

1. Jointly (with the Health and Safety Support Team) maintain and review the Managing Stress at Work Policy.
2. Provide advice and guidance on the effective management of stress related absence in accordance with the Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure
3. Monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by providing appropriate sickness absence data and statistics to management, as required.
4. Support the identification of any stress “hot-spots” .
5. Review the Employee Survey data to ensure that the results are used to assist in the management and reduction of stress.

### **2.1.5 Occupational Health**

The Occupational Health Service provides specialist support and advice regarding identified potential work related stress issues. Occupational Health will:

1. Where required, undertake pre-employment health screening.
2. Provide medical or specialist advice to support effective stress management.
3. Facilitate referrals to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required.
4. Support employees returning to work following stress related absence.

### **2.1.6 Employees**

Employees have a duty to take care of their own health and safety and must:

1. Take individual responsibility for their own feelings and reactions to stressful situations and their personal methods of coping.
2. Take an active part in the development of any stress risk assessment.
3. Inform (either directly or through appropriate line management) HR or the Health and Safety Support Team, if they feel they are experiencing the adverse effects of stress, so that the underlying causes may be addressed.
4. Accept opportunities to attend training and receive additional support if appropriate.
5. Take reasonable steps to ensure that they do not cause unnecessary stress to others.

## SECTION THREE – ARRANGEMENTS FOR MANAGING WORK RELATED STRESS

### 3.1 General

The following section explains the day-to-day arrangements for managing work related stress. These arrangements apply to all employees.

### 3.2 Corporate Management

At a corporate level, the aim will be to manage work related stress using both a proactive and reactive approach that should minimise the risk of work related stress whilst effectively managing any identified instances of stress.

Proactive measures include:

- Corporate monitoring of the effectiveness of the arrangements in place to manage work related stress.
- Identification of stress “hot-spots” with action plans to minimise work related stressors where required;
- Corporate monitoring of risk assessments to identify common work related stressors and assess the adequacy of the arrangements in place to minimise them;
- Training and information to assist employees to identify the causes and signs of stress as well as measures to reduce the risk and individual coping strategies.
- An Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) that provides information, expert advice and specialist counselling to support staff and their families effectively manage both work and non-work related stress.

Reactive measures include:

- HR support to manage any identified instances of stress (this may include referral to Occupational Health);
- Reporting and managing any stress related absence in accordance with the Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure;
- Using risk assessments as a basis for discussion with an individual who has identified stress as an issue or is returning from a stress related absence, in order to develop an action plan to effectively manage such instances.

### 3.3 Local Management

At a local level, the approach to managing work related stress is based on the principles that all persons take individual responsibility for:

- their own feelings and reactions to stressful situations and their personal methods of coping;
- informing their line manager, HR or the Health and Safety Support Team, if they feel they are experiencing the adverse effects of stress, so that the underlying causes may be addressed.

Line Managers are responsible for ensuring that:

- work related stressors are proactively identified, properly assessed and minimised using the corporate risk assessment (see 3.4 below for details);
- HR are contacted for further support and advice if work related stress is identified as a problem or is a reason for absence.
- any stress related absence is reported to HR and effectively managed in accordance with the Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure.

### 3.4 Risk Assessment Process

Risk Assessments are fundamental to the management of health and safety and will be used to identify and assess the significant stressors that exist within particular service areas. Such risk assessments must be:

- carried out by competent persons;
- recorded using the corporate Risk Assessment Template;
- communicated to those affected; and reviewed and revised, as appropriate.

For more detailed information about risk assessments generally please refer to the corporate [Health and Safety Risk Assessment Policy and Procedure](#).

To assist with the identification and assessment of significant risks related to work related stress, the Health and Safety Team has produced a corporate "[Managing Stress at Work Risk Assessment](#)". This Risk Assessment is available electronically on the Health and Safety Intranet pages.

This risk assessment is based on guidance from the Health and Safety Executive and examines the six key aspects of work which experts have decided can contribute to stress if not managed properly:

- **Demands** – workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Control** – the amount of say staff have in how they do their work
- **Support** – encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the Council and colleagues
- **Relationships** – positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** – the understanding by employees and the avoidance of conflicting roles
- **Change** – the organisation and management of large and small change within the organisation

Line managers need to review this corporate risk assessment and amend it to reflect the particular circumstances within their own service area.

Wherever possible, risk assessments should be created and maintained on the Harriet risk assessment system. The software is currently available to all core council managers and is being "rolled out" to schools. Access, user training and detailed user guides can be obtained by contacting the Health and Safety Support Team.

To assist line managers to develop their own risk assessment, the Health and Safety Support Team has produced a "[Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire](#)" that teams can complete to help identify any stressors related to their particular service area.



The Health and Safety Support Team can provide assistance, if line managers need help to complete the Risk Assessment Questionnaire, to facilitate a team discussion or deliver a stress awareness briefing.

If the risk assessment does not reveal any significant risk of work related stress, line managers need only keep the matter under review. However, if the assessment identifies potential workplace stressors, controls must be put in place to eliminate or reduce them to the lowest levels reasonably practicable.

### **3.5 Training**

Training is available for all employees. All Council employed line managers are required to attend a mandatory training course. Governing Bodies should consider whether this training should be attended by school designated management.

There is also training available for anyone suffering from stress or at risk of stress. Line managers are encouraged to identify any staff that would benefit from this training, although individuals can book directly.

The training covers the following broad areas:

#### Stress Awareness

To explore what stress is, the signs and symptoms and the impact stress has on someone.

#### Stress Management Workshop for Managers

To explore the legal and financial implications of workplace stress and their personal responsibilities around identifying and managing stress within teams.

#### Effective Stress Management

To explore different coping strategies to help individuals manage their own stress.

In addition, practical advice and guidance is available on the [Health and Safety Intranet](#) pages to support both managers and employees.

### **3.6 Employee Assistance Programme**

The Employee Assistance Programme is available free of charge to employees and their immediate dependants within the household family. This is a confidential facility that provides information, expert advice and specialist counselling by telephone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, on a wide range of issues, both work and non-work related.

The service is contactable via a free-phone telephone number – **0800 282 193** or online from the PPC Online web site – **www.ppconline.info**

Employees can call the regular free-phone access number to obtain support and advice on anything from citizen's advice bureau style issues such as consumer rights, dealing with a noisy neighbour, to telephone counselling support on home or work related concerns.

Information on the site is drawn from a number of professional sources and presented in the form of fact sheets and useful links that are easy to read and download. There are also structured programmes to help employees improve aspects of their life.

### **3.7 Communication**

The Managing Work Related Stress Policy (and any future revisions) will be communicated as appropriate, to ensure that all managers and staff are aware of its existence and their responsibilities. It is also available on the [Health and Safety Intranet](#). Staff notice boards will be used to display posters and articles that relate to managing stress. HSE leaflets and guidance booklets will be used to inform staff of good practise.

### **3.8 Other Support**

There are a range of supporting policies in place to assist in the management of stress. Some examples include the Corporate Health and Safety Policy, Recruitment and Selection, Dignity at Work, Induction Process and the Parental Leave Scheme. Advice on using any of these Policies should be sought, in the first instance, from HR.

### **3.9 Equalities**

This Policy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

### **3.10 Planned Date of Review**

2013.

### **3.11 Further Advice and Guidance**

For further information, please contact the Health and Safety Support Team on telephone 0121 704 6328